

Solitarius

Kólá Túbòsún

April 16, 2021



The grey clouds enveloped the valley which nestled the school - an affluent boarding school for boys only. Sandwiched between two hilly edges, the school was part of a small urban growth point that benefited from Nonibe's historical sites. The school was closing for the term that day and the queue was the last group to be ferried home. The boys filed into the school auditorium like young colonels marching in a single line. Outside the well-maintained chicken bus were parked their luggages. Lungani and other boys sat down at the front rows of the hall, waiting for the boarding master. Everything was done military style.

No chit-chat was allowed even during the last hour of school. A pot-bellied but energetic bald-headed man strutted towards the podium. His swarthy skin was oily, something a bit bizarre in the morning. Josh the football captain instructed the boys to file out orderly to the bus, no one questioned his authority. He was a senior and the seniors in the school were next in hierarchy to the teachers. Although Josh stuttered, nobody dared jeer when he skipped his phrases. He had this hefty intimidating presence and most students feared him. The line came to a halt as the boarding master issued his last instructions.

"The school uniform must be worn as a full attire only to be removed when you're home. Am I clear?!" he instructed while his last syllables spurted out with drops of saliva. Their "Yes, sir!" echoed up and beyond the granite hills that formed the school enclave in the veld. They moved in a column into the bus quietly. Moments later, the driver turned on the ignition and the bus roared into life, coughing aggressively for some seconds before setting off. The boys cheered as it passed the main gate.

In the midst of all the excitement Lungani was leaning against the window not uttering a word. The rain started falling for a few minutes then abruptly it stopped. He watched as the droplets slid down the window forming an imaginary river as they plied their way down. The hills rolled by and the young village boys waved as the bus made its way through the narrow gravel road. He was disinterested in any conversation, shunting anyone that attempted to spark chat with him. He opened his satchel and took out a novel and devoured every word with all his energy. To every other person he was an enigmatic individual who did not put up with people encroaching his safe space. He suffered from susceptibility.

It was no longer clear whether it's them or him who confined him to his mind and books. It was getting confusing. A prisoner of his mind and captive of his own thoughts and memories.

They disembarked from the bus and were warmly welcomed by their mothers who missed their dear boys. He made a wry smile that was just his attempt at being socially 'nice'. He felt a nudge on his shoulder and turned around and realised it was Andile, his hilarious roommate. He handed him an enclosed package and wished him a happy festive season. This was the only person that he tolerated. In simple terms Andile was welcomed into his circle of nerdy and bookish friends who were not really friends but spent most of their times together not talking. Andile read occasionally he wasn't a regular.

Lungani made his first genuine smile for the day.

As a young child Lungani had been barred from playing outside their house, something that he got used to eventually as he grew. His home felt like prison. Being shipped to some boarding for snobbish 'masalad' teens put him in a tight situation. He mastered the art of bottling up his thoughts and emotions.

It happened again. Those untimely black outs, he felt lightheaded then tumbled down. He told himself he was fine and drank a glass of chilled water. These thoughts that crept upon him more regularly as of lately were depressing. Even if he had told anyone no one would've listened anyway. If they could pass him in the corridor and say nothing what would be the reason to say anything. Was it a memory that had been pushed back for too long? He asked himself but brushed it aside and moved ahead with a few pages of a thriller.

He decided to take a siesta break from reading.

Lungani had been yearning for some peace of mind since he left school. With the driver gone and the house girl slamming the door behind him a few minutes earlier, he was left to himself. The silence and loneliness allowed him to explore the facade of himself nobody knew about. Slowly he became unconscious of his surroundings and his muscles loosened up. Later he was fast asleep. His daytime nightmare began.

He could still remember their teasing. They shoved him down the muddy street drainage. One of them spat on his face. He was an aberration to them, something uncommon and alien. They didn't want to play with his 'type'. They held no tolerance for an extra. He couldn't see his friend anywhere. He wanted to pull himself up but his friend wasn't there anymore. All of a sudden he fell into an abyss. Their jeers faded with each second. There was something they were saying but that was exactly what he wanted to avoid. Whatever he was avoiding in his dream was transcendental in nature. It was for him and him alone.

He was awakened by the loud noise made by the neighbourhood drunk loitering by the gate. He wanted to take a breather and take a walk but he had no strength. Besides, he had nosy neighbours.

The drizzle leveled up and became a thunderstorm. The rain poured for an hour then sunlight came turning window panes rosy. The raindrops that had collected on the petals of the Belinda roses made the flowers look artificial .

He locked his bedroom door and turned on the television. The channel he had tuned into was broadcasting a vaudeville. He watched trying to soothe his soul. The grey walls of the room reminded him of prison. His bedroom felt like solitary confinement with the doors always locked. The windows had steel burglars bars, the curtains allowed only little light to filter through. Everything was gloomy.

At the end of the show, he broke into a trance. Twirling around in the small space available. He let out a chuckle, he wasn't sure why but it was relaxing and exciting. He thrust himself onto his bed and began sobbing. After five minutes, he sniffled.

He stood up and held the steel bars between the curtain and window glass, he wanted to reach out to touch the other layer of steel from the outside but there was a rule against putting one's hand through the window.

If only he could join others and be included in the fun. He crouched next to his bed and stared at the screen as if hypnotised. Never speaking or moving.

Rabhelani Mguni is a writer and activist from Bulawayo, Zimbabwe. He is an advocate of social inclusion. He spends his time reading African fiction and engaging other activists through debate on contemporary issues.

