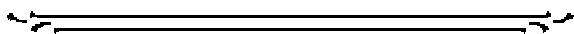


Flood of Tears

*Where there's love,
Tears keep on falling*



Poulo Paulus Poulo



FLOOD OF TEARS

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Dedication

To everyone who's been hurt a number of
times while in search of true love.

Acknowledgments

I DIDN'T DO THIS ALONE. FIRST AND FOREMOST, I'd like to express my deepest thanks to my editor, Michelle Bristow-Bovey. Thank you very much for your quality work and professionalism.

I can't forget to put a pat on my back for completing this project. It wasn't easy, but finally I made it through God who always strengthens me.

Without gaining a huge support from my family, I could have done nothing. Love you all.

It'd be very unfortunate if I could not mention Mr. Khosi at Lesotho National Library in Butha-Buthe. He played a significant role to make this successful.

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To all friends of mine that I can't pinpoint, I just want to say you're remarkable!

My deepest gratitude goes to the most important people, my readers. This book is specifically written for you. Please enjoy it!

Introduction

I AM SURE MOST PEOPLE WILL AGREE WITH the premise that all human beings need love. For this reason, we'll do everything in our power to attain it—and strive to make it last for eternity. However, due to unforeseen circumstances and external forces, such as jealousy and unfaithfulness, couples end up breaking up and people lose that love.

It's during such moments, when people realise they are about to lose their loved ones, or that their lovers have been “stolen” from them, that some find themselves in extreme distress.

Some people accept reality and move on with their lives, but others wish upon themselves nothing but death. Those who find it hard to let go may end up hurting themselves, or falling victim to acute illnesses, such as heart attacks. I believe that after reading *Flood of Tears*, the reader will realise that when it comes to matters of the heart, it can be dangerous to not let go and accept reality. They say that love's proved by letting go.

ONE

First love

AS AMELIA RUSHED AWAY FROM poor Jonathan, she yelled, “No, you’re too old to date me.” He remained motionless, seemingly frozen for a couple of seconds, stranded at the scene. He didn’t utter a single word. It was the first time a girl had ever turned him down. He was humiliated. In fact, he felt hurt by her words. She did not seem to care about him or the feelings he had developed for her. He wondered if things would stay that way forever. He would just have to wait and see.

Amelia had only just turned 14 when she first met Jonathan, who was 19. They had bumped into each other behind the classrooms at St Mark’s High School. Jonathan had tried unsuccessfully to court Amelia for several

weeks. However, if she was honest with herself, as time went on she had begun to develop bizarre feelings of affection for him. Still, she felt uncomfortable about their age gap, so she had decided to deny herself any chance of falling for him.

The situation really bothered Jonathan because he adored her with every beat of his heart. He was even on the verge of bribing her cousin, Mary, with a few coins in the hope that she could influence Amelia to fall in love with him. Mary and Jonathan had known each other for quite some time. They had started together in Form A and were now in Form D.

Nevertheless, before he could approach Mary, he had again collided with Amelia at the corner of her classroom during a recess. The impact had knocked her off her feet, but he had grabbed her hand just before she hit the ground.

As Amelia regained her balance, she became frightened when she realised that she was in his "hands." Realising that Amelia was in shock, Jonathan tried to break the ice with conversation.

"I'm sorry for bumping into you," said Jonathan. "I hope you aren't hurt."

"I'm fine," said Amelia, still in shock.

"It's good that you aren't hurt," said Jonathan with a grin on his face.

She nodded.

“But when shall we talk again?” asked Jonathan enthusiastically.

“That won’t happen,” replied Amelia, trying to discourage him.

She attempted to drag her hand back from Jonathan, but he was reluctant to release her.

“Why don’t you want to talk to me?”

“It’s not like that,” replied Amelia, avoiding eye contact.

“So? What is it then?”

“Please release me. I’ve got a class to attend now,” said Amelia. “We will talk.”

He released her as the bell rang to signal that recess was over. By promising to talk another time, she had given him a little hope.

After recess Jonathan could not stop fantasising about Amelia, and paid no attention to anything that was taught in the classroom. In his mind, he was living out fantasies with her. He imagined the pair of them walking together, hand in hand, smiling and hugging passionately. He was in his own Neverland.

When the school day came to an end, he headed straight to the village, in an attempt to avoid any conversation with his fellow classmates with whom he usually hung around. He feared that they might spoil his mood. Usually, after school, he would gossip about girls with his associates, which always bred

negativity towards those girls. He did not want to be tempted to share that the girl he had often discussed had promised to talk to him. He feared they would discourage him.

Amelia, too, did not feel like mingling with her friends after school. She just wanted to digest what she was beginning to feel for Jonathan. Was it love, or something else?

Although they had talked before, she had never been so intimate and up close with him. He had several traits that she admired. She had seen a lot of maturity in him. She also realised that he was not as ugly as he had initially appeared to be at a distance. If she risked loving him, she would not get hurt.

At last, she was prepared to give him a “try.”

* * *

During the evening, Jonathan climbed into bed earlier than usual. He wanted a little time to focus his thoughts on Amelia before he became sleepy. He couldn't pinpoint for sure when he fell asleep, but around midnight he had a wonderful dream: He met Amelia near the river that they always crossed before reaching their village. Amelia's face was shining with happiness and he was holding her hand. From there, they walked along the bank of the river

until they found a lone willow tree and sat down. In front of them the river was flowing, making lapping sounds, like little waves. They shared an amazing conversation followed by a wonderful first kiss.

He awoke from the dream feeling overly excited and wishing he could dream further. But, he slept no more until morning. He could not keep his mind off Amelia. He wondered if his dream meant that Amelia would accept his love. Somehow, he felt jubilant. He was aware that his desire to make Amelia his darling was on the verge of becoming a reality. Indeed, his dream had signaled that to him.

The next morning, Amelia had just crossed the river en route to school when she sensed someone approaching from behind. In a flash, she caught sight of Jonathan, who was now hurrying to close the gap between them. She tried to move faster, but he was determined. By the time she turned for the second time, Jonathan had been just four feet behind her. A couple of seconds later, he was walking beside her.

Then he clasped her hand.

"How are you, my love?" asked Jonathan, trying to gauge her reactions.

"I'm fine," said Amelia. "And you?"

To his surprise, she smiled a little. Her face became animated; she slowed her pace and

looked him straight in his eyes. He let out a sigh of relief.

“I’m not feeling well.”

“Why?”

“I’m sick,” said Jonathan, “because of you.”

“Because of me?” asked Amelia, stunned.

She stopped in her tracks to allow him to explain himself. Jonathan moved in front of her. He grabbed her shoulders and looked at her delicate face for a few seconds without uttering a word. Finally, he opened his mouth.

“I love you,” said Jonathan with watering eyes, “with all my heart.”

Within a few seconds, his cheeks were wet as tears flowed from his eyes. She lifted her soft hand to dry them. There was nothing she wanted to hear from him more. He had wooed her many times, but she had rejected him. This time, she could no longer deny him. She could not deny her heart. Although she had never been in love before, she knew that what she had seen in Jonathan’s eyes, and what she felt deep in her heart, was love.

“I love you, too, Jonathan.”

The bell rang and they hurried to school. If they were late, their punishment would be a whipping. As they reached the school premises, they broke away and went to their respective classes.

TWO

Love hurts

IT WAS THE FIRST TIME THAT AMELIA had felt so in love. She resented each day that passed without seeing Jonathan. If it happened that they had not managed to be together, she would go to sleep with a broken heart. She vowed that she would never cheat on Jonathan with another guy, and he in turn promised Amelia that even if the circumstances forced him to live apart from her, he would do everything in his power to protect their relationship. Their love affair became the talk of the village. They were the envy of St Mark's High School. Each and every couple wanted to be them.

Amelia often afforded Jonathan time with her. She would wait for him near the river, which they crossed everyday on their way to

the village. She always left school with her friends, but they knew that before they crossed the bridge, they had to leave Amelia there so that she and Jonathan could have space to talk and make the journey together.

Jonathan always trailed behind her at the end of the school day. After crossing the bridge they would stroll along the bank of the river before sitting under the huge willow tree. They would watch the water snake down while doves cooed in the tree above. They shared ideas, hugged, and kissed, and promised each other many things. Then, after about an hour, they made their way to their village before dark.

When they were not at school, over weekends and on public holidays, they would meet in fields to share their passion. Amelia could not imagine living without Jonathan. She never thought of any possibility that would compel her to separate from him. He was everything to her, the first lover she had ever had.

Jonathan, too, could not imagine anything coming between them. He loved Amelia with all of his heart. She had not been his first lover, but she was the first girl who had been loyal to him and who had respected him. When they first started dating, Amelia had been in Form A, while Jonathan had been in Form D. He planned to marry Amelia when she completed

Form C, as he realised that he would never be patient enough to wait for her to finish Form E. Not once had Amelia experienced a single regret about dating Jonathan. He had been very good to her and she felt blessed.

A year into the relationship, their love had grown ever deeper. Amelia was in Form B and Jonathan was in Form E, when Jonathan suddenly found himself having to drop out of St Mark's High School.

He was devastated. He was forced to abscond with immediate effect as his family was unable to pay his tuition and examination fees. He had been forced to find a job in order to look after his younger sister and recently widowed mother. The timing couldn't be worse.

Worry and confusion overtook Jonathan when he realised that he was going to have to leave Amelia, who had crept into his heart. He didn't know how he would be able to tell her the news. Despite his anxiety, he knew he had to tell her the truth and not hide anything. He had planned to confront her after school in their favourite place, where they often still met. Although Amelia would be sad, he knew that he had to disclose everything—and what he planned to do after leaving school.

That afternoon, as Jonathan approached Amelia, she sensed something wrong. Something was happening to her boyfriend. As

she led him to the old willow tree, he dragged his legs. His face was pale and etched with stress and sadness. His shoulders were stooped as he drew closer to her, avoiding eye contact. He wrapped his arms around her neck without saying a word. Then he pressed her tight against his body. There was a moment of silence between them, except for the doves cooing above, which seemed louder than on other days they had met. The rushing sound of the water was louder, too.

Amelia felt warm wetness on her neck, running down to her spine. This was followed by a sob. In amazement, she pushed Jonathan away from her. He could no longer stop the tears from rolling down his cheeks and over the end of his rounded chin.

“Jonathan!” screamed Amelia, “What’s happening, Baby?”

“Nothing,” said Jonathan, sobbing again.

“But you’re crying,” said Amelia. “Please tell me. What’s happening?”

“I’m dropping out of school.”

“Oh, my goodness!” exclaimed Amelia. “Why?”

“My mother doesn’t have enough money to pay my tuition fees.”

“What are you going to do?” asked Amelia, in shock.

“I’ll have to find a job as from tomorrow. I’ll

be going to South Africa.”

“You’re going to leave me alone?” asked Amelia. “No—”

“I’ve no other option.”

“You aren’t going anywhere!”

“I won’t neglect you. I’ll come back to marry you.”

She wept.

Jonathan drew closer to her and held her tightly around the waist.

“I’ll come for you, Baby,” he said. “Do you understand?”

But Amelia remained numb, speechless and hopeless in Jonathan’s arms. It took some time before she found her words.

“Do you promise me?” asked Amelia through teary eyes.

“Yes, I promise, Baby.”

He wiped the tears from her cheeks and gave her a kiss on the forehead.

“I’ll be waiting for you,” said Amelia. “I promise.”

There was a moment of silence again as they just stared at each other. Neither one wanted to break the embrace. They did not want to leave their place of love, but it was getting dark and they had to get back. As they reached the village, they embraced one last time, reluctant to let go.

“Keep your promise,” said Amelia, as she



took a few steps away from Jonathan.

“And you, too!”

“Yes, I will,” said Amelia, as she watched him disappear from sight behind some shrubs.

It was not easy for Amelia to learn to live without Jonathan again. She could see no justice in the world. She wondered how such an angel could be brought into her life, only to then be snatched away from her. But, she trusted Jonathan and believed that he would honour his promise. She decided to stay single and wait for him to return to her.

She waited patiently for several months, but he never returned. He never called or even sent a message of greeting. Still, she never lost hope in him. Then loneliness got better of her. Life became dull. She decided to break her promise. After all, Jonathan, too, had broken his promise to return to her.

It was not an easy decision for her to make, but she knew that she had to find the courage to let go of their love. She felt that she owed it to herself to find love again. All she needed was love. She longed to feel love for the second time. Indeed, she wanted to see the sunshine.

THREE

Disappointment

IN, MASERU EAST, SEVERAL MILES away from Amelia and Jonathan's village, there lived a gentleman by the name of Pollen. Pollen was a noble man: Educated and well behaved, but unlucky in matters of the heart.

The situation bothered him because he could see no flaw in himself. Despite his efforts, each and every one of his love affairs had failed. Still, he never lost hope in love: He kept trying and trying. After all, love is not meant for the faint of heart, he thought. But would he find what he was looking for?

It had been a year since Pollen had broken up with his ex-girlfriend, a former college classmate named Irene. Pollen had discovered that Irene was cheating on him, so he had left her. He had resolved to stop dating altogether

and to focus on his college studies, but his resolve had not lasted long. He soon found himself hopelessly in love again—this time with Beauty, an urban girl.

Beauty was young, like Amelia, and she was gorgeous. And Pollen claimed that she was his “wife,” even though he never paid the bride prize to Beauty’s family. Beauty in turn also called Pollen her “husband.” Everyone in the village was convinced that their relationship would lead to marriage. Owing to Beauty’s youth, Pollen thought she would not cause him any trouble, like Irene had done.

Beauty was also attending school at St Mark’s High School. She had been a classmate of Amelia since Form A. She knew Amelia very well, even though they were not friends. She caught the school bus from Maseru East every morning to St Mark’s High School, and always returned from school late, in the evening. When she was in Form B, she started dating Pollen. At that time, he was a final-year student at a college of education in Maseru.

Pollen loved Beauty so much that he resented seeing her gloomy. He sacrificed every penny he had to buy her gifts: Different kinds of chocolates, birthday presents and flowers. From time to time, he texted her to remind her how much he adored her. However, there was a huge amount of jealousy from the

boys in the village who had attempted to separate the couple through malicious words. Some had even offered Beauty money in exchange for falling in love with them.

Despite all of these challenges, Beauty remained loyal to Pollen, and he was very proud of her and realised that she would always stand up for him against the village lads.

The relationship between Pollen and Beauty blossomed. Pollen relaxed into it, finally reassured that Beauty would not disappoint him or break his heart.

One day, after writing a less-than-successful exam paper, and needing some consolation, Pollen decided to phone Beauty from a public phone near the main gate to the college. To his surprise, she was not available. The call was diverted to her mother's cellular phone number.

"Hello," her mother answered.

"Good afternoon, Madam," greeted Pollen.

He grew shy, realising that he was talking to Beauty's mother.

"Yes, good afternoon," she said in a low voice.

"Please, can I talk to Beauty?" asked Pollen shyly.

"No, you can't. She isn't available."

"Has she gone far?"

He picked up in her tone that something was

wrong.

“Yes.”

“Will she be returning this evening?”

“No, she’s married.”

“What? Married?” Pollen was incredulous.

“This can’t happen!”

“Yeah, it’s true. She’s married,” her mother said, sadly.

“In which village?” asked Pollen, devastated.

“Roma.”

“I don’t believe this!” he screamed.

Beauty’s mother felt a huge amount of pity for Pollen. She had never met Pollen, but had seen photographs of him. The first time she laid eyes on him, she had admired him. The fact that Pollen was in college was a huge bonus.

“You know, my son? This wretched daughter of mine has disappointed me a lot,” she told him. “I wanted to give her quality education, but she absconded from school and got married. She’s broken my heart.”

She sobbed.

She added, “I sent her to town last weekend and she never returned.”

“What did you do when she didn’t come home?” asked Pollen, shocked.

“I searched for her,” she said, “but the following morning a messenger came to report that she had wedded her secret boyfriend in Roma.”

Pollen did not wait to hear any more from Beauty's mother.

"Thank you for your kindness," he said.
"Thank you for everything, Madam."

He hung up the phone.

In just a few seconds, Pollen's life had collapsed around him. He wondered how Beauty could do that to him. He had been fooled once again. He realised that Beauty must have been seeing this other guy for some time. It was obvious that she had been lying to him when she told him that she was going to church in Roma. In reality, she had planned a number of secret rendezvous with her lover.

Pollen could not hold back his tears. Beauty was gone and his dreams were shattered. Their love, which he had deemed unbreakable, had come to an end—and it had ended so badly. He had never had the chance to say goodbye to Beauty, his goddess and his "wife." He had never had an opportunity to thank her for the sacrifices she had made for him and for the good memories they had built together.

Indeed, Pollen could not be consoled. He wished he could ask Beauty questions. Maybe that would have brought him peace in his heart. But, Beauty was not available. She had left him at the time he needed her most. She had vanished at when his academic workload was at its heaviest. Pollen wished the Earth would

open up and swallow him, allowing him to escape his great misery.

A few weeks earlier, Pollen had bought Beauty a wonderful birthday present of lingerie. What a way to thank him! And he also wondered what more the guy, who had married her, had done for her. Pollen battled to wrap his head around the situation, but he had no one close to him to whom he could talk. The burden was too heavy to carry alone.

Pollen later discovered from other people that Beauty had been three months' pregnant when she got married. She had been hiding it from him all along. Pollen had once suspected that Beauty might be pregnant, but had doubted himself. He thought that maybe she had just gained weight during the Easter vacation.

However, the secret was out now, and the best thing that he could do was to let go. He had to accept that Beauty was not meant for him. If she had been meant for him, it would have been his child that she was carrying. Or she would have stayed loyal to him.

FOUR

Mourning

DEVASTED BY HIS LOST LOVE, Pollen's academic work suffered and he lost weight. He was suffering, dying inside. He mourned for Beauty for a very long time. In his eyes, there was no one out there who could possibly replace her.

The little motivation he had once had vanished into oblivion. He found no reason to work hard at college. He was there to get his qualification and for no other reason. While he had been dating Beauty he had been motivated to put effort in his studies—to one day enjoy the fruits of his toil when they were married. Living for Beauty had given him the extraordinary motivation and a drive to succeed.

But now the person for whom he had studied

was gone. She had left him stranded in the middle of nowhere. She was enjoying her new marriage while he was drowning in frustration and stress. Falling in love had been good for Pollen, but being dumped like that the moment he relaxed and felt positive about the relationship had been devastating.

Despite all of his sufferings, Pollen chose to collect himself again and to let go of the pain of the past. Above all, he knew that he had to learn to forgive and forget. He had to accept that everything that had happened to him was simply a part of life. Then he had to move on and progress with his studies and forget about Beauty.

Time is the best healer, so after a few months, the memory of Beauty had faded for Pollen. She was finally history. He regained his footing and attacked his studies, firing on all cylinders. Without Beauty, life seemed full of possibilities. At the end of his final year of college, Pollen earned a Diploma in Education with a distinction.

* * *

Two years after Pollen had separated from Beauty, they met again. Beauty was no longer living with her former husband. They had

divorced after a year and a half together. At that time, Pollen was still job hunting. After Beauty had separated from her ex-husband, she heard from other people that Pollen had earned his Diploma in Education with a distinction. She regretted disappointing Pollen. She could have been married to a teacher.

When they got married, Beauty's ex-husband was still in Form C. Life had become tough for them, because her husband was not working. They relied only on the benefits from her husband's father, who had passed away in the mines in South Africa. When the money dried up, they began to suffer; their marriage became less stable and later fell apart forever.

Beauty realised the agony she had caused Pollen and she asked his forgiveness. She told him that she had been young at the time. However, that was not enough of an excuse for Pollen to accept her as his lover again. Still, he had forgiven her a long time before. That day, they talked and laughed together as if there was nothing painful in their past.

"Could you please find me a good man who'll love me and my little son?"

"It's not me who'll find you a man," said Pollen, wondering why Beauty had asked such a thing of him. "Only God can find a suitable man for you."

"Are you married now?" Beauty asked

eagerly.

"I'm not," replied Pollen, "and it won't happen very soon."

"What are you waiting for?"

"I'm waiting for the right lady."

He recalled how he had once loved Beauty and how he had intended marrying her after he completed his studies. He felt the pain all over again, but pretended that nothing had affected him.

"I wanted to marry you," said Pollen.

"But you never showed any indication of wanting to marry me!"

"How was I supposed to show that?"

"Let's not talk about this. It brings sorrow," said Beauty, changing the subject.

She was now feeling a lot of sadness. After all, she had been the one to terminate their love affair. Pollen was beginning to experience the agony he had once felt when Beauty left him for another man, so he decided to leave before he found himself crying once more.

"Goodbye."

Puzzled, Beauty remained silent as Pollen disappeared behind the houses, en route home. She wanted to scream aloud, but Pollen was gone. She was alone as the flood of tears ran down her ageing face. It had once been young and beautiful and caused Pollen to fall for her at first sight.

When Pollen reached home, he thought about Beauty's request to help her find another man. He interpreted this bizarre statement as asking him whether he could love her and her child. He reminded himself that he would never again give his heart to someone who was untrustworthy. How could he love a traitor who had left him heartbroken? He decided that the only thing he could offer her was friendship. Nothing more. Nevertheless, he felt relieved that he had managed to talk to Beauty and to share with her how much he had suffered when she left him.

In that way, Pollen's wounds were healed. He was finally ready to love again. He just needed to meet another woman who would love him through thick and thin. Above all, he wanted someone who would be with him forever.

The grudge he had held against Beauty was finally gone and he was eager to experience true love again. He realised that love was something that he could not afford to live without. Yes, his body and soul needed love, and he was optimistic that he would find his ideal woman: Someone who would be able to respect him and be loyal to him, even when the tempests were strong.

But who would that woman be? Who would see the good in Pollen and be with him forever?

FIVE

In the garden

SEVERAL SEASONS HAD PASSED since Pollen had started his unsuccessful job hunt. When he realised that he would not immediately secure a job offer, he had opted to immerse himself in his father's garden. He cultivated and planted vegetables for the purpose of consumption and sale. So, it became the norm for Pollen to spend his mornings in the garden. He had stayed there until the afternoon, when he had completed all of his routine duties: Weeding, watering, sowing and clearing. Ever since Pollen had completed his studies, the garden had remained green and tidy throughout all of the seasons.

A few yards away, below this beautiful garden, there was a narrow footpath. Villagers and their visitors who were reluctant to travel

on the main road to the village bypassed their home. The busy path was always dotted with adults and children, and not a minute passed without a pedestrian passing the garden.

Every time Pollen felt fatigued as a result of hard labour, he would try to catch his breath by watching village people stroll by. To Pollen, it was an attractive view. Sometimes he would notice strangers on the path, en route to visit family members. It was easy for him to tell who belonged there and who didn't.

A number of passersby were fascinated by the tidiness of Pollen's garden, and others praised him for the effort he put into it, for his father's sake. Still others wanted to hire him to help them prepare their own gardens, but each time Pollen rejected their lucrative offers.

Some of the villagers had even forgotten that Pollen was a qualified teacher, rather than just the village gardener. Because Pollen was a gentleman, he never let his achievements or pride go to his head. He remained down-to-earth and humble. As a result, many people liked him and only a few were envious of him. However, that minority often mocked and badmouthed Pollen to other members of the community.

But, those who admired Pollen tried all possible means to defend him and to clarify any disparaging comments made about him.

Pollen stood by his belief that he would not starve while he still had hands to use, and that he would not just hang around, waiting to be hired. He usually ignored those who put him down, and kept silent. This had amazed most of his haters, and he was considered a highly unusual person.

* * *

It was summer time. The grass had grown tall and the vegetables were healthy. Pollen was clearing weeds from the garden when Susan emerged on the path close by. Although attractive, she seemed to be a little older than Pollen. Susan was accompanying her three-year-old son to preschool in the town. Pollen had always observed Susan from a distance, but as she walked the path just below his garden, he was overwhelmed to see her so close up.

There was something special about her, and he adored it. It was something that he could not describe in words. On their first real encounter, he was charmed.

Although Pollen had developed a sudden crush on Susan, his inner voice told him that he would never succeed in making Susan his lover. She was married, and Pollen would not allow himself to fall in love with married women. So,

he gave up any hope of courting Susan, but wondered if she perhaps had a little sister with similar looks and build. He would certainly have been ready to flirt with her sister! That was the only way his heart's desire would be at peace.

Susan, however, was fascinated by how Pollen kept his father's garden. Every time she took her child to preschool, she would ensure that she passed in the garden. She was overwhelmed by its beauty. Susan wished that her younger sister, Amelia, lived with her so that she could persuade Amelia to entice Pollen. She knew how strong and handsome Pollen was, and Susan thought Amelia and Pollen would be a great match. Pollen, however, did not seem to be interested in much but his garden. Susan wanted Amelia to find love again. Her former high school boyfriend, Jonathan, had disappointed her terribly.

In the evenings, when her husband, Bethuel, returned home from work, Susan couldn't stop talking about Pollen.

"How I wish to have a gardener like Pollen," said Susan, trying to gauge her husband's reactions.

"Why are you always talking about that selfish gardener?" asked Bethuel.

"He's strong and tidy."

"Who says so?"

"I've seen it as I pass near to his father's garden every day," replied Susan. "And I like him for Amelia."

"How can you like for Amelia a useless person who doesn't work?"

"He's handsome," said Susan, "And he's educated."

"So, if he's educated, why can't he find a job?"

"He'll work someday, when the time's right."

"No, he won't find a job," said Bethuel. "Besides, he's old."

"Who says he won't find a job?" asked Susan with a surprise.

"I'm saying so," said Bethuel. "If he wasn't so old, he would have found a job long ago."

"Why are you always so negative about Pollen?"

"Let's stop talking about that useless thing," said Bethuel in fury.

Susan sensed that her husband was becoming very jealous of Pollen and decided to keep quiet.

Although, Susan was very pretty, Bethuel was an ugly, foolish, jealous and a narrow-minded man with a tendency to find fault in everything that was good. He was the type of man who would capitalise on other people's weaknesses. He always looked for an opportunity to cheat others, and if he did not get that chance, he stayed away from them or destroyed their

relationships with his victims. He was also lazy and floated between different jobs. Every job seemed too tough for him.

Bethuel had seemed enraged when he heard Pollen's name uttered by his wife. Susan, however, had managed to persuade him to allow her younger sister, Amelia, to stay with them. She had wanted Amelia to leave St Mark's High School after completing Form C so that Susan could take proper care of her, since they had become orphans.

She also wanted to help Amelia to register at one of the schools in Maseru town, where study materials were convenient and abundant.

SIX

Separation

WHEN AMELIA'S GRANNY, Margaret, told her what her sister had planned for her, Amelia did not hesitate to pack her belongings to join Susan and Bethuel in Maseru. She had been struggling in her remote village. After passing Form C and then facing the trauma of her parents' death, she found no point to life in her village. Also, her sole guardian, Margaret, was not in a good position to provide for her basic needs and academic requirements. So, Amelia had seen Susan's decision to move her to Maseru as best for her well-being.

Nevertheless, Amelia had still been very anxious to leave her village, where she had lived all of her life. She had plenty of good memories there. She had begun school there

and had discovered what love was in that village. Indeed, after 16 years, it had been emotional for Amelia to leave her beloved village.

Her grandmother had been reluctant to let her go to Maseru. She loved Amelia so much and believed that the girl would be changed by urban life. But, she had to give in and agree to let her live with her sister, who had migrated to town after marrying Bethuel.

"I hope you won't change when you get to Maseru," said Margaret, filled with sorrow at the reality of separating from her beloved granddaughter.

"I won't change, Granny," said Amelia, pitying her grandmother.

"I'm only allowing this because I want you to be educated."

"Yes, I understand, Granny," said Amelia, her voice filled with emotion.

"You know I trust you, Amelia," said Margaret. "Please do not disappoint me when you get there."

"I promise you, Granny," assured Amelia, picking up her luggage. Margaret led her out of the hut. Filled with sorrow, they hugged and kissed each other before separating. Margaret stood in front of the hut as Amelia took a few steps before turning to wave goodbye. Without saying a word, Amelia walked towards the bus

terminal. She did not look back until she had vanished into the valley that separated the bus terminal from her grandmother's hut.

Margaret stood watching until Amelia was no longer visible. When she realised that her granddaughter had disappeared into the valley, she knew that she was nearly at her destination. She wiped away the tears that were pouring down her old cheeks and retreated into her hut to tidy a few items that had been scattered while Amelia packed.

After half an hour of waiting, the bus finally arrived and Amelia climbed in. It did not take long before it was full to the brim with the many other passengers who had been waiting with her at the terminal. As the bus set off, Amelia was overwhelmed by a sense of jubilation and sorrow. On the one hand, she could not wait for the next 60 minutes to pass so that she could be in the city, but on the other, she knew that she would be living far away from her grandmother, who had become her mother and her father through a very difficult time.

"Where are you going with this heavy luggage, Amelia?" asked one passenger, recognising her from the village.

"I'm going to Maseru," Amelia said with a smile.

"When will you return home?"

“Not anytime soon.”

“Serious?”

“Yes,” said Amelia, confidently.

“Are you getting married?”

“No, I’m visiting my sister,” explained Amelia. “I’m also going to school.”

“Wow, that’s good news,” said the passenger enthusiastically.

“Indeed,” said Amelia.

“Didn’t your granny find it difficult to release you?”

“She didn’t want me to go, but she finally agreed to it.”

“Behave well when you get there and never disappoint her.”

“I’ve promised her that I won’t disappoint her.”

“Keep that promise,” said the passenger. “And good luck in your future endeavours.”

“Thank you,” Amelia said as she stood up from her seat and disembarked at the Maseru Bus Terminal.

Susan was right there waiting for her, but she did not see Amelia until the young girl rushed up to embrace her. It was a fantastic moment as the two blood sisters were reunited after many months of separation.

Without wasting any time, Susan picked up Amelia’s luggage. It took only a couple of minutes to reach their home. Susan and her

husband had rented a three-roomed house with two bedrooms and a kitchen a few miles away from the town.

Susan showed Amelia the bedroom she would occupy for the duration of her studies. After depositing her luggage, Amelia went to greet Bethuel, who was sitting near the table in the kitchen. Susan began to prepare some food for Amelia.

“Oh, Amelia, you’re so grown up!” exclaimed Bethuel.

Bethuel stood up from his seat to grab Amelia by the hand as he examined her body in disbelief.

“Why have you hidden yourself for so long?” he asked, still holding Amelia’s hand in both of his.

“I didn’t have enough bus fare to come,” replied Amelia, looking down shyly.

Bethuel’s eyes continued to search Amelia in a way that made her uncomfortable. He was overwhelmed by her. The blood rushed through his body and he failed to control his urges. He developed a sudden lust for Amelia – in the presence of his spouse. However, Susan never saw anything. She was too busy preparing the food.

“How’s Granny and everyone else in the village?” asked Bethuel.

“Everyone’s alright,” replied Amelia.

He released her hand and she sat down on the chair next to him, but he would not take his eyes off her. Bethuel could not ask more questions as Susan presented Amelia with a tray of food and a glass of fizzy drink. That night, Amelia retired to her bedroom feeling excited.

SEVEN

Sunshine

AFTER A WEEK OF LIVING WITH Susan and Bethuel, Amelia offered to take their child to preschool. She was directed to the shortcut path that passed close to Pollen's garden.

That morning, Pollen had been busy performing his usual tasks in the garden when he caught sight of Amelia. It was a fantastic moment. He immediately identified her as being related to Susan. When it came to their bodies and facial features, they were like two peas in a pod. And, of course, Amelia was accompanying Susan's child, which led Pollen to believe that his instincts were correct.

Pollen stopped what he was doing and focused his attention on Amelia. He realised that his prayers had been answered. It had long

been his desire to meet Susan's younger sister, even though at that time he had no idea that Susan had even had a younger sister.

Since Amelia was passing a few yards away from him, he decided to work closer to the path so that he could observe her at a close range. When she returned from dropping the child, he decided to introduce himself to her and confirm that she was indeed Susan's sister.

"Hi," greeted Pollen.

He approached Amelia.

"Hello," said Amelia with amazement, when she realized that Pollen was charging toward her.

"Are you Susan's younger sister?" asked Pollen with a big smile.

"Yes," replied Amelia. "How did you know?"

"You look alike," replied Pollen with a giggle.

"I don't think so," said Amelia. "She's gorgeous, but I'm not."

"Who said that you aren't beautiful?"

"I know I'm not."

She continued walking, but he trailed behind her and persisted in talking to her.

"Okay, to me, you're beautiful," said Pollen.

"Am I?" winked Amelia.

"Yes, you are."

She took a step away from him.

Realising that she was leaving, he returned to his work, but he could not stop thinking about

her.

It had been a while since anyone had told her that she was beautiful. Amelia was humbled by his compliments as she walked further away from Pollen's garden. When she reached her room, she threw herself on the bed, at peace in her heart. She stretched out and reached for a small piece of broken mirror on the headboard to check if she was indeed as beautiful as he had just said.

She could not believe that he had said that she was as pretty as Susan. She wondered if he was insane. The last person who had called her "Pretty lady" was her ex-boyfriend, Jonathan. Since then, no one had praised her beauty.

Besides being overwhelmed by his compliments, she had been attracted by the kindness, softness and power of his voice. Although he had never communicated any intentions to her, her guts told her that there was something more that he intended to convey to her. She decided to wait and see what happened when they met again.

To be honest, she felt some sort of affection toward Pollen, although she could not say that it was love as yet. For the second time ever, she found herself contemplating a man: The first had been Jonathan, her first boyfriend and love. For the past two years, in his absence, she had not allowed herself to love anyone else.

But, here she was, thinking about Pollen after their first encounter. It had taken Jonathan several trials and failures to win her heart. She had told herself that if Pollen made a move to court her, she would not fall for him.

When Pollen realised that he had some unusual feelings for Amelia, he decided to take things slowly. He did not want to risk giving his heart to someone he had met only once. He had decided to deny his sudden feelings of love for her until he was quite sure that she was the right person to date.

A few days later, Pollen pretended that there was nothing that he wanted to say to her when she passed close to his garden. Amelia began to think she had been wrong in her belief that he intended to proposition her.

However, Pollen could not deny his love forever. One weekend, as Amelia was returning from town, she bumped into Pollen. She tried to dodge him, but she had his attention. He walked up to her and held her by the hand, anticipating that she might run away from him. She wanted to pull her hand away from him, but she couldn't.

Pollen initiated the conversation.

"I've been wanting to talk to you about this matter for a while, but I was unable to do so as I have been busy whenever you've passed by my garden. I don't want to waste your time. My

point is that I'm interested in you and I need to get to know you better. I beg you to accept my request without questions or rejection. From now on, you and I are in love."

Amelia felt threatened by his forceful statements and wanted to leave without angering him.

"Yes, we are—"

She was blushing and shivering.

"Why are you answering so quickly?" Pollen asked. "Are you aware that I'm not kidding?"

"Yes, I am."

Then she dragged her hand from his. He was reluctant to release her, but when he realised that she was terrified, he set her free.

As she walked away from him, she realised that she had accepted him so quickly, despite planning to deny his love until he had made several attempts. However, she consoled herself because at least she had developed some feelings for him.

She realised that her singleness had come to an end. Indeed, she had the sunshine that she had been waiting for. Today it shone bright for her. She was in love again.

Would her new love stand the test of time?

EIGHT

Jealousy

IT HAS BEEN A WHILE SINCE POLLEN had begun dating Amelia. Their relationship had blossomed within a short period of time. One day Amelia was chatting with her best friend, Portia, outside Bethuel's house. Without them realising it, Bethuel had been listening to their "women talk."

"You're lucky that you've found a soul mate," said Portia with a huge smile.

"Am I lucky?"

"Yes, Pollen's a good guy," said Portia. "He's also handsome."

"But I don't think so," said Amelia. "Isn't he just like any other guy?"

"No, he's different," replied Portia. "You must be grateful that you're dating such a good man."

“You mean that men like him are hard to find?”

“Yeah, that’s what I mean.”

“Thank you, girl, for such a compliment,” said Amelia. “Now I do feel blessed to be dating him.”

“You must feel that way, my friend. He’s unlike these bastards, I often date.”

“Don’t worry, you’ll also find Mr. Right someday,” Amelia said, encouraging her.

“But I don’t think so,” said Portia glumly. “I’ve tried so many guys without success.”

“Don’t lose hope. It’s just the matter of time.”

“Let’s hope so,” said Portia, a little more optimistically.

While they were talking, Bethuel appeared at the kitchen door. Having eavesdropped on the girls’ conversation, he was offended. He felt jealous when he heard the two talking in such glowing terms about Pollen—the guy he had always referred to as a “useless thing,” or “bastard.”

He realised that his mission to seduce Amelia would be hindered by her relationship with Pollen, so he planned to nip it in the bud before it blossomed any further and could no longer be controlled.

“What are you talking about?” shouted Bethuel, trying to intimidate both girls.

“What are we talking about?” asked Amelia

with surprise.

“Yes, you understood what I asked,” said Bethuel, his voice shaking with rage.

“Nothing,” replied Amelia in a low tone.

“Have you started dating?”

The girls kept quiet.

“Why don’t you answer my question?” asked Bethuel. He took a few steps toward them.

“No,” answered Portia, shyly.

“I want you to answer me, Amelia.” He stopped advancing on her.

“I don’t date anybody.”

“But I heard you talking and bragging about that bastard, Pollen,” said Bethuel, probing Amelia.

“We didn’t, talk about him,” said Amelia. Besides that, I don’t date Pollen.”

“If you think you’re grown up and ready to date, you must sleep in my bedroom from tonight onwards.”

He left the shocked girls and went back inside the house.

Amelia was worried about what Bethuel had suggested. She realized there was menace in his words, but she was also embarrassed when she realised that he had been listening in on all of their secrets.

Inside the house, Bethuel could not control his anxiety over Pollen. He could not understand how that useless thing had ended

up dating Amelia, the little girl for whom he had developed an insatiable lust. Since the first day that Amelia arrived to live with them, he had been possessed by this weird feeling. If Amelia was seeing another guy, his plan to seduce her in Susan's absence would falter. He decided to do everything in his power to separate Pollen and Amelia.



A couple of days had passed since Bethuel had resolved to break up Pollen and Amelia's love affair. He had been trying to find ways to encourage Amelia to abandon Pollen. One day, however, he had the chance to accompany Amelia to town on a shopping spree. Bethuel was quite convinced that this would be his opportunity to encourage her to leave Pollen.

However, he was unaware that Amelia had noticed his strange behaviour. On the way to town, Bethuel told Amelia that he had not been unhappy to find out that she was dating, but he disliked the fact that she was dating that "useless thing."

"What do you see in him? There are so many good-looking guys who are better than him."

"I've told you that I'm not in love with Pollen," said Amelia, feeling enraged.

"I can't help wondering what you noticed in that gardener."

"Don't you understand? I said that I'm not dating him." She was fuming. "What do you want me to say?"

"I want you to tell me the truth," said Bethuel.

"Please. I don't want to talk about this anymore."

She kept silent.

"You want to deny it today, but last week you told Portia that you were dating him," explained Bethuel. "I'll find out the truth by myself."

After realising that Amelia had lost her temper, Bethuel ended the conversation. However, he decided to tell Susan that Amelia was dating Pollen. His intention was to win his wife's favour, in the hope that she would rebuke Amelia for dating Pollen.

When Amelia and Bethuel returned from town and unpacked their purchases, Amelia left the house to afford Bethuel and Susan some time to discuss "family issues." But, she did not go far from the house. She sat down in a position where she could eavesdrop on everything that was being discussed inside.

Bethuel related to Susan how the previous week Amelia had disclosed to Portia that she was dating Pollen. He expressed much

dissatisfaction with this fact. He had assumed that Susan would react negatively, so he was astonished that Susan was jubilant.

“What’s wrong with her dating him?” asked Susan with amazement. “I don’t see anything wrong with this.”

“You don’t see anything wrong... yeah?” said Bethuel “Are you the one who encourages her to do this utter nonsense?”

“No, I didn’t encourage her to do so, but I don’t see anything wrong with her dating,” replied Susan. “Besides that, she’s now 16.”

“I don’t like this useless thing dating her. He’s old,” explained Bethuel. “He doesn’t work, either.”

“But even if he doesn’t work, he’s educated.”

“So, if he’s educated, why doesn’t he get a job?” asked Bethuel, mockingly.

“He’ll get a job when the time’s right,” Susan replied confidently.

“No, he won’t... No one will hire him.”

“Why?”

“Because he’s old,” replied Bethuel. “And employers don’t hire older people.”

“Maybe you’re right,” said Susan, realising that her husband might be talking some sense.

“I dislike this bastard. He’s impregnated many girls.”

“I see now why you abhor him,” said Susan. “He’s a bad boy.”

"I'm glad that you now see why I want him to leave her alone," said Bethuel, realising that he had won the battle.

"I liked Pollen, but now I'm aware that I admired the wrong guy," said Susan "When you see him in his father's garden, you assume that he's a sweet boy and—"

"He's a chameleon. He can't be trusted," interrupted Bethuel. "So, when Amelia steps in here, you must instruct her to stay away from that bastard."

Susan was convinced that what her husband had just told her about Pollen was the unquestionable truth, and she began to despise Pollen. She was now ready to instruct Amelia to leave Pollen the minute she returned home. The good traits that Susan had once seen in Pollen had faded into oblivion. What remained was hostility only. She did not want to hear anything about Pollen, or even his name uttered in her house again.

For Bethuel, experiencing the massive jump in Susan's opinions about Pollen made him very glad that his plans to influence Susan had been successful. Now, he realised, his dream of satisfying his lust for Amelia was on the brink of becoming a reality.

As Amelia was listening to Bethuel and Susan, she realised that her sister had turned against Pollen, too. It was frustrating and

painful, because she had developed strong feelings for him.

Despite their situation, she vowed not to forsake Pollen. She did not know if she could survive without Pollen's love. Life was unfair. Bethuel and Susan's complaints weren't real or justified. Bethuel was the initiator of this mess. He was simply jealous of her innocent boyfriend.

After hearing that Susan was going to command her to break up with Pollen, Amelia decided to deny everything and dismiss any restriction that her sister placed on her. She would do so to protect the trust and precious love that had built up between her and Pollen. In that manner, she hoped that her sister and brother-in-law would fail to separate them.

Bethuel and Susan had no tangible reason to accuse Amelia of seeing Pollen. It would be difficult for them to win this battle. Amelia did not know why Bethuel was so envious of Pollen, an honest guy who demonstrated an extraordinary affection and respect for her. She had promised herself that she would stand by Pollen through thick and thin, no matter what happened.

When Amelia returned to the house, Bethuel laid everything out in the open. He said how disappointed he was to discover that Amelia was in love with Pollen. Susan then condemned

Amelia for falling in love with a useless boy who would soon destroy her future. She warned Amelia that if she was serious about staying with them, she could not go out with Pollen. She told Amelia that if she would not change her behaviour, she would send her packing back to the village.

However, Amelia denied everything. She assured them that there was nothing between her and Pollen and that such a thing would not happen. She assured them that she was serious about her education and that she would not allow anything ridiculous to shatter her dream of a bright future. But, deep in her heart, she knew that what she had just promised them were things that could not happen. She was only making empty promises in to please them. She knew that Bethuel's accusations were unfounded. Pollen was not a useless thing.

The couple believed her false declaration. They were quite sure that they had pushed Amelia away from Pollen, but they decided that she needed a little further persuasion. The outcome of the interrogation pleased Bethuel more than anyone. He was the one who was the most concerned about their relationship. Bethuel once again began to plot how he could persuade Amelia to sleep with him.

The next day, Amelia decided to tell Pollen everything. They met as planned, and she

encouraged him to stay calm and not worry. She reassured him that she would not abandon him. Still, Pollen was anxious about the situation and wondered what evil he had done in this world to prompt Bethuel's great resentment toward him.

So, Pollen suggested that they kept their relationship a secret and away from the public eye. He wanted Amelia to go to school and finish her studies.

They both agreed to that, for their love's sake.

NINE

Abuse

WHEN THE TIME CAME TO REGISTER at 'Mabatho High School, Susan registered Amelia in the Form D class. It was a sensational feeling for Amelia to become a full-time student at the high school. She dedicated herself to her studies in order to avoid disappointing both her family and Pollen. During this crucial time, Pollen tried not to distract Amelia in any possible way. Circumstances forced them to meet only by chance.

Even though Pollen was dissatisfied with the prevailing situation, he had no other option but to compromise. After all, he loved Amelia. By the same token, Amelia was also not feeling good about the distance between her and Pollen, but she had no alternative. To Bethuel

and Susan, it seemed obvious that the Pollen-Amelia relationship no longer existed. They had no reason to be suspicious.

The first quarter of school went perfectly for Amelia. She adapted and fitted in well. At the end of the first-quarter examinations, Amelia earned good grades and Bethuel and Susan were proud of Amelia's performance. Bethuel even volunteered to buy her a present in order to motivate her to demonstrate more ability. Amelia was looking forward to receiving his gift.

What Susan and Amelia did not know was that Bethuel had hired a few young boys to observe and watch Amelia's movements, both to and from school. Their jobs were to find out if Amelia was still dating Pollen, or if she was seeing anyone new. If, by chance, they witnessed something suspicious, they were to inform Bethuel immediately. But their surveillance revealed nothing suspicious about Amelia. The reality was that Amelia was only dating Pollen. When she began classes at 'Mabatho High School, Pollen had avoided interacting with her in public. They only met by chance over weekends and for short periods of time.

Amelia was planning to visit her grandmother, Margaret, as soon as school broke up for the Easter vacation. However,

Susan had to attend an urgent meeting a few miles from home the very day that Amelia had been scheduled to depart. Susan was due home the next day and she needed Amelia to help with some household tasks in her absence. So, Amelia's journey to her village was postponed.

When Susan left, Bethuel saw his opportunity to share his lustful feelings with Amelia, and to lure her into having sexual intercourse with him. That evening, Amelia busied herself with supper preparations while Bethuel sat near the table, watching Amelia lecherously while she stirred some pots.

"I wish I'd married you instead of Susan."

"Why do you say this?" asked Amelia. She stopped stirring the food.

"Because you take care of me, unlike her," said Bethuel.

"So, what am I doing that she doesn't do?" asked Amelia with surprise.

"You cook for me daily, but she only cooks for me when she chooses."

"Are you serious?" asked Amelia. "I haven't been aware of that."

"It's true. She also doesn't want to sleep with me."

"So, now what are you suggesting?"

"I... I do suggest that you come to my room tonight and bed with me."

"Me?" asked Amelia with disbelief.

“Yes.”

“Do you hear what you’re saying to me?”

“Yes, I do.”

“Over my dead body,” said Amelia. She was furious.

“But Susan won’t know.”

“Please stop saying these things to me,” said Amelia, “or else I’m going to tell her when she returns.”

“I’m just kidding. Please never tell her,” said Bethuel. He looked very troubled. “I beg you.”

When Bethuel realised that Amelia was angry and might tell Susan about what he had proposed, he changed the subject and started talking about Pollen.

“The reason why I don’t want you to date Pollen is because I love you and I wish you success. For that good reason, I think Pollen isn’t the right man for you. He only wants to destroy your future and then leave you heartbroken.”

“How many times must I say I’m not in love with Pollen?” asked Amelia. “How many times must I say the same thing?”

“You said it many times. But...”

“What?”

“I’m just warning you,” said Bethuel, “But since you don’t want to listen to my advice, I’ll keep quiet.”

“You had better do so,” said Amelia, stirring

the food for the last time.

She took a plate out of the cupboard and served dinner to Bethuel, who was now silent. Then she went to her bedroom. That evening she did not eat supper. She was fed up. She disliked what Bethuel had just said to her, and about her sister.

In her bedroom, she donned a tight bathing costume before putting on her jeans. She would sleep with all of her clothes on. She was fearful and depressed and suspected that Bethuel might try to rape her while she was asleep. The tight clothes would make it difficult for him to undress her. Bethuel, however, feared doing anything to Amelia. He felt intimidated when she said that she was going to report him to Susan.

Amelia had indeed been thinking about telling Susan everything that Bethuel had said to her, but she realised that by so doing, she would be causing chaos and conflict between the couple. Bethuel was very tense. He thought for a long time about what would happen if Amelia brought this shameful matter to Susan's attention. He was troubled and prayed that Amelia should not reveal anything to her the following day.

When morning came, Amelia got up to do the household duties as usual. She had planned to see Pollen before she left for her village. She

intended to explain to him that Bethuel had spoken bad things about him, and that he had tried to persuade her to sleep with him the previous night. She also wanted to say goodbye to him before her journey.

When Bethuel awoke, he was filled with the deepest shame and did not want to face Amelia, so he left before she rose. When Amelia realised that Bethuel was not home, she took the opportunity to visit Pollen and told him everything.

Pollen advised her not to tell Susan anything as the situation would likely cause havoc in the family and jeopardise her stay with the couple. However, he said that if the bad behaviour persisted, she should not hesitate to report it to Susan. She should then handle the matter seriously.

When Susan returned from her meeting in the afternoon, she asked Amelia, if everything had gone well in her absence. Amelia said that she had not encountered any problems. When Bethuel returned in the evening, he had a similar report. Susan had no reason to suspect that anything had gone wrong.

The next day, Amelia caught a bus to the village to see Margaret. She thoroughly enjoyed the few days at home with her grandmother. When the time came to leave, Amelia was deeply sad, but she had to leave the village to

resume her studies.

“Goodbye, Granny,” she said, as the bus left the terminal.

She sat down and leaned back against her seat, wiping her tear stained face with the palm of her hand. Margaret stopped waving her hand and sobbed before walking slowly from the bus terminal to her house. After an hour’s drive from the village, Amelia was once again back in Maseru.

The year progressed and during the second quarter of Amelia’s study, Bethuel began to develop a massive abhorrence toward Amelia. He had begun to hate her on the night that she said that she would sleep with him over her “dead body.” He felt like a loser and thought that he had not been treated with fairness, as he deserved. He had wanted only one thing from her: To sleep with her, but she had refused to listen to him.

He was the primary breadwinner in the family and the one who was paying the largest portion of Amelia’s school fees. Margaret’s pension was not enough to cover it all. So, planning to hurt Amelia and avenge himself, he masterminded another trap for her.

TEN

Secret unfolds

IT HAD BEEN A WHILE SINCE POLLEN and Amelia had not seen each other in public. One day, Bethuel sent Amelia to town, so she invited Pollen to accompany her. Amelia wanted to rekindle her love with Pollen. It had been many months of short dates and meeting in secret. She needed to tell Pollen that she was still feeling the same unconditional love that she felt when they first started dating. She was eager to hear what Pollen had planned for their future. Above all, she missed Pollen so much.

When Amelia left home, Bethuel tiptoed behind her, intent on discovering if any other guy would be accompanying her. He had tried to find different ways to accuse Amelia and harm her, but all of his plans had backfired. But, this time, if he succeeded in catching her, he would be able to get his revenge for

declining his request.

However, on that unfortunate day, Bethuel never expected to see Pollen walking with Amelia. He had been quite convinced that the Pollen-Amelia relationship no longer existed. He had expected a stranger and had been hoping to accuse Amelia of wasting time with the boys when he had sent her to town. He would have then had a good opportunity to smack her.

However, no stranger showed up. Pollen did. As jealousy and rage engulfed Bethuel, his face became pale and he shivered with anger. He was very glad that, at last, Pollen had fallen into his trap. He rushed at them at high speed, until he was close enough to wallop Amelia. Using all of his strength, he sent Amelia rolling on the ground, screaming in agony.

“These are the things you do when I send you?” Bethuel shouted.

When Pollen realised that Bethuel had caught up with them, he ran for his life. He left Amelia, lying on the ground, crying for help. Bethuel fumed and chased after Pollen. He also wanted to smack him, but Pollen managed to escape unhurt.

What will I do if he sues me? Bethuel thought for a moment and stopped chasing him. When he returned, Amelia was nowhere to be seen. She had disappeared into thin air. His great

target had been Amelia. He had managed to avenge himself, but he had not restored his peace of mind.

It was painful for Amelia to be humiliated in front of her boyfriend. Pollen regretted that he had been unable to defend Amelia. He could not do so because he did not want to interfere with Amelia's family life. He thought that maybe Susan had instructed Bethuel to reprimand Amelia. However, Pollen felt awful that he had been unable to fight for Amelia. She was suffering because of him.



From that day onwards, Amelia despised Bethuel. She was not ready to let Pollen down. She vowed to die rather than live without him. However, Pollen became conscious of the misfortune that he had brought into Amelia's life and said that he wanted to terminate their love affair. Amelia, however, would not allow him to do so. Pollen found it impossible to leave a woman who had stood by him when challenges had tested their love.

When Bethuel realised that Amelia was not ready to break up with Pollen, he decided to expel her from his house. He told Susan that he could not afford to keep Amelia in the home,

and that she had disobeyed him.

“You’re chasing after the boys instead of studying. So, go from my house,” he rebuked.

Amelia was forced to drop out of school in the second quarter of the year and to immediately find work in the households of Ladybrand, South Africa. But, her love for Pollen remained strong and unshaken.

Realising how she was honest and true to him, Pollen also vowed to love Amelia until death tore them apart.

But, would this love stand test of time?

ELEVEN

Departure

POLLEN'S FACE WAS ETCHED with sadness. "It's so sad that you're leaving today, Baby," he said. He paused, silent for a moment. "There's nothing I can do to make you stay."

"I'm sorry, my dear. I've to go. I've no other way," said Amelia. She was worried.

She gazed at Pollen's gloomy face. His small, watery eyes indicated that teardrops would soon hit the ground. Before the first tears fell, she passionately wrapped her arms around his neck and they pressed their bodies against each other. They could no longer stop the tears from falling. They stood there for a couple of seconds. Not a single word was murmured between them. They were overcome by

emotion. Separation was the only remedy for their suffering.

When they came back to their senses, Pollen removed a handkerchief from his pocket and wiped the tears from her eyes.

“Don’t cry, Baby. It’s okay,” he said. “It’s going to be fine, my dear.”

She sobbed.

“Take care,” he added. “We will meet again when the time’s right.”

He pulled a brown A5-sized envelope from the pocket of his jacket and handed it to Amelia. Amazed, she opened it and removed three photographs of Pollen. She stared at them for a while.

“They’re nice. I like them.” She stretched out her arms to embrace Pollen once more in appreciation.

“I’ve got only these photographs to give you,” he said, “so that you can have something to remember me when you’re gone.”

He looked into her eyes for a while.

“Please call when you get there,” he said, stroking her eyebrows with the tip of his index finger.

“I will,” she promised, grinning.

However, before she could say anything more, the minibus arrived at the stop sign.

“Let’s go, passengers,” shouted the conductor, coming closer.

“Wait! Wait!” screamed Amelia.

“Hand me your bag,” demanded the conductor.

Amelia kissed Pollen on the lips and jumped into the minibus.

“Goodbye, my dear,” she said, waving her hands to Pollen as the vehicle hit the road.

“Goodbye, Baby. Remember to call,” shouted Pollen, as he watched the minibus disappear from sight.

In the minibus, Amelia could not stop thinking about Pollen. She knew that she was leaving the love of her life.

* * *

Pollen stood motionless near the stop sign. She’s gone for good, he thought. He dragged his feet toward his home. On the way, he could not stop asking himself the same questions over and over.

Is my Baby gone forever?

Will she remember me?

Does this situation mark the end of our relationship?

Will she change when she gets there?

But, the answers eluded him.

The day moved so fast. Soon, it was night and he had nothing to do. His emotions were

scattered, but he hoped that things would be different the following day. Amelia's departure to the Big City, Ladybrand, had left him in a state of deep misery. He was heartbroken.

It's another part of life... Sometimes one has to let go someone we adore, he thought. They say that love's proved by letting go.

There was nothing he could do to stop Amelia from leaving him. He knew her struggles and sufferings. How could he not release someone whom he loved so much? He loved Amelia and wanted nothing but happiness for her.

Before she left for the Big City, Amelia had borne a grudge against her sister and brother-in-law. How could she love people who wanted her to suffer? How could he trust people who hated the love of her life, Pollen? How could she smile and laugh with people who did not appreciate the man in her life? She could not do that.

Most importantly, these people had forced her to drop out of school. They decided to impose harsh consequences on her in an attempt to get her to relinquish her relationship with her unfailing love, Pollen. Maybe their perception was right. Or perhaps, it wasn't.

Compelled by her circumstances to accept a job offer in the Big City, she wanted to go far away from her "enemies." Although it was hard

POULO PAULUS POULO

to live so far away from her love, her gut told her that she would always remember him. Maybe one day we'll get married, and maybe one day he'll land a good job offer, she thought.

TWELVE

In the big city

LIFE IN THE BIG CITY WAS GOOD for Amelia. The atmosphere was exciting and the mood was electrifying. She was now living far from home, where life was faster, but it was easier than where she came from. Everyone has to adapt to new changes and technology.

The boom of social networks certainly made life simpler and more interesting, but the shift from “old” means of communication to the new, was slow for Amelia. Again and again, she held herself back from experiencing and exploring new things.

Her boss had often said: “Feel at home, Amelia. This place is your new home. Loosen up.”

So, Amelia would “loosen up” a little and

allow some new changes to take place. Most of her boss's words were soothing, but they were not enough to fill the gap that Pollen had left in her heart. She would be content for a while, but when a thought of Pollen crossed her mind, she felt incomplete. And so life continued in that way until she got used to her long distance relationship.

When Amelia left Maseru for Ladybrand, she had not been into social networking, so for the first few months of living there, her only means of communication with Pollen was SMS and phone calls. They called each other in the evenings. Sometimes, they exchanged romantic texts, like: "I love you" and "I keep thinking of you." It was wonderful for the lovebirds to be able to share their passion. Their relationship blossomed and grew from strength to strength.

Their "enemies" never thought that any relationship between Pollen and Amelia still existed. They continued to ask questions, but no one had any accurate answers:

"Are they still seeing each other?"

"Will the long distance break their love affair?"

"What will be their end?"

"Will they marry?"

Time passed without anyone hearing anything about Pollen and Amelia.

Since "traditional" means of communication

between Pollen and Amelia were expensive, unlike social networking, the couple realised that they needed to shift and adapt to “new technology.” They both embraced it, and it became easier to communicate. They sent each other photos, videos and MP3 songs, and chatted with each other for far longer and far cheaper on social networks. For a while, it seemed that social networking had strengthened their relationship.

Now connected to the world, Amelia was able to connect with her former high school friends with whom she had lost touch several years back. In an attempt to rekindle old friendships, she searched for those who had disappeared from her life long before. It was during that time that she found herself communicating with her ex-boyfriend, Jonathan, who had also adapted to the “new technology.” Connected again online, it was easy for him and Amelia to resurrect their relationship. The online union of these lovebirds took place behind Pollen's back.

Pollen was not aware that Amelia was seeing somebody else. However, he was surprised that Amelia was no longer chatting with him as often as she used to do. Perhaps her workload is too heavy, he thought. Nevertheless, at that stage, he was not concerned.

But, why did Amelia bring Jonathan back

into her life? Was she not familiar with the expression: Let bygones be bygones?

* * *

Finding Jonathan on social networks aroused great excitement in Amelia, but brought increasing monotony into Pollen's life. Amelia began to learn how to live without Pollen, the supposed love of her life. She began to allocate more of her time chatting online with Jonathan. Time with Pollen became an afterthought—and Pollen felt it. He pretended to be unaffected, but emptiness filled his heart, and his boredom grew. Why is Amelia paying him less attention these days? Although she was always online, he had stopped receiving instant messages from her. Who was she chatting with? In happier times, Pollen had known that when Amelia was online, she was there chatting with him. Now, things were different.

I think she's now chatting with someone else. That thought bothered Pollen. He was desperate to find out the truth. His gut told him that something was happening behind his back.

At first, Pollen thought that technology had helped them to connect as a couple, but eventually he realised that it was pushing them apart. He simply had to have faith that the truth

would come out.

Pollen felt a great loneliness. Feelings of emptiness and depression replaced the warmth and joy that he had once held on to when he knew that Amelia was committed to him. All that remained was a deep void.

THIRTEEN

Tears fall

A STRESSED OUT POLLEN WAS anxious and depressed. He climbed under the covers at 8pm in an attempt to sleep. It was an hour earlier than usual, but, Pollen couldn't sleep, so he tossed and turned for about three hours, hearing members of his family snoring in the other rooms.

He pulled off his sheets, sat upright on the bed and grabbed a matchbox that was resting on a wooden chair beside the bed. He took out a single match and struck it. The flame illuminated the room. There was still a small piece of candle in the candlestick, which was sitting on a wooden table in the middle of the room.

He stood up and put the match to its wick, so the candlelight filled the entire room. Then he saw his old cellular phone, headphones still

plugged in, next to the candlestick. He grabbed it and blew the candle out before climbing back under the sheets.

He liked to tune into the radio station on the phone. Midnight Radio was broadcasting on 91.3 MH. His favourite presenter was on air.

“You’re tuned into Midnight Radio and the time’s 12 midnight,” the radio presenter told him.

It was Monday morning already. The DJ launched into a set of soul music. The intention was to put listeners in a good mood and welcome the start of the week. Pollen’s mind was abuzz. Everything seemed to be against him, and he felt like a spectator in his own life. He came to his senses: A familiar song, *My tears*, was now playing. The sound was crystal-clear through the headphones. Its smooth rhythm and slow tempo arrested Pollen.

*My tears keep on falling
As I remember the good things and the good times
That we enjoyed together in our happiest times
Now you’re married to another man, my darling
Here I’m alone in the middle of the night
I’m missing you more than anything, my baby
As more tears keep on pouring from my eyes...*

Pollen’s emptiness increased. He realised how much he missed Amelia, as well as the

immensity of the distance that separated him from his girlfriend. He realised how jealousy had torn his relationship apart and forced his soul mate away from him.

There's no justice in this world, he thought.

Everything they had done together reran in his mind like a movie. He saw every scene, every act replayed. He remembered the first time they had talked, and how they had begun to fall in love. He remembered how she had suffered because of him. He remembered the harshness of her family's decision to remove her from school, and the pain of how Bethuel had walloped her in his presence.

Most of all, he remembered Amelia's touch. Floods of tears escaped his eyes and rolled down his cheeks. He remembered how he had taken out a handkerchief to wipe the tears falling from Amelia's eyes. He recalled the sweetness of their last kiss before she left for the Big City.

Pollen roused himself from a dreamlike state only to realise that he wasn't dreaming at all. He had simply been "absent." He became aware of his own tears as the song came to an end. He pulled out his earphones and turned off the radio. He felt tired and drifted off into a sorrow-drenched sleep.

* * *

When Pollen awoke, it was 8am. He grabbed his phone to check for updates on the social networks. Browsing his timeline, there was one. He was stunned.

“How could this happen!” he screamed.

The notification read: “Amelia and Jonathan got married.”

He simply could not believe his eyes. He rubbed them and read it again. He had read correctly. He threw his sheets and pillows off his bed.

“Who's Jonathan?” he cried. “Where has he been all along?”

He needed to hear from Amelia whether this was true. In an enormous rage, he picked up his phone to call her, but he could not make an outgoing call. His only option was to send her an instant message and hope that she would reply swiftly.

He threw himself on the bed, fraught with hopelessness. He wished nothing for himself, but death. His only reason for living had just disappeared into thin air.

At last, a message popped up on his screen.

“I’m very sorry, Pollen. What you saw on my timeline is real. Jonathan and I got married

yesterday. And we're happy together. I hope you'll find someone else... Your ex-girlfriend, Amelia."

Filled with sorrow and pain, Pollen smashed his cellular phone against the wall. Pieces scattered across the floor. He fell from the bed to the floor and rolled once. For several seconds, *My tears*, replayed in his head as a flood of tears kept on falling. Then, Pollen, the teacher-gardener, was struck down by a heart attack. His heart simply stopped pumping blood: No longer conscious and no longer breathing.

