

I decided to go back to work and everything went well as time rolled on. We were allowed annual leave in the plumbing department. I took my leave on the 20th December, wanting to spend Christmas at home. My friends and brothers in the hostel gave me R120 for provisions and my witchdoctor gave me more medicine. They liked me very much. They were grateful that I used to clean our room, cook and run errands.

They even bought me a second class return ticket. Kloza, my witchdoctor, gave me muthi which was in a small bottle. He said: "My son this medicine is very important. Don't propose love to a woman, tell her that you would like to see her at such and such a place, open this bottle and call the woman by her name."

Before I could even say "Thank you", tears were running down my face.

At Pietermaritzburg I waited for a Kokstad train. I arrived in Kokstad the following day and I took a bus to Port St Johns. I was home by 3 o'clock, my relatives were waiting for me at the station.

It was Christmas, everybody was happy, singing, rehearsing for the Christmas Day concert. I was particularly attracted to a teacher from the local school. I told her that I wanted to see her at 9.30 the following evening. She didn't want to talk to me, she said, she was tired and needed a rest. Anyway at 9.30 the following evening I waited for this

woman. I opened my small bottle and after I called out her name I said: "I am, here come immediately." I closed it and put it back into my pocket.

After about 20 minutes I saw her coming out of her room. I couldn't believe my eyes. She sat next to me and put her head on my shoulder. After 15 minutes she went back to her room. She came back again with a blanket and we sat there until 3.45 am. We were in love, I could feel it. I said "Thank you" to Kloza's medicine. In the affairs of love, Khoza's medicine never let me down from that day on.

But before long I decided to leave Carletonville and seek employment nearer home. I did not regret leaving that place of suffering, with its compounds, its violence, its homosexuality, a place crawling with the spirits of unappeased dead miners and workers. The place of gold, dagga, drink and oppression. Yes, the compound, that "small gateway" to "heaven".

THE SMALL GATEWAY TO HEAVEN

Tall brown walls crowned
with barbed wire fences
Walls that hide what lives inside
from all outsiders.
And inside them, the inmates never see
the world outside
They hear sounds
Rumours of lives
They hear stories.

And on these walls: two gates.
A small and a big gate
Just as it was told in the
histories of custody
But also in the stories of the entrances to Heaven.

And they feel that they are blessed,
Those elected to enter feel they are blessed

entering the small gateway to the hostel or the compound.
Those unmarked, those without numbers on their wrists
cannot enter.

But I entered, I was elected to enter the small gates
And these eyes have seen wonders:
I saw the people sleeping stacked in shelves
like goods in a human supermarket.

I saw the elect, long strings of men
in queues
One after the other tracing their steps through
the kitchens
To meet the sight of men perspiring rivers on their bodies
of glass
Beads of sweat pouring
as they were stirring cauldrons of stiff porridge
Stirring away with enormous logs
and others with ladles shovelling the porridge
onto dishes made hard like the rockface
And you imagined the heat of your food
before you received it cold.

Then there were others: with his enormous ukhezo
Fishing for pieces of meat and gravy
Slapping it onto the plate shouting
to move on, stop wasting his time,
Pouring out insults
Swearing and throwing the plate so the gravy
Poured and smudged surfaces, fingers, anger

He was having his fun
His daily amusement
on the brink of a riot.

And at night another is busy courting
his workmate
Praising him as the beautiful one from KwaTeba
the one with short breasts saying -
Since you left your sister behind
Please take her place in my bunk tonight.

And he asks and asks him to acknowledge his proposal.

This is the small gateway to Heaven,
for the elect
For the old men turned to animals
And the young mesmerised by the promises.

And I remember:
When the recruiters invaded our homes
to get us to work the mines
They would say:
"Come to Malamulela
at Mamlankuzi with its hills and valleys
There are mountains of meat
There a man's teeth become loose from endless chewing
And there where the walls are grumbling
Where the stoneface is singing
Promising bridewealth and merriment
Where sorrows disappear at the wink of an eye
Come to the place of the
Hairy-jaw
where starvation is not known".

And we joined the queues through the small gate to Heaven.
And we found the walls of our custody
and degradation
and of work darkness to darkness
with heavy shoes burdening our feet
with worry
For nothing
At the place of the Hairy-jaw
away from our loved ones

And I have seen this prison of a Heaven
This kraal which encircles the slaves

And I saw it as the heart of our oppression
And I saw the walls that separate us
from a life of love

I felt I would never survive the world of Carletonville, its harshness but also its great distance from my home. As many people from Pondoland have been settled in Natal to work for sugarcane or to work in town in Durban, I decided to look for a job in Natal. My uncle got me a job in one of the firms in Durban. I worked for La Lucia Homes Construction at Mount Edgecombe.

I enjoyed working for this company, I was quite satisfied with my work, and I gained a lot of experience. I was glad to be away from the Witwatersrand and its hostels. My uncle allowed me to occupy a room at his place out at Amauti in Inanda, and although transport was difficult to and from Durban, at least there was kindness and understanding at home.

In 1966 my supervisor, a Mr Crowie, left this company and started his own, and lured me away by promising me a better wage. I left La Lucia Homes in 1966 and joined "General Plumbers", his company which operated from the Red Hill of Durban. Coloured and whites didn't like me but I tried very hard to compete with them. I was not at all happy with the salary they gave me. I sat for an exam in 1970 and obtained a very good pass. I thought I was going to get an increase but I was told that the Government was against equal pay for all.

I felt very small, they laughed at me and passed silly remarks, saying: "Alfred teaches us everything but at the end of the week we get more money". I couldn't take it. I was unhappy and frustrated. In 1974 I decided to look for a better paying job. I managed to get myself a job. I wasn't fussy I was looking for any job.

Little did I know that I was about to enter an enormous factory gateway to Hell. But in the meantime, before all that, came more hardships of the heart.