



These hands

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THE SILENCE OF A LIFETIME

At seven she was raped by her uncle,
in the middle of the night
under the dining table
in the lounge-cum-dining room
of their four-roomed house
where eleven of them lived in the township.
Everyone else was asleep on every available floor space.
She muffled her cries as his penis suffocated her.
He kept whispering to her, "Don't ever tell anyone."

At fifteen she was gang-raped
by four classmates, in broad daylight
on a desk
in their classroom
at their school
where a thousand of them study.
Everyone else was in their little corner
on the grounds of the school premises.
She cried out loud.
Each boy muffled her cries with a punch.
Numbed with pain, she kept hearing them:
"Stop thinking you're so smart."

At eighteen she was date-raped
by her first boyfriend, just before ten at night
on a concrete pavement, behind the movie theatre
in a city, where millions of city dwellers breathe and stroll.
Everyone else was on their own important mission
on the streets, in the corners of the city.
She cried silently as she wondered madly
what had suddenly gone wrong
with her very first boyfriend, as he kept saying:
"Prove that you love me."

At twenty-six she was raped in marriage
by her husband, at six o'clock in the morning
on their matrimonial bed
while their child was feeding on her breast
in their home
where no one would question why.

Everyone else was minding their business,
whatever it is at this time of the day.
She swallowed the breast milk.
She heard him say, at one point:
"You are my wife, aren't you?"

At forty-five she was raped
by two of her colleagues
on a sunny weekend afternoon
in her own flat,
in her own lounge,
where anyone who walked in there
did so at her invitation.
The work had been done, the report written,
when her colleagues took her by surprise.
Everyone else was minding their own business
as they do every weekend afternoon.

Her cries went nowhere.
Her colleagues had turned the music system on full blast.
As they took turns, they each muttered:
"So, who's the boss now?
This boardroom is much better
than the one at work, hey, Sweetie?"

At sixty she was raped
by the neighbour she knew so well
one wet Sunday morning, on the path from church,
amongst the mielie fields, where everyone walked by
every single day of the year, in this small community,
in this tiny village, where the villages lived in peaceful harmony.
Every villager was minding their own business.
whatever it is they did on a rainy Sunday morning.
She could not even cry
for the shock of what was happening was numbing.
She kept telling herself she was dreaming
though she knew she was hearing right
when he kept saying:
"When last did you get it, old woman?
Enjoy it.
No one else wants an old rag like you."