

CHAPTER ONE

A Cup of Black Perspective



"What you allow is what will continue."

- Unknown -

Like the parched bark of a mourning wattle tree, whispering tales of its plea, her eyes held the glint of a thousand untold stories, each reflecting the wisdom of the years gone by. Her dark, avocado skin, etched with time, whispered the secrets of a life lived with courage, every wrinkle a testament to the battles she had fought and the love she had given. Her hidden scars were the silent echoes of a resilient spirit that refused to break. In her presence, I always felt the strength of a thousand soldiers, the warmth of love that endured, and the quiet grace of a woman who carried the world in her heart.

But Grandma Nomasonto, whom I call "*Nonna*" for short, was gone now, and her face looked peaceful in her coffin. Finally, her eyes saw heaven, and her ears heard no evil. The arms of the clock had confirmed her passing. The shadow of the unforgiving forest of Lotzaba held its breath and tears in respect for her soul. Her precious hands had tended this forest for ninety-four years, and if any soul were worthy of resting within its ancient bowels, it would be hers. Yet, a storyline stirred that silence—showing a tale of resilience noticeable in her wrinkles. To that, the forest began to weep, and its tears did moan, borne aloft by winds that alone dared to carry such sorrow—a testament to her heart that wore the plumes of the rare bird. Were those tears black enough to ink, I would be the canvas, and this is how our story would hue upon the heavens.

As she had foretold, echoing the song by Ben E. King, there would come a day when the night would fall, and the land would be draped in darkness, with only the moon to cast its glow. That day, I was not to crumble or falter under the weight of my tears, nor was I to let them dry on their own or waste them on barren ground. Instead, I was to take up my QWERTY keyboard and give voice to our shared scars.

And now, that day has come. Today, I write our story with a heavy heart. I share it with the world to inspire the younger generation and to show how I navigated storms and doubt in a tale riddled with hardships. It is a story of a ship caught in the relentless winds of apartheid, its ropes frayed and torn, yet it never surrendered. As if the storm weren't enough,

my father's final westward journey left tangled threads in its wake, a vessel adrift in a sea of anguish. His death became the price I paid to the Creator, a toll weighed down by grief and profound consequences.

Yet still, it was not enough to doff me off from poverty and endless suffering. I vied like a canoe in the struggle to survive the giant sea swells of this world. But the greatest torment was not poverty itself—it was the travesty attached to the colour of my skin, a hue that I could never alter or blend with ease, unlike the chameleon. Sadly, we Black people cannot change, for it is who we are. It is woven into our identity. Brook Benton, too, sought answers, asking, “Why is the colour of our skin said to be an oil of sin?” when we are all carbon-based organisms.

Ironically, my father's death brought me closer to my maternal grandmother, the *Nonna*, who would have been distant had he lived. A proof that the universe is conscious and alive. His passing opened a new chapter that would have otherwise remained untouched in a life unmarred by such storms.

His death was no figment of my imagination but a truth that altered the trajectory of my existence. I was only two years old and inconsolable when he passed. My mother, even as she grieved, shared words that clung to my soul. While still enveloped in wonder at the world, I was forced to leave the safety of my chrysalis too soon, fragile, disoriented, and not yet ready to face life. Like a butterfly whose wings were still wet and delicate, I hung suspended, wings folded and clipped by the bitter winter of the eastern Transvaal, whose air was so cold that the locals named the river “*Iqhwa*,” meaning ice, but over time, the name got distorted into “*Igwa*.”

I was not prepared for the storms that awaited a Black child on the outskirts of South Africa. Life's metamorphosis loomed ahead—a reality that quickened my pulse. The thought of navigating life's turbulent estuaries without a paddle filled me with fear and anticipation as I hovered on the edge of the delicate air and the impending struggle that awaited me.

My roots trace back to Ermelo, my birthplace, a close-knit community snuggled in the Gert Sibande district of Mpumalanga. Once a farm founded by Reverend Frans Lion Cachet between 1835 and 1899, the town was named by a Dutch Reformed Church clergyman in honour of his friend Witteveen, who hailed from Ermelo in the Netherlands. At one point, it was part of the Transvaal region.