

Braids and migraines

I am nine years old. The stars start to blind me so I take a seat on this big reddish stone to scan Our Rural Township and to count houses that look pretty from up here. The nice thing about our house being on a hill is that the features of Our Rural Township are exaggerated. You see that blinking house right there, that blue one, look at how beautiful it is and look at how it sparkles like a star. I call it 'Inkanyezi' because it looks like the ghetto version of heaven or hell, I don't know. You don't want to know the full truth about that house but I will tell you nonetheless. That house is actually awful in real life, it is not that big, and that blue colour is actually plastic bags used as an alternative for building bricks.

It is ugly just like our house behind me. You don't want to see their toilet; it is just this massive stinky hole with no support or anything. Even in winter there are cockroaches, mosquitoes and flies everywhere, those green ones, I could never use their toilet. Ours is better because at least Baba was creative when he built it. He dug a hole, tore open a bucket, shoved it around the hole, and he put cement to steady it. He nailed the top of the bucket with this soft thing so that you are comfortable when you sit on it. It is clean too because mama cleans it all the time. You see Mama Matola from that blue house is not from here. She comes from far. We don't play with her children because they say they smell bad.

When Our Rural Township is in a fix they call Mama Matola names, they say "fusek wena mubi!" They say it like it is a curse but I know better. Because my brother Bhuti Qondile Manguzi says there is no such thing, we are all the same, we are all a rainbow and I believe him.

They say Mama Matola has tokoloshes under her bed and every night she feeds them with people's souls. They say that is why we are unhappy, that is why Our Rural Township is miserable because Mama Matola is a witch. I still secretly play with Rebecca and Nunu, but now and again when we have a little fight I tease them. I tell them that they are aliens and that they must go back to where they come from. "Nuka Nuka!" I say to them, the same way the old people say it, I say it like it is a curse but you should see Rebecca when I say it; she just laughs like it is nothing. Nunu is

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the one who gets really angry; one time she said she was going to hit me and tie me up and burn me. She said that I was as dark as a pit and that at least she was half Portuguese. I think it is because Nunu is light in complexion and that her hair is full, she always wants special treatment.

“Fusek!” I told her. “Ugly,” she said. “Kwerekwere!” I shouted and she cried like a baby and I laughed a thorny laugh. The laugh pierced me the entire day because I felt really bad watching her run back home like that. It is strange how words can scar a person.