

SARAH, RINGS AND I

There was something I could not understand with Sarah: she had so many rings on her fingers. I wondered who the lucky men were, I just wondered. But somehow I was certain Sarah was not married; married people do not attend school. Besides, one morning when Sarah and I were late for school, the Teacher who guarded the gate "looking for little fish" gave us six cuts each on our left palms with Big Boy the cane, he gave Sarah extra cuts because Sarah had so many rings on her fingers. Teacher had made Sarah remove the rings, and he threw them into the drain. Sarah's hand was red. I cried when Teacher hit me; Sarah did not cry. I loved Sarah. So I hated Teacher because Sarah had seen me cry. People whispered afterwards that Sarah had her revenge, because on the following day, Teacher came to school with a white bandage round his head, and Sarah had come with new rings on her fingers. Teacher did not guard the gate that day. People whispered that Sarah had organised a group of men to beat up Teacher. The men beat up Teacher. I felt sorry for Teacher when he was bandaged; he looked so sad. Sarah's men had really beaten him up. There were so many rings on Sarah's fingers.

We filed like miners into the big, hot school hall to hear about our examination results. Every year in December when the schools close, we came into the school hall to be told of our results. With this school-closing came a burning desire to release the tension in me. After all, people have resolutions which they wish to fulfil at school-closing. I had mine too. I would face Sarah directly in her eyes and tell her that during scripture, we had learned what the Bible said: "Love one another." Then I would say "therefore, let us love each other, Sarah." But Sarah would tell me that I was too young. She was five years older than I. But that would not matter; people in love thought only about love. I wondered. Sarah walked with so many big boys, I would have no chance at all against them. But I would tell Sarah I loved her. I feared Sarah. I even feared to greet her. But school-closing is school-closing.

This hall made me wonder, because at other times it was made up of three classrooms with two wooden partitions in between. People whispered that lovers knocked to one another on these partitions and when the Teacher caught them knocking, he would beat them with a cane. But when schools closed, there were no partitions. This made me wonder. Doksi said that it was magic. I agreed. But I wondered.

Because we were in Standard III, our class was called "The Babies", So we came in first into the hall and occupied the front benches. Doksi was sitting next to me, and together we glared at the door to watch Sarah and her friend come in. Doksi was interested in Sarah's friend, a tall girl who was two yards tall (or so people whispered). Being in Standard VI, they came in last with their aloof class-mates, the envied and zealous intellectuals of the school who talked about "(corporal Punishment School be Abolished" in debates. Oneday Doksi thought he was clever, and raised his hand to speak. The intellectuals jeered at him and he cried loudly. Then I said to Doksi: "I told you! I told you!" and he cried more. He cried more also when the Chairman ordered him out to cry outside, and two big boys lifted him out into the streets. People said that Doksi cried until he reached his home. But he denied.

I saw Sarah come in, and looking at her, I wished I had passed.

"Where are they?" Doksi asked.

"Didn't you see them?" I asked back.

"I did, but they disappeared in the crowd."

"It's your own fault then." Doksi liked to cry. So before he could think of crying I said: "O.K, I shall stand up as if I am adjusting my belt, then I'll look." He nodded. At a flash, I saw Sarah and her tall friend together with a few other girls standing on a table at the back of the hall. "They are standing on a table" I repeated back, sitting down.

"Where man?" Doksi nudged at me with a bandaged elbow. He had fallen from a tree after having jumped on to a light pranch when he, Wibbie, Lincoln, Monna and I were playing Tarzan. We had laughed at him, saying that he had fallen like a bag of potatoes. Doksi had cried.

"At the back. They are standing on a table." I explained with some annoyance. Doksi stood up as if he was adjusting his belt and looked, then he sat down beaming, and patted me on the shoulders. I was annoyed more. It was hot. Then he said sadly: "I feel mad when I think that she is in love with my brother. Nx! A mere factory worker." I would feel mad when I came upon Sarah walking hand-in-hand with a different big boy every Sunday afternoon.

"Here are your results," bellowed Teacher, who was once ambushed by Sarah's men. There were scars on his forehead. "First, The Babie-e-e-s," and he yawned. It was hot that afternoon; the sun was always hot at 2 o'clock. I noticed Teacher did not cover his mouth with his hand when he yawned. Doksi and I laughed at this "..... then the Fours, the Fives and lastly, the Sixes." There was hot silence in the hall. Supposing I had failed. Mama had always advised me to study hard, but I hadn't bothered to. "Now is the time and the day to uncover all those who have been playing with Satan for the whole year. Hell is where all failures go." and he yawned again. There was hot tension in the hall. Doksi looked at me, I was afraid he would cry, but he did not. Nx! Somebody had let out air; it was smelling, inhaling bad air was a bad omen. Then people began to fan their faces with their hands. As the bad air spread, the fanning spread also. First, there was a murmur, then there was a roar. I looked back, and I saw Sarah fanning herself too. "SHUT UP, MONKEYS!" shouted Teacher, who was once ambushed by Sarah's men, and he raised Big Boy into the air. There was immediate silence; everybody feared Big Boy. "People should learn to control their stomachs!" Teacher ordered. "Now listen," he continued. "Those who have passed are as follows: John Radebe, Samuel Hlatshwayo, Visie Nkosi, Samuel Zwane" Supposing I had failed. I WOULD GO TO HELL. HELL! Sarah had inhaled the bad air also, we would go to hell together. "..... Judith Sibeko, Carolina Maduna" Somehow I had a feeling I had passed. "..... Lincoln Nkosi, Deborah Mashinini, Daniel Zwane-e-e" Teacher yawned again. A fly kept on landing on his forehead. He threatened it with Big Boy, but the fly did not seem to scare easily. Then he spotted a battered exercise book

on the floor; picked it up, and flung it angrily at the fly; the fly winged into safety and disappeared. We all laughed merrily - after the Principal had given the green light. "SHUT YOUR BEAKS!" We shut our beaks. The Principal shut his too.

"Sibusiso Twala" continued Teacher, "Doksi Mbewe, Penise Sibeko"
 Doksi had passed; there was no reason I couldn't have passed. I had always beaten Doksi in class, and that made him cry. "..... Rogers Vilakazi, Agnes Maphanga, Emily Mahlangu, Njabulo Ndebele" It was all over as far as I was concerned. All I wanted to do then was to walk out with Sarah. Everyone had heard my name read out. Even Sarah. I had passed. All I had to do then was to walk over to Sarah and tell her about what the Bible said: "LOVE ONE ANOTHER!" Then I would add that I had passed my examinations. I would tell her that my grandfather once said I would become a famous man, Sarah passed in Third Class; she had too many rings on her fingers.

When all the results had been announced, we sang "Our Father" in English and then in Afrikaans. Then we sang "Nkosi Sikelela", after which we gibbered a song called "Die Stem", the words of which I have never known.

There was a lot of noise when we poured out of the hall into the Parade Square in a helter-skelter of angry and sulky and laughing and dancing ants. Those who had passed were laughing mercilessly at those who had failed. Doksi and I lost Sarah and her friend in the confusion. I laughed at Doksi because his girl had failed. Besides, Sarah's tall friend annoyed me because she received undivided attention from Sarah, and I told Doksi, who said that I was mad.

"Where is she?" Doksi asked.

"Where are they?" I retorted angrily.

"I don't know," he replied. "I lost them in the crowd." I could hardly hear Doksi; children were singing "HOME SWEET HOME."

"Did you think that I knew where they were? Didn't we lose sight of them when we left the hall?"

"Just say you don't know where they are," replied Doksi, "instead of telling me a whole story."

"Don't tell me a whole story too, let's look for them. Today is Today!" Then we began to bully our way through the crowd of singing children. Somehow I was certain Sarah was watching this display of bravery.

ZING ZING TARZAN!
 TARZAN THE APE MAN!
 ZING ZING TARZAN!

Doksi always became mad when he was Tarzan. We fought through the thick undergrowth of children. A lot of girls were smelling of pan-cakes; some had lots of vaseline on their faces and they were brown with dust. Doksi always became mad when he was Tarzan. ZING ZING. He did not care for the smell of pan-cakes; crocodiles smell worse. I followed Tarzan closely, until he stopped suddenly and shouted: "There they are!" Sarah and her tall friend were standing with two boys, about ten paces away, laughing at jokes we couldn't hear. "Lets go to them,"

Doksi said. I agreed, but somehow my legs became heavy. "Come on let's go. What's wrong with you?" My legs became heavier, and somehow my mouth had become dry. "Are you a coward? O.K. I'll tell her you love her"

"No! don't do that"

"Then what are you waiting for? What's wrong with you? Let's go." My legs were then very heavy, and somehow my mouth had become more dry; it was painful when I swallowed. "You're a coward. You are afraid of a girl. I am going to tell the others, and we will all laugh at you. Eh! I shall tell them that Njabulo feared a girl." Sarah was laughing at jokes I could not hear. My legs were then very heavy. "Let's go. Are you a coward?"

O.K. DOKSI, LET US GO. BUT I'M
AFRAID. I LOVE SARAH. BUT I'M AFRAID.
SARAH IS FIVE YEARS OLDER THAN I. CAN'T
YOUR THICK EYES SEE?

But Doksi didn't hear me; my voice hurt my dry throat when I tried to talk. So Doksi didn't hear; Doksi did not hear that I was afraid. The others would laugh at me when they heard from Doksi. Then they would laugh at me until I cried. They would laugh at me for the whole week after we had played soccer in the afternoon.

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AFRAID. I LOVE SARAH. BUT I'M AFRAID.
SARAH IS FIVE YEARS OLDER THAN I. CAN'T
YOUR THICK EYES SEE?

But Doksi didn't hear me; my voice hurt my dry throat when I tried to talk. "O.K. I'm going. I'll tell her that you love her. I'll tell her, alright."

"Wait! wait." But Doksi did not wait. I saw him advance. Then I began to wish I had had two glasses of Coca Cola. Then I would have approached Sarah and given her one, like they did in the films. Then we would raise our glasses into the air for a brief moment, then drink,...

I saw Doksi talk and they all laughed. Aww! Doksi had joked! Then the tall girl patted him on the shoulders and kissed his forehead.

AW! DOKSI HAD WON.

The Doksi talked again, and I saw them all turn in my direction. Doksi pointed at me. Somehow my throat had become wet. "NO! NO!" Somehow my legs were then very light; I made a sharp pivot turn on my heels and shouted: "HOME-SWEET-HOME!" as I mingled with the drunk crowd of children who smelt of pancakes and 'acha.' Doksi told her that I loved her. Doksi had messed me up. Doksi had. Doksi would boast, and offer to teach me how to acquire pluck. How Doksi would boast! How he would give her his handkerchiefs to wash and to bring them back powdered! Aw! How he would boast! I would not stand it. Doksi would tell me that he had twisted her hand until she agreed. But anyway, Sarah was five years older than I, and she had so many rings on her fingers. But I loved Sarah. HOW DOKSI WOULD BOAST! I wouldn't stand it!

We sprayed out into the street where many children were dancing and running and

singing and throwing orange peels at one another. Some were laughing at those who had failed. I saw some children mocking Sydney the mad man, who always stood outside the school-gate and laughed all day. Sydney was pissing and children were shouting at him. Girls shouted "Hha-a-a!" with their hands across their mouths. Sydney just pissed and laughed. Some boys were proposing love to girls; they twisted the girls' arms until they accepted. Others were going to Mamba Stadium to settle old grudges that had been postponed to closing-day; some fights were postponed further more to Christmas or to New Year's Eve. Another girl was crying as she looked for a lost penny, and some boys jeered at her. A lot of girls stood stubbornly on the road so that cars might hoot and they would then jump off the street with feigned shock, raising their dresses behind and showing us things of many colours. But when Baba Ngwenya's taxi came they all ran away before he hooted the car, because Baba Ngwenya had a sjambok. Then it happened.

As I was being sprayed into the street, a fast-moving paper-ball, wet with somebody's saliva, caught my left eye and separated into small pieces all over my face. "Sies! Your mother's bottoms!" I cursed, desperately removing the wetfilth, while fat and grubby and over-vaselined pan-cake smelling children laughed at me.

"Hhe-e-yi! they got him."

"You fired him well"

"He is too proud!" said someone whose voice smelt.

"Just because they have a street at his home!"

"They eat Sandwiches at his home!"

"Throw another at him! Throw another at him! Throw another at him!" Then they began to chant: "Throw another at him!" Then I blamed my father for being the Principal of the Secondary School, and also for having agreed to have our street named after him. Just then, Sarah, the tall girl, the two other boys, and Doksi appeared round the corner. They were amongst the last group of children. Dammit! I would show Sarah I was brave.

"Come out!" I demanded. "I mean you who did that. Come out!" But the chant drowned my voice. Then my throat began to dry again and voice hurt it when trying to come out.

THROW ANOTHER AT HIM! THROW ANOTHER AT HIM!
HE THINKS HE IS CLEVER.

The chant seemed to make them mad. They closed in on me. I stood on guard, I had to show Sarah I was brave. "Come out!" I demanded. "Let him who did it come out!" But my throat hurt.

LET HIM COME OUT, AND I SHALL HIT HIM UNTIL
HE CALLS HIS BROTHERS AND THE WHOLE FAMILY, AND I
SHALL ROUT THEM ALL WITH SIX BLOWS.

My throat hurt; they did not hear me; the chant seemed to make them mad. They closed in on me. Then I felt many hands feeling for me. They were mad. "COME OUT!" They were mad. Then I was in the air. They danced about with me. I was moved from one group of hands to another. I saw Sarah and her friends pointing at me and laughing. Then Doksi too thought that he was brave. He came running

towards me saying: "come one, come all" like they say in the films. But he was also lifted into the air. They danced about with us. I saw Doksi. Crying in the air I was not crying, I'm sure Sarah saw that I was not crying.

When they were tired, the mad children put us down at Twala's Butchery opposite the school, and scattered away like chickens when a car comes. Some girls acted like they did when they stood stubbornly on the street and lifted their dresses when a car hooted. Doksi picked up a stone and hit another one on the buttocks while the dress was up. She cried with pain as they all ran away. Doksi said he had 'marked' them well. We would get them in the evening when they were sent to the shops.

"What happened" Doksi asked wiping tears away,

"They lifted me into the air, didn't you see, stupid?"

"Yes, I saw them lifting you up into the air and I ran to help you."

"Oho! It didn't help did it? All you know is to tell Sarah that I love her, hey?"

"I did not tell Sarah," Said Doksi beginning to cry again.

"Well what happened"

"I just told them you were my friend." He then told me, amidst a wiping of tears and lots of sniffing, that the tall girl had sent him with a message to his brother to tell him to take her to the bioscope that evening.

"Well, didn't you tell her you loved her, Tarzan?"

"No. Those two gorillas kept on breathing down the girls, and they forgot about me after the message." Sarah and the tall friend who was two yards tall were walking down the old, holed dual road that had old tar on it. They walked two-for-two and hand-in-hand with their gorillas. "Let us throw stones at them," I suggested. Doksi was not keen. I hated those gorillas, and I said it bitterly to Doksi, but he just said "Nx!" As for the one with Sarah, I shot him down with a German Luger, and when he was dead, I ran him over with my Mercedes Benz Convertible. And when I had run him over with my Benza-Benza Convertible, I ran him over with my twenty-four wheeled black locomotive, and then burnt him in its hungry flames where he would dance with Satan's bones. Then I took Sarah away hand-in-hand into my Benza-Benza Convertible, and we sailed over the sea, and we flew into the sky where I bought her everything from my ten storied shops over the clouds. Then Sarah and I asked all my six aeroplanes each bring us a child. Then Sarah, the children and I would live happily ever after....

Doksi decided to go home, swearing that he would not tell his brother that the tall girl wanted to be taken to the bioscope. The he came with a brilliant idea: he would tell the tall girl that evening that his brother was ill, and had asked Doksi to take her to the bioscope. I envied Doksi, but I decided to follow the couples.

As we parted, someone said: "Here's the child who was hit in the eyes with a big ball!" I heard her distinctly: Sarah, she was laughing. The tall girl too was laughing. Their gorillas too croaked. I threw an angry stone at the girl who had made Sarah laugh at me. The stone missed, but it made the little girl run away. But another stone caught her at the back of the head, and she ran away crying. I waved a fist at her.

"Heyi Wena!" a girl's voice shouted behind me. "Heyi wena!" it repeated. Then I turned. Sarah was coming towards me. Then my legs became heavy again. NO! I couldn't propose love to Sarah; not now. Every body would be watching me twist her hand. Sarah had too many rings on her fingers. Sarah knew lots of men. Besides she was five years older than I. I feared lots of men, especially when they were Sarah's. Lots of men might take their revenge and I would bandage my head like Teacher. But Sarah was coming to me.

NO, SARAH, DON'T COME TO ME-E-E!
THERE ARE TOO MANY RINGS ON YOUR FINGERS!

Sarah was coming to me. There were too many rings on her fingers: I didn't want Sarah anymore. But I loved Sarah. Sarah was coming to me....

There was nobody at home when I arrived at half-past four. My sister was away too. My sister liked to disappear. But when she was away at the Boarding School, she would write to say that she missed us so much that she felt like crying, and when she came home, she just disappeared. So I began to clean the house. Mama would be very pleased to find the house clean when she come from work. I scrubbed the floors, washed them and put polish. Then I dusted all the furniture like our Mistress had said during Hygiene. I washed all the pots and dishes in the kitchen, and polished the "Ellis Deluxe." In the sitting room, into which I would lead Sarah, I placed, on the table, an exercise book where I had scored ten-out-of-ten, sixty-out-of-seventy, twelve-out-of-fifteen and three-out of twenty. But I removed the page where I had got three out of twenty.

There was still nobody else at home when I finished at half-past six. So I sat down on a sofa in the sitting room and waited. Perhaps my sister had decided to go to church for hymn practices. There was always a hymn-practice in church at seven on Friday evenings. So Sarah would not find her. It would be nice perhaps if my sister did not come, I would offer to take Sarah to church. It would be nice to go through the big trees in the dark with Sarah on our way to the Church. Sarah had stood a few yards away from me and said, "come here, Baba." Yes, she had called me Baba. I had heard Mama call Father that way. Perhaps she loved me. Mama certainly loved Father. Thanks God Doksi and I had listened to our Mistress and another Teacher talking about kisses. It was at night in the bushes behind the school when there was a concert. We saw them kiss. The Teacher had said, "There are two most important kisses: the English Kiss and the French Kiss. Which one do you prefer?" Mistress said "The nicer one." The Teacher said that the nicer one was the French Kiss which was done when people were in bed, so it would inconvenient there. Then Mistress said they should do the English Kiss. Then they did it. We saw them: Doksi and I. If Sarah loved me, I would hold her tightly, hum a little in her ear, and then I would thrust my tongue out and she would open her mouth and let it in, and we would kiss for a whole ten minutes: just like the Teacher had said.

"Why do the other children worry you so much?" Sarah had asked. I did not answer, my throat hurt a little.

"Shame! What do you want with me? You are always looking at me?" Sarah had asked smiling.

"Hhayi! I have never looked at you." I blushed.

"Hawu! This child; you are telling a lie." she replied clapping her hands.

"I just like to look at you." I admitted. Sarah laughed at this.

"You're still a child; that's the disadvantage. I also like to look at you. But you're so young."

"What if I were old?" I gathered pluck. My throat did not hurt anymore.

"Hha! you're silly. This child!"

"True's God, I'm not silly."

"Where is your Sister?" I said I was not sure where she was. "Tell her I shall come to see her this evening?" I nodded, elated. "Please don't forget."

"I wont. I'll tell her another sister said she would be coming to see you this evening."

"Ja! Who will you say it was?"

"Sarah!"

"Hawu! This child knows me." I grinned mysteriously.

"Yes! Say Sarah is coming, neh?"

"Ja!" I agreed looking down and drawing a funny person with my big right toe on the old, holed dual road that had old tar.....

We passed a shop, not far from my home, that belonged to an old Jew. Opposite the shop was the Charterston Clinic. Then we crossed the tarred street that had street lights. The street went to town, to Johannesburg and to Springs, and far away, it was very dark. We went into the dark golf-course that had ant-hills and mole-hills. My sister called it the city of ant-hills when she mocked it. She had wondered how people managed to play a game of golf on such a course. Sometimes Doksi, S'manga, Monna, Wibby, I and others of our gang would trap the moles and send them to Mavimbela the witch-doctor, and he would give us five shillings and we bought fish and chips from the Jew's shop. Sometimes he asked us to trap wild rats for him. At other times, especially in summer, we trapped birds at the golf-course and the golfers chased us away with golf sticks. Sometimes, in a panic, we left our birds behind and the golfers released them. Often, we would revenge by coming at night to release our bowels into the holes. Monna and Saki always laughed when they released their bowels into the holes on the greens. It was funny. They just laughed. I wondered.

Sarah and I passed the Charterston Clinic where one day Doksi was forced to drink castor oil under threat of a walloping by the nurse with a hose pipe. Behind the Clinic were huge gum trees. It was dark, very dark, and a little wind made the trees hush. Cars and buses went up and down the street that went far away. There was also lots of noise from the beer hall near-by. It was Friday!

Then I became conscious of Sarah's hand feeling for mine. She found it, and held it tightly. "It's so dark." She said, probably accounting for her action. "You should protect me when trouble comes."

"Of-course I'll protect you." I assured her, feeling genuinely protective. But I feared ghosts all the same. People whispered that ghosts sometimes lived in big trees at night. We felt our way through the trees. Then I began to feel more

pressure on my hand; Sarah was stopping me. Sarah was pulling me towards her. The trees just hushed, and the noise from the beer hall scared me; as if people were looking at us. Sarah put her hands on my shoulders, holding me at arms length. Although it was dark, I felt Sarah's eyes penetrate into me. Then my throat began to hurt. When she spoke, Sarah's voice had changed. I thought it was like that of Rex when it was cold outside and he howled to be let into the house; his kennel was stolen, oneday.

"Have you ever kissed?" Sarah asked. My throat hurt more. I remembered our Mistress and another Teacher in the bushes behind the school. How Doksi and I had eventually thrown stones at them and laughed as we ran away, shouting "We saw you!" With handkerchiefs across our mouths as they did in the films. I told Sarah that Mama kissed me often when I went to school. Sarah laughed. "I mean have you ever kissed a girl!" she insisted.

"Yes. My sister kisses me sometimes." She laughed again. But my throat was hurting. Sarah's voice had changed. It reminded me of Rex when it was cold outside and howled to be let into the house; his kennel was stolen, oneday.

"No! what I mean is... of course you are still young." She said.

"But I know," I added boldly, "that there are two most important kisses: the English kiss and the French Kiss."

"Hawu! This child is silly." Said Sarah laughing. Then I remembered:

"I passed my exams"

"Hawu! That's good," she replied. "People say that you are clever." I blushed in the dark and hoped that my silence suggested modesty.

"You passed too," I returned her compliment. "You are clever too!"

"Oho! Mym! You make people laugh at me." Somehow I forgot about what the Bible said, because Sarah began to come nearer, until our bosoms touched and her powerful hands were crushing me. Sarah was powerful; she embraced me strongly. I felt many rings on my crushed back. Sarah had many rings on her fingers. My throat was becoming very painful. Sarah began to moan like Rex when it was cold outside and he howled to be let into the house. Then Sarah moaned a lot. I feared a lot of moans. Sarah was moving her hands all over my back. I think Sarah was mad. Then she began to breathe heavily. Sarah was hurting me. She was crushing me.

SARAH, WHAT ARE YOU DOING TO ME?
LEAVE ME ALONE, SARAH OR I SHALL TELL MAMA.
SARAH YOU ARE CRUSHING ME. NO! NO!

My voice did not come out; it hurt my throat when it tried to. I tried to push her away, but Sarah's hands were webs. They moved all over my back. Sarah's breath was hot against my face. She kissed my eyes, my forehead, my mouth, and my cheeks where there was always an explosive sound, just like when gogo kissed me.

SARAH WAS MAD!. SARAH WAS MAD!

She held me with the viciousness of the police in town. I feared. I froze. I whimpered

SARAH, WHAT ARE YOU DOING TO ME-E?

My voice did not come out; it hurt my throat when it tried to. Then Sarah's kissing mouth eventually concentrated on my lips. I felt her tongue wiping my lips. Sarah's breath was hot.

OPEN YOUR MOUTH! OPEN! OPEN!

The Teacher in the bushes had said so. I felt Sarah's tongue, it had stopped wiping my lips. It was then taut and was sort of boring into my mouth between the lips. Then something snapped inside me, and I knew I had to let it in. There was silence. And I began to enjoy.....

..... until Sarah began to moan again, and began to shake her lower body violently against my belly. Then I felt fingers; they had many rings. Mad fingers. Mad! Mad! They fumbled with the buttons of my trousers. Then I began to struggle again. Sarah's breath was hot against my face. It was hot. The trees hushed a lot now, and the noise from the beer hall made me scared. Sarah was mad. She now breathed in gasps. Sarah was mad! Sarah was mad! Sarah was mad! She pushed me back until I bumped against a tree. Then she pressed me on to the tree. Sarah breathed in gasps. Her fingers were fumbling with the buttons of my trousers.

NO, SARAH! TEACHER HAD SAID THAT THIS
THIS THING SHOULD NOT BE DONE BEFORE
WE HAD GONE TO THE BIOSCOPE TWICE!
WHAT ARE YOU DOING TO ME, SARAH?

My voice did not come out; it hurt my throat when it tried to. Sarah's moan reminded me of Rex when it was cold outside and he howled to be let into the house; his kennel was stolen, one day. Sarah was moaning and gasping like a knock on the door. Then my buttons were off. Sarah gasped like a knock on the door.

SARAH, I WILL SHOUT!
I WILL TELL MAMA. WHAT ARE YOU
DOING TO ME, SARAH? I WILL SHOUT!

My voice did not come out; it hurt my throat when it tried to. Sarah's lower body was shaking violently against my belly. My belly became hot like sticks when primitive men made fire. Then Sarah began to raise her dress, but she stopped in the middle of doing so, clung to me fiercely, crushing me, her breath hot against my face. There was no movement, just tension. Sarah was killing me.

SARAH YOU ARE KILLING ME-E-E-E!

Then she released a long shriek and I felt the pressure of her hands on me lessening. I pushed Sarah away, and ran like a wind. I ran towards Mackenzieville where there was the bioscope. I ran; ran; ran. Sarah's shrieks gradually disappeared as I ran. I feared Sarah. When I passed the Church, which was also along the fringes of the township, I heard people singing, but I ran on. Then I didn't hear Sarah anymore.

Suddenly, a few feet away, a dark figure leapt up from the grass amongst weeds,

picked up something and took to its heels into the township. I hesitated, reducing my speed. But the thought of Sarah following me made me run on, taking a slight deviation from where the figure had left up. But when I had passed, a voice of a woman on the grass amongst the weeds shouted: "Come back, fool! It's only a child. You coward!"

"You rubbish of a child," a man yelled, "I'll get you!"

"Shut up! Come back; you're wasting time!" The woman shouted.

"Voetsek!" I cursed the man. "You'll see your mother!" Somehow I knew he would never follow me.

At Mackenzieville, the bioscope was about to begin. People were already filing in like miners. Then I saw Sarah's tall friend with Doksi's brother. They were going to the bioscope. They were hand in hand...

"I came to see you yesterday evening, but your brother told me you might have gone to church." Said a familiar voice in the kitchen as sunbeams and a cold morning wind purred into my bedroom through a widely and wildly opened window. An annoying sister worshipped Hygiene. She had changed since she began going to the Boarding School. I jumped out of bed and ran into the kitchen where Sarah and I looked at each other, and our eyes spoke, as Teacher had said to our Mistress behind the School, in the bushes.

"You!" Sarah pointed at me smiling.

"Hha! What have I done?" I asked swinging between the table and the cupboard. She did not answer back, nor did she ever look at me, or speak to me again. She stood up, telling my sister she had come to say good-bye for she was going to stay in Durban; she had been waiting for schools to close for holidays. My sister said "Hawu!" in surprise. I stopped swinging, and was also surprised.

I watched Sarah go away; my sister took her half-way. Sarah's men would never revenge on me. Never! She would never have the chance to tell them about yesterday. I watched her go. I saw the two deep holes behind each of her knees. Sarah was beautiful. Sarah had too many rings on her fingers. I loved Sarah. I never saw Sarah again. I saw Sarah go.

I LOVE YOU, SARAH!

But my throat was dry again. My voice did not come out; it hurt my throat when it tried to.

NJABULO S. NDEBELE