

*Beer, Songs
and
Quarrels*

Sibongile Sithole

Beer, songs
and
quarrels
and other stories

by
Sibongile Sithole

Edited by Andrea Engel &
Heather Silove Howe



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Dear Readers,

The stories in this book were told by Sibongile and written down by Andrea and Heather.

Sibongile likes to talk about things that happen in her life. For a long time she spoke to Andrea about her experiences.

We were learners on an adult education course. On the course we learnt that there is a great need for reading material for new readers. When we were told to do a project we decided to make a book. We thought that Sibongile's stories would be interesting for adults who want to practise reading English.

We asked Sibongile first what she would like to tell the readers about, and she said, "I want to talk about how we are suffering."

We liked Sibongile's stories very much and learnt a lot from them. But then we thought, "Maybe the readers know all the things Sibongile is talking about. Maybe they want something very different."

But Sibongile said, "I think these stories are right for the readers because people are forgetting how things used to be."

We decided to use drawings for some of the stories to make the book more interesting. We thought you, the readers, might want to use the pictures to talk about similar things that have happened to you. We asked Jeff Rankin, who teaches drawing at the Natal Technikon, to help us. He made our book a project for his second year learners. They read the book. Sibongile then helped them by describing what the people in the stories looked like.

We enjoyed making this book together and we hope that you will enjoy reading it. Maybe it will encourage you to write down your own stories. If you need some advice we would be very happy to help you. You can contact us through the following address:

New Readers Publishers

Andrea and Heather

We have kept the following South African words in the stories:

daka	mud
tsotsis	criminals
roti	flat, handmade bread
muthi	medicine
iJuba	traditional beer
Rama	margarine
amasi	sour milk
gogo	granny
braai	barbeque

The wood location

I live in KwaMashu.

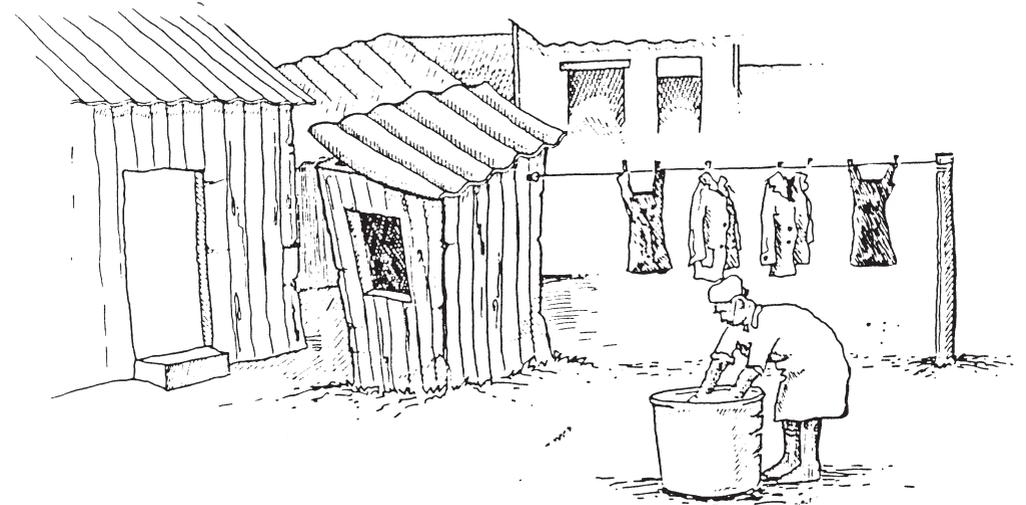
I came to KwaMashu in 1963 when it was a beautiful township. Then, there were many sections that were made from bricks. But our section, which was called D section, was made from wood.

Sometimes a family stayed in one room. My family were six people living together in one room.

Many children from section D went to Isibonelo High School in section F. When I was in standard seven I remember an interesting thing happened at school.

One day the principal said in assembly, "I am very proud of our school because some children here come from the wood location where they stay together in a small place. But their parents try by all means to take their children to our school. I am so pleased when I drive past their houses and I see their green and gold school uniforms hanging on the lines."

Even today I remember what the principal said. Life was nice in those days in KwaMashu.



Good neighbours

Before we moved to KwaMashu we lived in Glebeland. There we stayed in the daka houses. They were round and the roof was made of grass.

Our neighbours in Glebeland were Indian people. They were our friends, young people like me, playing together, and going to fetch some water at the tap.

Even if we were going to church, we went to church together. But the Indians did not go to our church. We went to their church in Clairwood.

And our parents too talked together with the Indians, just like they were talking to other black people.

I remember my mother liked to cook vegetables. In Zulu we call vegetables imifino. Every day she would pick the fresh vegetables from her garden and then she cooked them in a big pot. From their homes the Indian ladies would smell the vegetables and they would say, "Oh Mama, you are cooking sweet vegetables today, they smell so nice."

So my mother laughed and said to them, "Yes, all right, I am going to show you how to cook vegetables so you can also enjoy them." And some days the



Indians showed my mother how to cook roti and curry. Ooh, the curry was very strong, but it was also very nice.

And so, even the boys were playing soccer and basketball together. Oh it was very nice those days.

But one day, I was very, very sad because they were moving the Indian people to Clairwood.

No more did we see each other unless from our church the priest said, "Oh, this following Sunday we are going to Clairwood and we are going to meet the Indians there."

After church we went to their homes, to eat and drink something. And then we took buses back to our home.

The white Valiant

I remember one big problem we had when we were growing up in KwaMashu. That was the problem of the white valiant car. We were very scared of that car because it belonged to tsotsis.

We took buses and taxis to school because we were worried that the valiant car would follow us. But sometimes we did not have money to pay the taxis; so we had to walk to school. Then we tried to hide between the houses when we saw the white valiant car. Because we knew that if the tsotsis would see us they would kill us or take us away.

One day we heard that the tsotsis had a big accident. While they were driving to the south coast, the police started to chase them. The tsotsis' car was going very fast and rolled off the road. One of them died, and the other one, called Bafana, had his arm cut off. And then there was only one tsotsi left. He was the boss of them.

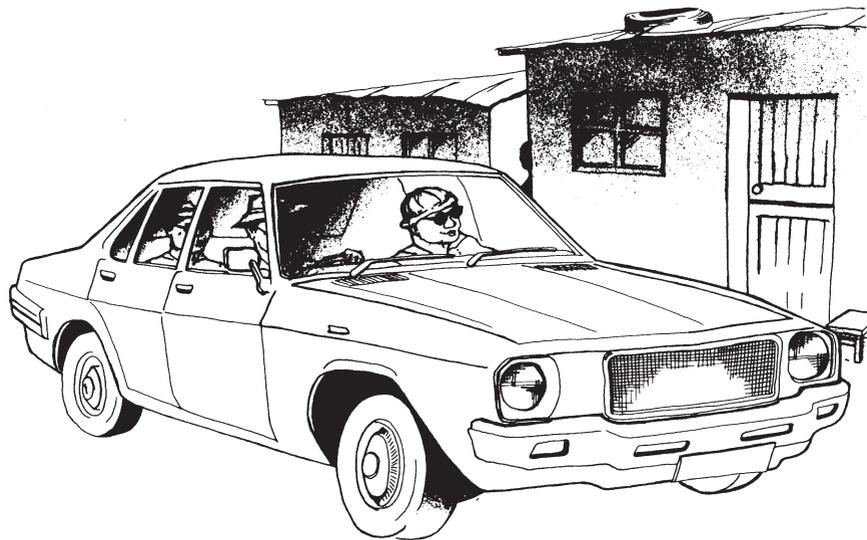
We thought that everything would be better because the boss was now on his own. But he still did many bad things. One day the boss went to E section to visit his girlfriend. While he was there he decided to wash his car. Now, Vusi, the brother of the boss's girlfriend came out of the house.

Vusi hated the boss, so he took out his knife and stabbed him to death. Oh, and then we all heard that Vusi had killed the boss. Oh, we were all very, very happy that day.

We were also promising Vusi that we were going to visit him in jail, and bring him some food. We said he would not suffer.

And we even wanted to tell the police that we were sick and tired of the big boss. Maybe he was going to start a new gang.

Ai, and then Vusi didn't stay too long in jail. He stayed a few days and then the police said, "Oh, many years we wanted to catch the big boss. Now, you, Vusi, can go out of jail."



Black Cat

I remember another story about a car called "Black Cat". It came from Vryheid and it was very dangerous. We, the mothers, were very scared. That car wanted to take away our children and use them for muthi.

One day I went to fetch my daughter, Zandile, from school. I met my boys and I told them to go home because the Black Cat was near. They said they did not know where Zandile was.

I looked all over but I could not see my daughter. Then I saw some children and asked them, "Did you see Zandile?" Someone called us and said, "Look, Mama, Zandile is in the classroom." We looked and there she was.

She said, "I am sitting here because I have to finish my English homework." I said, "Aai, I am thanking the Lord because I have found you."

We have a joke at home. Dumisani, the brother of Zandile, asked her why she stayed at school. She said, "I don't want to be like you. You don't understand English."

My marriage

The first years

I got married in 1975. Before that I had already been staying with my husband, in M section in KwaMashu. We had been together since the time when I had one child, Dumisani, the eldest one. That was in 1968. We got on well together. It was fine, nice. Everything went right.

But after three years my husband started doing some bad things that I didn't like. He began to get girlfriends and to sleep out. He did not come home early and sometimes he didn't even come home at all. From then on I started to suffer.

I had Thami in 1969 and Zandile in 1972 and Siphon, the one who is ill, in 1976. It was bad but not too bad. Because when I was having all these children he was trying to help me in many ways. When I came home from hospital he helped with cooking and with other things. But after he had finished helping he often used to go out.

Then it got really bad after I had Siphon, the one who was born in 1976. My husband kept on getting new girlfriends and started drinking beer.

Coming home from hospital

In 1979 I had Nono, my second girl, at King Edward Hospital. My husband did not visit or phone me at all. He just kept quiet.

They discharged me the same day because they said there were too many people in the hospital. There was no place for me.

I didn't even have a cent in my pocket. I took my child and went to the gate asking for an ambulance. They said that there was no ambulance going to KwaMashu. I was wondering what I should do now. They said, "There is nothing we can do for you."

So I went out through the gates of the hospital.

There was a man standing over there. I went over to him and asked him for money because I wanted to take the train. But he didn't have money. He said, "Ai, I feel very sorry for you but I haven't got anything in my pocket."

So I just started walking, a long way from King Edward to Dalbridge station.



When I was just near Dalbridge station there came a lady. This lady sells iJuba and other things at the station. She came quickly towards me saying, "Oh, you are coming from the hospital. Why are you walking? Because I can see that you have delivered just a short while ago." I said, "Yes, I haven't got money and so I had to walk." She said, "Bring your child."

And then this lady called another girl. She gave her five rands to buy me a pint of milk and scones and then we walked together to the station.

She said to the ticket examiner, "Don't ask a ticket from this lady, the girl I have sent to buy something will come with change."

When we got inside the station the girl came back from the shop with milk and scones. She gave me two rands and said, "I am going to buy a ticket for you. And when you get to KwaMashu station you must ask the taxi driver to take you to the gate of your home for these two rands." So she knew that the taxi costs a lot.

I said, "Thank you very much."

And I came home and my husband was not there.

The fish chutney

After I had had Nono, my fifth child, things got much worse. My husband did not buy me nappies, he did not buy me anything. And soon we started fighting. We had fights regularly.

One day, when I was in the house, he came in and just said, "Hey, make me some fish chutney. Don't cook it. And two slices of bread."

While I was preparing it a lady knocked at the door. It was his girlfriend. They sat down together in the dining room, drinking beer.

When I was finished, I brought the chutney to the dining room. My husband took a spoon and tasted it. Then he said, "Nonsense, who can eat this stuff? I told you how to make fish chutney, and now you have made it your way."

And he just threw it down onto the floor.

I kept quiet. And my eldest boy Dumisani picked up the stuff on the floor and wiped the floor clean.



Drinks and girlfriends

As time went on my husband became a heavy drinker. He used to wake up late in the morning, saying, "Today I am not going to work, I am tired." And as time went on, "I don't want to work today."

I asked, "Why?" He said, "Ai, I have been working at that place for many years, and they are not paying me a good salary. I am working hard and doing a big job that should pay me a lot, but they don't pay me enough."

Well, I just kept my mouth shut.

Now that he was staying at home he continued to drink and to have girlfriends. He started working on his own, painting cars outside in the yard. When he got paid a lot of money he just picked up his girlfriend and went away. But you would see him at home again as soon as the money was finished.

It was always the same.

The crowbar

My husband gave me very little money. So one day I said to him, "I must try to find a job now." But he said, "Oh no, I don't want you to work because I am working hard here and I am giving you food. I am giving you everything." But he didn't really give me anything. So I said, "I have to work." And I found a job and started working.

But after I had Sithe, my youngest son, I had to stay at home again.

One day when I was at home we had a big fight. I had not done anything. I was just asking myself, "What have I done?" He came inside, he took a crowbar, which is called umqala in Zulu, and hit me on the head. I said, "Why are you hitting me like this?" He said, "Don't talk." Oh, it was a big fight. He tried to hold me and I tried to push him away from me and to escape. But he followed me everywhere. At last my cousin came and pushed him away from me and held him.

Then I ran outside and went to see the chairman of our section and told him everything. The chairman came to our house and talked to my husband. After that my husband said, "I see now that I have made a mistake and I am not going to do it again."



Running away

One night my husband started hitting me again. When he was in the other bedroom for a moment I just opened the window because there were no burglar guards. I got out and ran away. I ran to another street to an aunt of mine and knocked at her window. She opened the door and let me in.

Soon afterwards we heard people looking for me. I heard my husband's voice, "It's me, Themba." But we just watched them from inside the house and did not open the door. I said, "I am not going back any more. I am tired of this nonsense."

After staying with my aunt for two days I went to D section to my brother's home and told him everything. My brother went to my husband's house to fetch the children. He said to him, "I am taking these children now. I have had enough of you. You are always playing with my sister. I am sick and tired of you."

My husband said, "All right, but you are going to see who is going to act last. You can do what you like but you are going to see what I am going to do."

So I stayed at my brother's home with my children and my husband stayed in his house.

But he often came and asked for me, "Where is she? I want to talk to her." But when we were talking, we were fighting at the same time.

He always acted in the same way. And so I said, "Eh, forget about me."

Stepmothers

One day when I was not at home my husband came to my brother's house and took all my children. My brother said to me, "All right, let him have the children so that he will suffer by supporting the children and paying school fees."

So the children stayed with my husband. When they came to visit me in the beginning they told me that everything was fine. Everything was going all right.

But then my husband started changing his girlfriends. First it was one woman who stayed with the children. Then, after three months, it was another one, and then again another one.

One day the woman who is still staying with him now, said to him, "No, I don't need your children, I don't want them." And when the two of them had something nice they did not share it with my children. So the children started reporting, "Ma, we are suffering now. Things are not going well."

I did not know what to do. But the children began leaving my husband, one after the other.

One by one they left him.

Changing ways

We grew up differently from the way our parents grew up.

When we were young, our parents said that girls must not eat amasi, eggs and chicken, because these foods made the girls grow up too fast and made their blood too hot. All they wanted, then, were boyfriends.

But now, these days, all that young people want is milk, Rama and eggs.

Also in those days of our parents, they had a party for a special day. If the first daughter turned twenty-one, the parents killed a goat, made Zulu beer, and called relatives and neighbours. From cutting the goat, they took the skin and wrapped it around the daughter's arm.

This way they saw that the daughter did not suffer. When she got old, she would have a husband and babies.

But today, young people are different. They don't want to keep the ways of their parents. They say, "What will our friends say?" When they turn twenty-one, they play radiograms and open the window. They are too modern.

Funerals - before and now

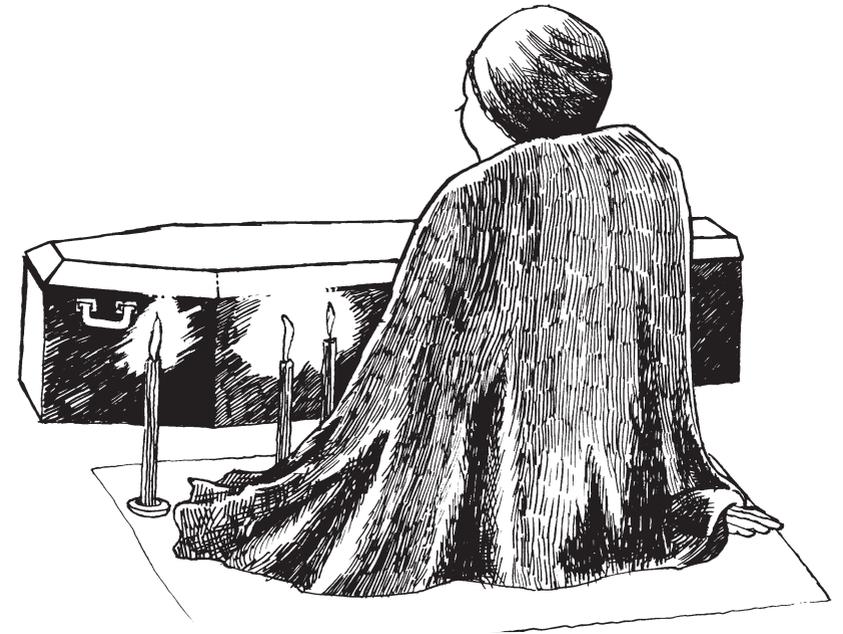
When we go to a funeral these days it is not the same as it used to be.

Before, we had to be patient at funerals. It was as if we were not allowed to behave badly when somebody had died in the family. We had to behave nicely, and when you were talking you were not shouting.

Usually, the woman who has lost her husband puts a rug over her shoulders and sits down quietly in front of the candles. She is not allowed to get up from there until the funeral day and she must not talk to people. If you want to talk to her you have to walk slowly and come close to her and talk softly.

Now people do things in a different way. They are not patient. They shout. They drink beer during the time of mourning, especially if the person who died was a drunkard.

Then they say, "Eh, he was our friend and we have to drink now because we used to do it together. We have to drink a lot today because they are going to take him away from us now."



And then sometimes you'll see the wife who has lost her husband getting up and taking off her rug and starting to quarrel with the other people in the family.

Recently I have been to two very different funerals. The one was my mother's funeral where everything was done the right way.

The other one was a very strange funeral.

My mother's funeral

My mother died last year in Ladysmith. And when she died, we, the family, gathered and we all went to Ladysmith where she had been living.

There we sat inside the house, the whole family and all the neighbours and friends.

When somebody from our nation has died, usually all the people come to the house and talk about the person who has passed away. What I liked best about this gathering was that all the people who were there said nice things about my mother.

They told how she liked to go to church and many other things she used to do. They said that she helped people from the neighbourhood and that she often talked to the young women and tried to explain things to them if they had problems. They all loved her.

And now that she was dead they were all there, walking up and down in the house and helping us. We did not even have to cook supper because there were so many people helping and bringing food.

On Friday we had the memorial service and Father Godfrey came to the house.

When we started to pray Father Godfrey talked about her.

He said, "This lady was very brave. She used to go to church even when she was suffering from her knees. But one day I said to her, 'Don't worry to come here. It is too far. I will come over to your section and have a prayer with you old people. So you must tell the other old people to get together at your place.'"

And Father started coming to her home, giving a prayer for the old people.

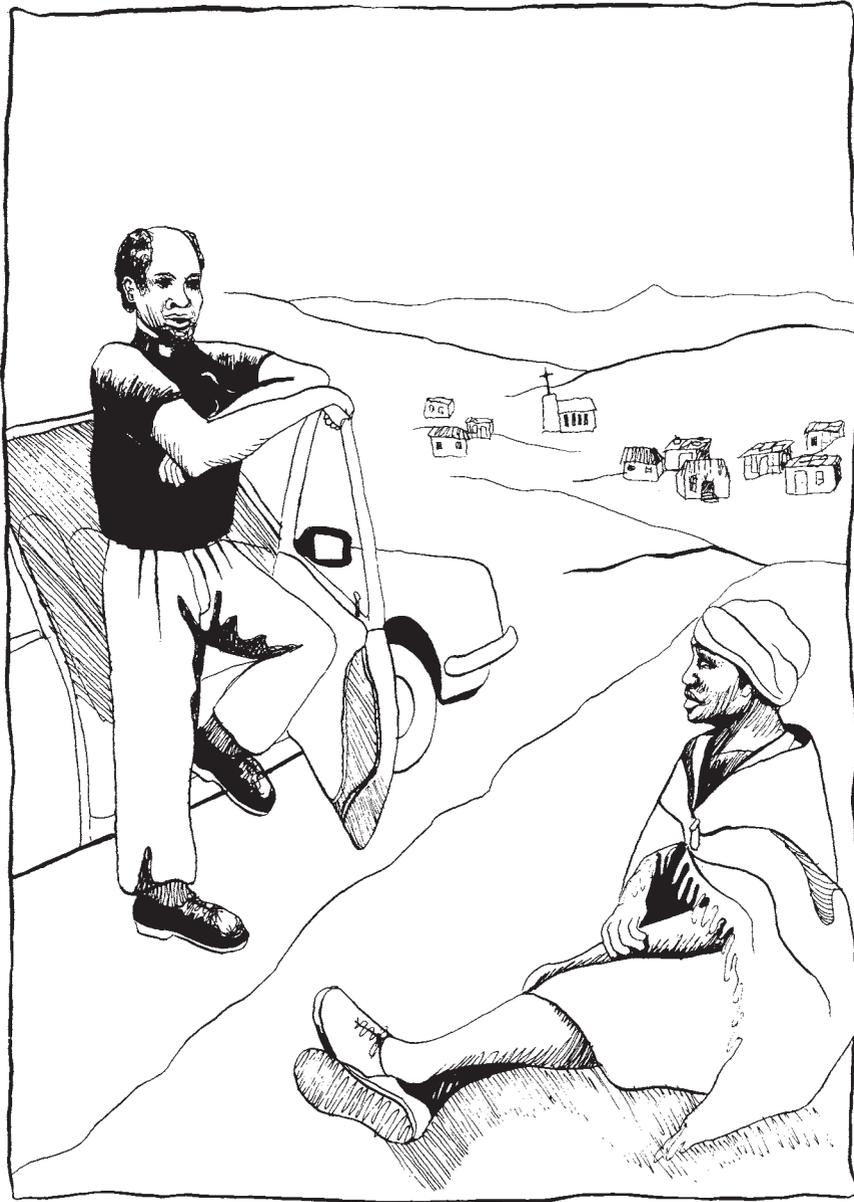
But one day my mother waited until he had left the house. Then she went out in order to follow him and to go to church again.

When she had been walking for some time she got very tired and sat down at the side of the road.

After a while Father came back by car from other places.

When he saw her sitting at the side of the road he said, "Hau, why are you here?"

She said, "Oh no, I can't stand it. I like to come to church because people sing nicely in church. But there at my home, we old people can't sing nicely. That is why I am not satisfied when I am not in church."



Father said to her, "Oh, get inside the car, let's go." And he had to take her to church again and bring her back every time because he felt that the way was too long and that she had to walk a lot.

This is what Father said.

And some of the young women said, "Oh, when I was fighting with the other young women or with my husband, Gogo helped me."

And others said, "When I had to go out working, Gogo used to come and help me at home, looking after my children and giving them food. Now we have lost her. We don't know who is going to help us."

Oh, all of them said nice things about her.

And then on Saturday we all went to the funeral to bury her.

A strange funeral

Beer, songs and quarrels

One day a friend of mine asked me to go to a funeral with her. So we went to the home of the man who had died. When we got there people were drunk, singing lots of different songs. The wife was sitting

While people were singing a lady came in. She wanted to talk about her dead brother as it is the custom. People shouted that she should be quiet but she sat down and started talking, "This is my brother and I want to talk about him now. When he was alive it was me who was carrying his difficulties. During the time when the people burnt his house he ran away and came to me."

"And during the time people were looking for him with guns he ran away to me. And now you don't even give me a chance to talk about him. If you don't want to sing properly or to talk about him we can fight. Then we won't have a funeral now."

And soon people didn't sing any more. They started quarrelling. One man asked the people to be quiet but they did not listen. My friend and I did not know what to do but we stayed on.

It really was a strange funeral.

The second wife

After we had been in the house for some time a car stopped outside and we saw some people arrive, about 20 or 25. And among them was a lady who had a rug over her shoulders.

I asked my friend, "Why does this woman wear a rug? Is not the wife here with us?" My friend said, "Oh, this man had three wives and they did not know each other."

The woman with the rug came inside and sat down. Now some new problems started because the people in the house were against the woman who came in and the new people were against the woman who was already sitting there. Again there was a big noise. Everybody thought it was a big joke now and people did not even try to behave well any more. Everybody was just talking about the story of this house, "This man had two wives and they are both wearing rugs."

Then one man said, "Sorry about this. You have all seen that this woman came inside with a rug. This is my brother's eldest wife, MaHlange."

He then told us to get into the buses which would take us to the funeral at Emolweni. When we were inside the buses we kept on talking about this strange story to the people around us.



The third wife

At the funeral the two wives had to sit together. We people were standing behind them and the Reverend started doing his job. He was just going to say, "It is time now for the family to put down sand."

But at this moment another car arrived and another lady with a rug and another group of people. The lady was crying. We did not know what to say but we thought that this must be the third wife. Who was she? Nobody knew. But now we wanted to know what was going to happen.

We were not sorry any more about what had happened before. Now we started to enjoy watching everything.

We all said, "Move, move" and we all moved out of the way and the lady passed and went to join the other two wives and sat down.

The funeral continued and my friend said to me, "We mustn't go home straight from here, we must go to their house so that we can see what is going to happen there."

And I agreed.

Number one, two, three

When the funeral was over, the three wives and their families got into their cars and we got into the buses in order to go back to the house. It is the custom with our people to stop by at the family's house first after a funeral so that we wash our hands. In Zulu we call this *geza izandla*.

When we got there the wives also arrived, all three of them. It is the custom that the wives take off their rugs after the funeral. They have to go to the cold shower before coming inside.

Now the wives started quarrelling. The one who had been staying with the husband until he died, said, "I am going to shower first because I have been staying with him." The one who had arrived second, said, "That can't be. I have to be the first one because I am his eldest wife."

Then somebody asked the third one, "Hau, MaSondo, why do you just keep quiet, why don't you go there?" Masondo said, "Eh, leave me alone. I don't want to talk. Leave them to do what they want to do."

After a while the sister of the last wife started calling, "Number 1, where is Number 3?"

After a while the sister of the last wife started calling, "Number 1, where is Number 3?"

We did not understand and asked her, "What do you mean?" She said, "Oh, I mean these three wives. I can't say MaShange, MaHlange, MaSondo. I must call them Number 1, Number 2, Number 3."

"Number 3 is here," says Number 3, "It's MaSondo."

"Then come, MaSondo, it's your turn now to go to the shower."

So they went to the shower one after the other and then all three of them came back into the house.

But when the food was brought in, the two wives who had just come on that day did not want to eat.

The other people were happy. They were drinking. They did not care about what had happened to the family.

One person said to them, "Why are you making so much noise? We should not be noisy because we have just come from Mr Mbongo's funeral."

But another person answered, "No, leave us alone. It is true that we came here to cry with the family but now they are not crying. They are talking, they are drinking, they are fighting. So why should we

worry if they themselves behave like that?"

But people did not listen to each other.

A few minutes later, a boy came in, the son of MaHlange, the eldest wife. MaShange, the last wife, was sitting in a corner. The boy went over to her and kicked her and said, "Get out of here! You stayed with my father last, you gave him some bad muthi, some poison, you are no good."

Now everybody got up and started running. That was the end.

I certainly in my life won't forget that funeral.

My mother's stories

The clever rabbit

When I was young my mother used to tell me many nice stories. This story has a rabbit in it.

One day two animals, the pig and goat, met a rabbit. And when they saw the rabbit they started to laugh at him.

The rabbit was cross and wanted to stop them laughing at him. When they passed, the rabbit started to call, "Hey you, pig, I want to tell you something very important."

But the rabbit did not say anything important. All he said was that the sun was very hot.

So the pig went back to the goat, and the goat asked him what the rabbit said. The pig said, "No, the rabbit didn't say anything."

"Oh," said the goat, "You are trying to trick me." The two animals started fighting.

The rabbit had won.



Granny and the jackal

Another story was about an old granny who lived with her daughter and son-in-law. So this story happened in the early years when these people were staying in huts near Ladysmith.

Now every day the daughter and son-in-law went to the fields to plant mealies.

When the son-in-law came back at night he liked to eat amasi from a bowl. Granny would watch the son-in-law because she also liked to eat amasi.

In the day, when the son-in-law was working in the field, Granny would eat his amasi.

She would sit on the chair, it was not really a chair, it was a tree stump, and she would eat and sing happily. When she was finished she took water and poured it into the bowl.

One day the son-in-law came back early from the field. As he walked to the hut, he saw granny eating amasi. He shouted, "Ya, Ya, I caught you. Today is your day. You have been eating my amasi. Then you put water in the bowl. Now I want you to go and fetch cold water from a river. There must be no frogs, no crocodiles and no snakes in the river."



So granny took a bowl to put the water in.

When she came to the first river she said, "Are there snakes? Are there crocodiles?"

The snakes made their song, "Sssss, we are here." Granny went to the other river and the animals answered her again.

Now granny was far away from home and she was very tired. She sat down to have a rest. Just then a rabbit came to her and said, "Who told you to fetch water? You will see the other one, the big animal like a giant is coming."

Granny started suffering, she was scared of giants. At last she heard a big sound and big footsteps. There was something coming, something speaking in a loud voice.

It was the voice of the giant. "Granny, see who I am. Stand up and come with me."

The giant took granny to where all the animals were. He said to them, "You must fetch me wood because granny is my meat. She will be a nice meal for me tomorrow."

That night when the animals were sleeping, the jackal came to granny. He said in her ear, "Granny wake up because you are going to die. I will take you half way to your home."

Granny and jackal ran and ran.

When jackal came back the dew of the grass was all over him. The dew showed that he had taken granny away. So he put the dew on the rabbit.



When the giant woke up in the morning he said, "Where is granny? Where is my meat?" All the animals said they did not know where granny was.

The giant laughed, "Aha, the one who took granny will be wet." The lion was not wet, the elephant was not wet. But the rabbit was wet.

The giant started to braai the rabbit.

Beer, songs and quarrels

First published 1991 by New Readers Publishers

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Editors: Andrea Engel and Heather Silove Hove
Illustrations: Students of the Natal Technikon and illustration for 'A Strange Funeral' by Lesley Lewis
Cover illustration: Lesley Lewis
Design: Lesley Lewis

Original print version ISBN: 1-874897-60-3

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