

# WOMEN MAKING HISTORY

We slipped out of our houses before anyone was awake, before the day itself was up. As we hurried to our meeting place in the wintry light of the quiet streets, we felt again for the piece of paper folded in our pockets. How can you know the excitement we felt, divided as it was between hope and fear? We met in small groups, our relief at seeing each other expressed in excited whispers, laughter at the imagined reactions of our husbands.

It was our day, the day we'd planned for months.

At the railway station were many more groups of women and the reality of being there together made us forget the doubts we'd had washing and dressing in our silent houses.

We began the singing before we were on the train, great waves of song. And when the first train came in, the women at the windows were singing too. There were a few men on the train, workers of the early shift. We teased them, we were so proud of our mission: you thought we knew nothing about politics but we're not going to carry passes like you, we will not be stopped in the streets by police, raided at night by the blackjacks. We are mothers, we can't go to jail as often as you do. The coaches were filled with us, we were everywhere.

We'd come from all parts of the country for our day. By the time our train reached the capital, dawn had broken and before we spilled out into the streets, the word had been around: processions are banned today; to avoid arrest, walk in groups of three.

Buses and cars filled with chanting women had arrived. By now we were thousands.

How can I describe our feeling walking together, how can you know what it was like?

We were wearing the green and black of liberation, or tribal dress, brilliant proud colours. We walked with babies on our backs, children at our sides. We were a moving body of colour and song. We weren't Xhosa, Zulu or Sotho, we weren't Indian, coloured or white. We were women making history.

WE COME AS WOMEN UNITED IN OUR PURPOSE  
TO SAVE THE AFRICAN WOMEN FROM THE  
DEGRADATION OF PASSES. FOR TO US, AN  
INSULT TO AFRICAN WOMEN IS AN INSULT TO  
ALL WOMEN.

By the time we reached the government buildings we were twenty thousand. You've never seen twenty thousand women

together. We signed the papers for the prime minister. He wasn't there to see us, he missed such a sight. Then we waited in silence. A heavy silence that was as strong as we were many. And then again we sang: Now you have touched the women, you have struck a rock, you have dislodged a boulder, you will be crushed. Yes of course today we carry passes, in the end we had to: we couldn't get work, receive our pensions, even register our children if we didn't. But that August day almost thirty years ago showed us our strength. That day we were women.

This story comes from a book called 'The Parrot Egg', by A. Blandel, S. Lamb and A. Hashemian. Published by Raven Press.



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