

Prologue

April 1963

South African miners toil in the eye of the sun. Men die like the ants of the earth in Lattterdam. In a fifty-foot hole of a fifty-foot tomb, they are separated from their families, dependable nightmares, unforgiving dreams. Oh, please, Mr. Von Mantor! Maylard Kambani just wants to see his wife Busisiwe. He just wants to see the light of day. He just saw a black cave of death. It was his face. It was his body.

A rock breaks in his hands. He lights up his helmet. A big flash comes down on the rock. It is a diamond, a big diamond. He gives it to Jacoi. They pass it around in the noise of this cave.

The thirsty men lick their dry lips. They cough up the earth from their lungs. The ground awakes from a sleep. Wide eyes pray to all sorts of gods as they start to run. Maylard runs with the diamond. He watched his friends tumble and fall as the cave explodes under their feet. He hears death call him back. He reaches out to a gloved hand. The mine explodes around him. "Awwww!" His own two eyes are not worried anymore.

A voice of a friend cries like pepper in the eyes.

"Hold on, my friend . . . hold on!" Jacoi punches through the stones. "Hold on." A knot of cold forms in his stomach. Getting out, digging.

"Give this to my wife . . ." He throws him the diamond and drifts into the nasty world of death. "Bye, my friend."

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Maylard Kambani's widow, Buisiswe, finds comfort in stitching up a blue brocade dress for the missus in her tin can shack house. She smiles down at her butter-head son, Titua. He is just four, with a wide mouth and coconut, big-eye face that tells love to dance around. He is playing with a friend, a grape-shaped beetle on the dirt floor in their tin can shack house. She can't stop the tears as she thinks of her Maylard. She has just buried him in the paper trash earth only two days ago. He was a wise man and will be good for heaven.

Minutes sweep by under the white diamond moon. Men come to bring her to justice in this night in this province of the KwaZulu. Fear comes up in her chest . . . it is the police.

"Open up!" The voice grabs her. "Open up!"

Buisiswe drops the dress, her hands shake. She unlatches the door. As she starts to peek, a rifle butt smacks her in the face.

Her son cries, "Mommie!" One of them snatches him and flings him to the wall.

"Mommie!"

Three men stand over her. The one with a long scar unzips his pants. The second with bad teeth growls, "Where is the diamond? Where is the diamond?" He spits on her.

"Diamond? Diamond? No! No!" She grabs her son and takes him closer to her bosom. "It's okay . . . it's okay." She rubs his head. "Dese men are not going to hurt us."

The third police officer is fat. "Boy, get away." He pulls him off his mother. They all laugh and chomp on their tongues. Moss-covered hands fall down on her round curves. Viking flames come up in the men's bellies as they laugh and stretch to take her body to the heavens of torture. He rips his fingers down the front of her dress, unzips. He becomes a thief. "She is a lovely Black." He fondles her breasts.

