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Writing Sample

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Extract from the story "Small Deaths"

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Panashe CHIGUMADZI

Extract from the story “Small Deaths”

Growing up, I thought Cape Town was a Boom Shaka music video. Blame it on the fact that the first time I saw an image of Table Mountain was during a Selimathunzi (or was it Jam Alley?) broadcast of Thobela. You must appreciate that, at the time, I thought my older cousins from Soweto were Cool As Fuck, because, while I was holed up in the suburbs watching KTV, they were gyrating and screaming along with Thembi, Lebo, Junior, and Theo in bum shorts, box braids and baby hairs (oh my!) as they did the Thobela on Camps Bay telling everybody It Was About Damn Time we listen to these Young Black kids.

Who were they waving to? The yt onlookers confused and enraged by the Arrival of these Young Blacks looking a little Too Free on their beach? (It blerrie well isn't even Boxing Day! Who gave these Blacks the day off?) The Black onlookers excited and encouraged by the Arrival of these Young Blacks? (It isn't even Boxing Day! It's true, uTata Madiba fought for us!)

Whoever it was to, I wanted to wave at them and do the Thobela on Camps Bay beach, too.

Thebe's boom: “Thooobela!”

Thembi's remixes: “Thobela-top-top-top!”

Junior's reggae-cool: “To the left, to the right! To the left, to the right! To the left, to the right! Boom!” Boom!

We've Arrived.

We've Arrived.

We've Motherfuckin' Arrived!, we announced with each Thobela. Soon enough, a more sober image appeared. Table Mountain became the striking mesa above the Mother City which lorded over another monument, which, thank Our Dear Black Jesus for Her Faithfulness, is no longer there.

My first day at the university, after passing the stump of Rhodes' statue, I come across a silent protest by the Rhodes Must Fall students titled “Black Death.” I stop and watch the figures of Black Women, bodies painted black and draped in black sheets, still and silent, in formation across the steps.

In time, a short dreadlocked young woman appears in front of the crowd gathered to take questions. I immediately recognise her from a newspaper **pro le** on Rhodes Must Fall leaders. I don't remember her name, but I do remember that she'd self-described as “the illegitimate child of Brenda Fassie and Dambudzo Marechera.” Watching her impatiently answering questions such as whether there was such a thing as Yt Death (“Yet again, Black people are talking about Blackness, you yt pipo choose to centre yt-ness”) or whether she was suggesting Black people are the walking dead (“I'm suggesting that to be Black in an Anti-Black World is an oxymoron”), I remember feeling unnerved by her praise of Marechera's plate-smashing “revolutionary ethic.” I put my hand up and she nods at me.

A little intimidated by Brenda Marechera, I hesitate until she nods at me again, “Isn't it a little irresponsible to glamourise depression? I love Marechera's work as much as anyone, and I wish I smashed plates and chandeliers at awards ceremonies, but don't you think it's a little selfish to romanticise his life? We all know he was a deeply troubled man.”

Brenda Marechera looks exasperated, “Comrade, what's your name?”

I bristle, thinking of how another member of the crowd had retorted that she wasn't a “comrade”, but if she insisted on calling her something, “colleague” would do, “It's Khanyi.”

“Comrade Khanyi, decolonise your mind. That's what yt pipo say to dismiss him! We know that he was a revolutionary. Marechera chose death by decay, A true Black revolutionary knows that there are only two honourable ways to die—either you must destroy the world or it must destroy you!” A lone dread tied to a cowrie shell quivered over her forehead. “Comrade Khanyi, aren't our deaths, if we choose them, ours and ours alone? If we aren't at death's mercy, we aren't at life's mercy. That, comrade Khanyi, is what Marechera understood.”

I don't respond. Not that I have the option to, there are many other hands.

I let out a sigh. Having tweeted, read, watched, listened to the protests, installations, manifestos of Rhodes Must Fall, I'm finally here. And, shit, a few days in I understand how, Rhodes' statue aside, Fallism couldn't have begun anywhere else. The Last Outpost is after all the First Outpost through which 1652s were birthed. Centuries later, their Mother City will fucking make you feel your Blackness in a way that no other city in this country can. Cape Town isn't even trying to give illusions of Black Upward Mobility like Joburg does. The Cape Dutch-style buildings, the 1652s and their fellow yt pipo holidaying from Europe in majority everywhere including tourist friendly "shanty towns," the Dutch-settler spellings with their Js and Vs and Zs tell you just Whose Vineyard This Is.

Even if Stellenbosch reeks of Slavery Past and Present with its plantation-like buildings, Cape Town is worse. It's like how I've come to prefer Afrikaans people to English people. With them there are no guessing games, Afrikaans people will at least tell you that they think you are a dog to your face instead of calling you a dog (or monkey or gorilla or or or) behind your back (or at their braai or Facebook post, or or or). So ja, nee, Stellenbosch is better for its racist honesty.

Since I'm demanding honesty from racists, I must confess that part of my Marechera question was projection. I've been selfish. I've been more grateful for the personal fury of changes that the Fallists churned up and mirrored inside me than for the actual movement itself.

Even if I was as presumptuous as Brenda Marechera in her political metaphor, I don't know if I'd call my leaving Joburg for Cape Town a personal exile. The only other way I can explain it is as a form of masochism. How else do you explain the fact that at a time when there's the Great Migration North by Young Black Professionals, I've chosen to leave South Africa, and self-elect into refugee status in Zille's 1652 Republic?

Part of why I left Joburg was because whenever I would meet friends and family they were always eager to know "what happens next?" because I "look, well, stable." Of course. I knew to go to therapy. I knew which medication worked. I knew to avoid dysfunction. When I told them I was going back to school for my post grad, they congratulated me for being positive and "doing something for my career development."

In my short life as a journalist, or to be less diplomatic, a Cog in the Young Black Professional Industrial Complex, I've come to know that whenever a Young Black Professional "Goes Back to School" they are Escaping. When Lindiwe Mazibuko "chose" to leave the parliamentary leadership of the country's largest (Ytest) opposition for that Harvard Masters all of us Young Black Professionals and Zille's Professional Blacks alike, no matter whether we hated the DA, empathised. We understood.

Welcome Black.

Welcome Black.

Welcome Black.

We wanted to say.

That night, the night I was Welcomed Black at Gallagher Estate was an ironic time to have had it happen, but it happened nonetheless.

"This way to the party," said the only other Black face in sight. I glanced at his imitation gold name tag: "Johnny." He could've been my grandfather. A whole tata called "Johnny." I wanted to tell the tata that it wasn't a "party," I was there for my award as best culture journalist for my story on the Economic Freedom Fighters' "revolutionary fashion." I left it. It was more important that I showed him some semblance of respect in a place where 1652s called him "Johnny" all day.

Per uTata Johnny's instructions, I followed the path promising to take me to the kind of exclusive "party" I'd dreamed of for years. I was so intensely focused on Arriving that I didn't notice the Black Woman walking footsteps ahead of me until we nearly bumped into one another. When I saw who it was, I became a mess.

It was Khanyi, the Khanyi.

"Hi, I'm Khanyi," I'd wanted to say. It was how I'd always announce myself with a firm handshake because I'd chosen to believe in a nominal determinism of sorts.

It was important for people to know that I was Khanyi, not anything like the Khanyi Mbau of Muvhango's-Doobsie-turned-BEE-tycoon's-floozy- turned-reformed-actress-presenter-singer-and-best-selling-author-of- tell-all-memoir fame.

Khanyi Mbau, the crass Soweto-born go-getter who clicked right into the canary-coloured (Lamborghini-owning) caricature of Black Diamonds in post-1994 umlilo wamaphepha with her busty implants popping out of Juicy Couture tracksuits, ass length weaves, and talon- like French nails.

It was important for people to know that I was Khanyi, everything like thee Khanyi Dhlomo of First-Black-news anchor-turned-Magazine- Editor-turned-Harvard-MBA-grad-who-returned-to-launch-her-own- Media-Empire fame.

Khanyi Dhlomo, the silver (/Black?) spoon born, acutely talented, crisply enunciated, pretty and sexually hushed Black Female Media Personality prototype who clicked right into the Rainbow Nation's Black Excellence Dreams with her lithe fashion model's body type, weave-less relaxed hair and subtle makeup.

This Khanyi's name was nominal determinism at its best. Khanyisile, dawn, light. In Khanyi, Black girls could revel in visibility and its possibilities. Our lights shone brighter for hers. The glint in her perfect teeth, the gleam in her eyes that said, long before Lupita did it so cutesy-ly at the Oscars, My Dreams of Perfect Black Girlhood Were Valid.

"I remember that Lux ad where you were proofing photos from a magazine shoot. That's the moment I knew I wanted to be an editor."

She smiled politely at the throwback. Just like with uTata Johnny, I wanted to tell her that I was there to receive an award. I wondered if it was a little too forward, but Fuck It, I needed for her to know that I was more than just a fan. I told her.

"Congratulations Khanyi," she began what could've been the standard email reply note her office had created for her countless awestruck fans, "I wish you all the best in your future endeavours."

And so, My Moment with Khanyi ended just as quickly as it started.

She continued into the hall and I followed. Grabbing a flute of champagne from a passing waiter, I washed my embarrassment and regret down with the bubbles. I bumped into Zanele, who I didn't recognise at first. She had a new hairstyle— peroxide blonde dreads. It suited her. She was a genius like that. Unlike me, she had a flair for reinvention without fictionalising herself.

My admiration for this trait of hers is not something I could have openly admitted when we first started working together at Marie Claire. With her freshly laundered shirts and readiness to do "Black Excellence," I recognised her immediately because I recognised myself. Lord did we both know that Only Oneness is tiring and lonely. Despite this loneliness, we both knew the rule of The Game too damn well: the presence of another Exception, dilutes your Exceptionality. Exceptionality, after all, is a zero sum game. With each glance her way: "Are you for real?" or "Are we kissing ass like that now?," I invaded her territory. We were both aware that the Arrival of another Exception introduces a new sense of self-consciousness that chips away at the self-possession we play at.

Over time though, with my position more secure, I did come to admit my admiration for some of the ways in which she wasn't me.

"They think I'm you," she laughed, "A woman walked up to me, kissing and hugging me, "Khanyi! Khanyi! I absolutely adore your work!" Abelungu! Kanjani Sway? Even with my blond dreads?"

"And what did you say?"

"Hau, what did you want me to say? I just said, "Thank you.""

We laughed a familiar laugh.

"Excuse me babes, I've been meaning to meet with Aspasia about that Fashion Editor vacancy. Let me catch her before she goes."

By the time my award was announced, I was barely sober. I didn't even feel the flush of pleasure I once did when I achieved a new milestone. I had been Arriving for a while: the Arrivant with No Point of Arrival.

Zanele won an award that night too. I can't remember what it was, maybe because I didn't want to acknowledge it. When I did eventually congratulate her, she looked a little uneasy. I felt disappointed, frustrated that I couldn't pretend to be above her anxiety of not being The Only One. My umpteenth champagne glass, I couldn't wash away my anxiety over the long line of other Khanyis outside Waiting to Arrive, Waiting to Be Let In, One Black At A Time.

I felt a tap on my shoulder.

"Well, look at you!" It was Ina, my former editor. I was drunk myself, but was nonetheless offended by the dense alcoholic stink on her breath as she pulled in for a hug. "Remember how I used to defend you to Jenna? I knew it wasn't for nothing. Well done, my girl!"

I quickly pulled myself away, mumbling something about not keeping her from seeing her other protégés before leaving the hall to wait for my Uber.

•••

"We ain't stopping, we ain't dropping, we ain't fading/ We're just climbing until we reach the sky!"

I used to love these words.

Maybe, I'm mourning lost innocence, or the sense of rebellion I used to get from them, but I've been listening to Boom Shaka a lot lately. I remember watching them performing It's About Time live on Selimathunzi after Dosto, our favourite presenter, had tried to get one of the Days of Our Lives' stars (Sammy?) to say "Duku Duku," per the customary gimmick, and, like the yt (American) she was, refused because she couldn't be sure we weren't making her say some African Voodoo Mambo Jumbo.

I'm thinking about those words a lot lately.

I wasn't Stopping. I wasn't Dropping. I wasn't Fading. I was just climbing until I Reached the Sky.

I was a Black Woman with the wish to invoke the collective voice of an Unheeded, Uncelebrated Anonymous. I'm not sure if I've let go entirely of such ambitions. The roots of that desire were deep. I was writing the Post-Apartheid story of a Little Black Girl, one of two born to a successful First Black couple (mostly) satisfied with their Black Excellence lives, wanting The Best for their children.

uBaba was born into a Respected Struggle Family who were exiled to London. He studied medicine there, practiced in Harare and when he returned after '94, he was the First Black doctor to establish a family clinic in Joburg's northern suburbs.

uMama was one of those women in exile who had retreated from her potential to the internal exile of marriage. She'd given up her medicine after falling pregnant with the child of the young doctor she met in London just before he'd been deployed to Harare. I'd once heard her joke to her friends, over a glass of wine, that her CV could've been condensed into the acronym FILTH: Failed in London, Tried Harare. My mother, my mother. The womanist in me hates that Black Women are always the punching bags for the world's bullshit, but, fuck it, my emotions aren't bigger than structure and so I have to say that she, my mother, plays a big part in my depression. She taught me the codes of Strong Black Womanhood:

"Never show anger. And for that matter, never cry."

"Strong Black Women like us must learn to Manage Our Emotions." This Emotional Management might come in the fervent belief in form of God, Jesu Kriste, the Alpha and Omega, like it had been in the case of uGogoNtombi. Or perhaps, like uMama, you can take your pick between wining, dining, and/or shopping, and where there isn't money, shopping via lay-bye and other forms of credit widely-available-to-Blacks.

uMama only ever cared for the ways in which I was a credit to her and the Codes of Strong Black Womanhood. Much like the world, in our house, if you aren't Outstanding, you will Suffer, you will Bear It, you will not Show It, you will Keep Working. After all, you are here because of the Sacrifice and Suffering of Past Generations.

And maybe, I wasn't Stopping, I wasn't Dropping, I wasn't Fading, I was just climbing until I Reached the Sky because of that.

When you are Alive, Self-Evident there is no need to argue, no need to justify. No need for big words to articulate your attempt at Existence. You just are. And so, like your yt girlfriends, you can be Carefree and Cutesy and Quirky and and all those adjectives that don't fall under the purview of Perfect Black Girlhood.

And so, because I wasn't Self-Evident, I lived through my words, Writing What I Like, capitalising my thoughts and feelings and experiences to give them the Importance they didn't have in the world.

Alas, my words haven't saved me.

So maybe pictures, images will do it? I don't know.

•••

I've enrolled for an MA in African Cinema by coursework. The first day of class I'm reminded how silly I am to think I can escape Blackness in Zille's Republic. I'm somewhat comforted by the fact that my lecturer and my five classmates (all 1,652 of them, except for a German exchange student) are nice enough in the way Best Yts can be. That's fine. I don't need or want much from them.

The first lecture ends well ahead of time, and so before I leave my chatty Best Yt Lecturer informs that there've never been any Black lecturers, let alone professors, in the program. Well, no, he continues, he's not sure if 2004's African American student really counted as Black. Anyway, for that reason, Best Yt Lecturer suggests that I consider staying on for my PhD, and then I could be the First Black Ever in the program.

I'm silent in response to the drone of overtures meant to make me feel like I'm really Being Considered, really Being Welcomed.

Welcome Black.

Welcome Black.

Welcome Black.

•••

When I was thick in the Young Black Professional Complex, Noni Jabavu was Life, the High Priestess of Black Women Writers by virtue of her status as the First Black Woman, not just in South Africa, but all of Africa, to write an autobiography and pursue a successful literary career.

When I thought about Noni and uGogo Ntombi together, I sometimes felt guilty for my adoration of Noni. Aside from being of the same era, same race, and same gender, they had little in common. Where Noni spent her life Writing Herself into a Canon, uGogo Ntombi simply wanted to Live with Dignity.

I imagine the life Gogo had led was not what she had in mind when she made her migration from Natal to Johannesburg, eGoli. A Bright Eyed Gold Digger, we could say: the Arrivant With No Point of Arrival.

uGogo worked hard as a Girl in the Kitchens, making next to nothing raising yt women's children. She had, however, managed to raise a Perfect Black Girl who in turn managed a scholarship to London during apartheid and had Managed to become a Strong Black Woman to a Good Black Man who was now (failing at) Managing to raise her own Perfect Black Girl.

"Too Late for Mama?"

I remember the day uGogo died. I watched my mother that day, the only day that uMama's Strong Black Womanhood was almost entirely gone, replaced by a slumped and diminished figure, telling of the trap of Strong Black Womanhood, denied the Ability to Suffer what they needed to.

I wouldn't admit this to the Fallists, but my first thoughts on Death found themselves in Wealthy Yt Writing Women like Ingrid Jonker, Sylvia Plath, and Virginia Woolf. That's where I first began to actively cultivate a desire to kill myself.

Again, if I'm honest with you, in a way, I sometimes coddle neurosis as a sign of my specialness. A Damn Room of My Own. That's right, the Very Fine Negress writes back. As if to

say Fuck You! to yt women, Black Women can damn well have the privilege of freely yielding to depression too.

And maybe that's why I choose to Suffer. In Suffering and yielding to it, I'm laying claim on a birth right denied to uMama, uGogo, and my many Foremothers.

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Best Yt Lecturer is really trying to prove his Best Yt status by having us start the year with a module on Film and Feminism. So I'm holing myself up in my room to watch Set It Off again doing an assignment on the Bechdel Test for "how (yt) feminist a movie is."

Four (Black) Women Lead: check. Not talking about a man: check. Set It Off is the OG Get Rich or Die Tryin'. It gives three of the four women a raison d'être (like they needed it?) to Fuck the System and rob some banks. Jada Pinkett's Stoney loses her college-bound brother in a cold-blood cop murder, Vivica Fox's Frankie is unfairly dismissed from her bank teller job, Kimberly Elise's Tisean has her toddler taken away by Child Welfare, and Queen Latifah's Cleo, my favourite, just takes pleasure in Generally Fucking Shit Up.

After they rob the bank the last and craziest time, Tisean is shot and dies in Stoney's arms en route to hospital. Her Death is painful, but unavoidable, expected.

The police catch up to the other three at a tunnel. Cleo tells Frankie and Stony to make a getaway. Not Gonna Go Down Without a Fight, Cleo rams straight into the cops' gun re, gets out the car, shoots. Rid- dled with bullets, she dies. Damn. It's fucked up, but I can make peace with it, Cleo is our Ride or Die.

Next, Frankie is surrounded and ordered to surrender. Strode, the yt officer who murdered Stony's brother, puts down his gun, approaches her. If I were her, I would surrender and live. No? No, Frankie pulls a gun on Strode. Shit, now they're definitely gonna kill her. I hope she'll kill this motherfucker for all the Black Deaths he's presided over: if you Must Go Down, don't Go Down alone. No? Fuck. Frankie makes a run for it. She's shot in the back. Gone. I can't understand, why didn't Frankie just Pull the Damn Trigger?

Finally, Stoney escapes to Mexico. After hearing baby girl Aaliyah's "Missing You," the movie ends with her driving through the mountains with her cut of the money.

I'm unsettled. I don't know what to make of it all. I can't shake the feeling that it was silly for me to have expected anything better than their deaths.

I end up in a Google Black Hole searching for answers. One of the things I see: Jada didn't want to do a sequel. Why? I spend days thinking about this.

In particular, I'm stuck on Cleo and how she chose to die. I'm thinking about her as I play Sembene's Black Girl. My Fallist Comrades, I'm sure, would love to remind me how Biko said, "Black Man You Are On Your Own." Biko should have said, "Black Girl You Are On Your Own." In Black Girl, Diouana, a young, illiterate woman, moves from Dakar to Antibes to work for a rich French couple hoping to continue her former nanny job and live a Cosmopolitan Lifestyle. Diouana has no knowledge of France beyond the glossy pictures of Elle magazine. Instead, Diouana is (surprise, surprise) forced to work as their maid and she laments, "Back in Dakar they must be saying: "Diouana is happy in France. She has a good life." The Arrivant with No Point of Arrival.

I'm not big (not anymore) on mastering more than one colonial language (it's enough that I dream in English), but I'll write to my Best Yt Lecturer that the French title, *La Noir De . . .* contains an ambiguity lost in the English translation, Black Girl. The ellipsis following the preposition "de" doesn't specify whether that "de" means "coming from a specific place," say, Senegal, the Dark Continent, Thwarted Ambition etc., etc. or whether it signifies that the Black "Girl" is someone's property.

I suppose the latter would be fitting because the Black "Girl" is most directly exploited not by Master, but by Master's Wife, albeit in His Service (isn't that always the case?). Moments before her death, Diouana says, "Never again will she tell me: 'Diouana, wash the shirts of Monsieur.'"

Indeed, Never Again.

Beautiful, Brave Diouana.

Just before she takes her life, Diouana declares, “If I could write, I would tell them . . .”

I’m writing now: In Death, this Black Girl, Le Noir De . . . becomes Her Own Black Girl, Belonging to No One but Herself. •••

I get the assignment back.

Best Yt Lecturer politely explains his “Minor Changes.” I don’t hear everything as I pore over the pages. Fuck him. He doesn’t mention the italics. Nonetheless, he’s dutifully inserted them. (!!!!)

Along with a number of explanations: “For the things that weren’t clear.” And he’s taken out whole paragraphs: “I’ve smoothed your writing out a bit to make it a bit more objective, you know?”

•••

My third Sunday in Cape Town.

On my way from errands, I drive past Christ Church Kenilworth.

Much to the would-be horror of my late Mothers Union uniform wearing grandmother, I’ve long since stopped Believing. If I had guts I would tell her that if there is a god, I wouldn’t recognise him because he’s a shitty god to Black people.

Of course, I wouldn’t have told her. It’d be worse than becoming a drug addict or murderer or prostitute or Muslim convert (or, for that matter, anyone else who doesn’t Kneel Before Jesu Kriste), or or or whatever else kind of biblically condemned Life of Sin. In effect, I’d be telling her that I had no chance at Redemption, having already been Condemned to Hell. I’d be telling her that I’m Spiritually Dead. This isn’t entirely far from the truth, but that’s beside the point.

Walking up to my flat, I bump into Brenda Marechera, who, it turns out, lives in my block, and a few other Fallists.

“Comrade Khanyi! Zwakala, we’re going to decolonise Camps Bay today. Will you let us nationalise your car?”

I don’t object. All I have planned is to revise my bludgeoned Xaba Test assignment.

On the beach we have Zamaleks and kotas. The sky is bright, the water sparkles. We’ve decided we’re going into the water with our bras, panties, and briefs. Njalo, njalo, we’re decolonising swimwear too.

At some point I get up and go into the water. The Atlantic is chillingly cold (hasn’t it always been to Blacks?), but I enjoy it. The waves are seductive, a deceptive calm, but I soon notice that the weight of the water is quite intense. Eventually, I end up being much further in the water than I had intended. I’m out in the middle of the sea, my back to the Comrades on Camps Bay and probably somewhat drunk because my Bourgie Black Self could barely manage half a kota.

I’m Tired, I suddenly realise. It’s like another wave over my body. It’s an overwhelming feeling. Physically, emotionally, I’m just Over It. When I realise this, I grow tired of paddling.

“I wanna be free from the chains that are binding me/ I wanna be free from the chains that I have in me,” Lebo sang.

So why not Just Do It?

I kind of make up my mind. It won’t be anything like Jonker walking into the sea or Plath’s head in the oven or Woolf walking on the bottom of the lake with stones in her pocket. No Statement Suicide, no Spectacle Suicide, no Suicide in Style. I’ll go the Unremarkable, Unmournable way of the Unheeded, Uncelebrated Anonymous. I’ll just let go.

As I’m floating, I remember my first meeting with Brenda Marechera. Wait, if I’m trying my hand at Decolonising The Mind, isn’t it some kind of straight-patriarchal bullshit that I thought it only natural that Brenda Marechera take her spiritual father’s surname? Why can’t she take her mother’s surname? Dambudzo Fassie it is from now. Okay, so I’ve also been thinking how it’s fucked up how both Dambudzo Fassie and I neglected to discuss her mother

Brenda Fassie's own Death by Decay. Was it because we (I?) didn't consider her Revolutionary because her only departures from Madonna-of- the-Township-Pop were Boipatong and My Black President? And those might not even count because it's an ode to Our Dear African Nationalist Leader uTata Madiba, where Marechera declared War Against Zimbabwe's Nationalists?

Get Liberated or Die Tryin'. An album. If Brenda Fassie were alive now, and she was to collaborate with her hip-hop producer son Bongani, they'd come up with that album. With Rhodes' stump on the cover, it'd sell.

Get Liberated or Die Tryin'.

Get Liberated or Die Tryin'.

Get Liberated or Die Tryin'.

A little like our Ride or Die Cleo.

That first day with Dambudzo Fassie, I'd also wanted to say that I didn't know if we could say that Dambudzo Marechera really chose decay. After all, what are the Deaths we die everyday trying to Live? To my mind, his Death, like Brenda's Death, like uGogo's death, was nothing like the accumulation of Small Deaths our people die everyday in Unpunished Insults And Uncompensated Injuries and Undiagnosed Illnesses and Untaken-Care-of Stresses and Unanswered Prayers and Unfulfilled Dreams and Uncried Tears and and and . . .

I was writing against this. I was Writing Existence. Would either Marechera, or Fassie, for that matter, have frowned on that? Not that I've ever entertained any ideas of myself as a Comrade, let alone a Radical, but I want to know, would he think less of me because I wasn't writing to destroy? I was Writing to Live? That I was writing with the hope that, if words weren't enough to stave Death, each word, each sentence, each paragraph, each page would be a ceremony to cremate the worst in our lives.

By the time I totally Let Go, my arms hit the sides of my body and I let my legs drag. The moment I do that, I feel my toes brush against the sand.

Fuck, I've been so caught up debating Death with myself, I haven't noticed that the waves have been pushing me back to The Shoreline.

I don't fight it.

I walk back to the group of Fallists. Dambudzo Fassie hands me another bottle.

"Comrade Khanyi, decolonize your stomach. We see you haven't finished your kota, comrade. Have another Zamalek to make sure it all goes down nicely."

Welcome Black. Welcome Black. Welcome Black.