

## MISS AFRICA SOUTH

(Inspired by the idea and title "MISS SOUTH –AFRICA"  
by Barney Simon )

An original play – for SUIDOOSTERFEES

by **LIZZ MEIRING**

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*A stark , clinical, soft grey or ice white, very stylish, architectural dressingroom.(like the kind of dressingroom/ lounge./ greenroom mix one would find backstage at a very modern conference centre, or huge new events venue. There is a dressing table , two chairs, a mirror ., a very uncomfortable, modern ,stylish two seater couch., a screen. Few bottles of mineral water. Sapphire's personal items – old style vanity case, suit bag with pageant dress, handbag, small suitcase. Huge bunch of flowers in a vase ,bottle of champagne from the event organisers, with a note attached to it. A tanoi system attached to a flat. It is not a friendly, cosy space. )*

*(The character, Sapphire Johnstone, is about 50 years old. She is attractive, but not a super glamorous, nipped and tucked , version of an ex beauty queen. She is middle class , to slightly working class. Not common or brash at all, not too pretensions either. She is not stupid, or uninformed, perhaps just a little naive, out of touch with modern times)*

*(Sapphire is in a dressing gown, fairly stylish and glamorous – underneath she is wearing pantyhose and a full slip. She is looking at the bunch of flowers, and reads the card. She puts it down. The first thought comes seemingly from nowhere. Then a small, slightly nervous, embarrassed laugh)*

“Are you mad “? “I’ll never fit into my dress!” Halliehaa ! That was *(thinks for a moment, works it out )* 33 years ago.

Who fits into clothes they wore thirty three years ago.” ?

“Anyway, I don’t know if I still have the damn dress!” I said. “It might still be here somewhere and the tiara is in a box in my garage ‘cause no-one wanted it back, but I’m sure the sash is reduced to a moth eaten scrap of satin.

Maar hulle wou niks weet nie. Absolutely tnsisted. “You must come. Ag please, Miss Johnstone, we want to honour you , specially ‘cause you were the last one .Please, please.This is a big event. We’re hoping all the previous South African pageant winners will be there.” .

Wat is dit met my ? Laat my altyd ‘n gat in die kop praat. *(Beat –a touch of self justification )*Dis net oor dit vir charity is.. Destitute dogs or an old age home ,of soiets. Never been good at saying no to people.

Presies hoe ek destyds in die hele ding beland het – because I simply couldn’t say no to the nice man who said I should enter.

*(beat )*

En die ander by die werk het my gedare. Hell, I was 18 .. Jy dink mos jy’s bullet proof as jy so jonk is. Nee, mens dink actually nog nie Plain and simple. Jy’s so stupid jy weet nie eers jy’s stupid nie.

*(Beat )*

Ek worry eintlik meer oor die skoene as die rok. Jare laas sulke high heels gedra. Netnou val ek flat on my face voor al daai mense en die cameras .

*(Beat )*

Oh well, here I am. *(Awkward silence. Takes in her surroundings. )* So klein muisgesig meisietjie het my hier kom sitmaak. “Pearl, you have one hour to get ready , - we’ll give you calls to warn you when the proceedings start. “ “Sapphire “I said. Sy’t my so blankly aangekyk.

**“Sapphire** , my name is **Sapphire**. Pearl was 1970. “ Nog ‘n blank stare.

*(referring to the card that came with the flowers. )*Gmf, so much for “we are privileged and grateful for your participation and gracious presence “ “ Kry nie eers jou naam reg nie.En g’n MISS of Mrs nie. Rude little thing. So, I had to spell it out for her – “I was 1976 , and my name is Sapphire. “

“Oh sorry,” she stuttered, “I get confused with all the names – I knew it had something to do with jewellery. “

I still don’t understand why they want to keep us all separate. Vir wat ? Ons is te oud vir jealousy en cat fights.

*(She gets up and scratches in her suitcase,frantically searches for something .Finds a pair of pantyhose, gives a sigh of relief )* Thank heavens. I did pack it. One must wear pantyhose.And always bring an extra pair. It’s essential. That’s why I never became a full time beauty queen. You have to remember to pack so many essential things.

Ek moes alewig pak toe ek klein was. Vat jou goed en trek, Fereirra.

Baie keer my in die middel van die nag wakker gemaak. My ma.: “Sapphie, pack your things quickly and help me put fresh linen on your bed. We have an unexpected guest.” Why can’t the guest sleep in the hotel ? “ You know the law, he’s one of us. “Toe, toe and don’t forget your school clothes ! “

‘n Mad gescramble en geraap en skraap,cramming clothes and schoolbooks into any container available , with a shadowy stranger standing in the doorway. “But can’t I just sneak in tomorrow morning and get my things?. I ‘all be quiet, I promise. No Sapphie, we can’t disturb our guest. “ Mom and the shadow person whispering, and me, scarcely awake, leave my cramped, cosy little room , getting into Mom’s room. En dan ‘n hoekie gaan vind in haar bed. Trying to fall asleep again , and then waking up again, as she later slides in beside me. My mother was a messy sleeper. Gesnuif en getwisch en geskuif ,nes ‘n dier wat nie sy lêplek kan kry nie.

Ek het nooit geweet wie al die “unexpected guests” was nie. It was never explained. And I didn’t dare ask .Eers baie jare later

uitgevind. All I experienced of those early **struggle** days was my **personal struggle** to get a good night's sleep.

Dit was 'n high class establishment – my ma se hotel. Well, it wasn't her hotel, she just ,unofficially -managed it. Ek moenie sê, "just managed it "nie. Was haar hele lewe. THE CHELSEA BOARD AND LODGING . Sy't 'n fully legal and official hoteliers license gehad. .

Mr Selwyn was the official owner- manager – maar sy vrou het asma en 'n "nervous condition " gehad , so hy was maar min daar.

Net kom staan en sweet as die hotelboard kom check het.

The man from the board came to inspect the register every six months.-Die guests se name en adresse en die room numbers en hoeveel nagte moes opgeskryf word, en dan het hy die bills gecheck. My room and Mom's room was not on the register. Private quarters.Eintlik maar bediende kwartiere. Right at the back of the yard.

Ma het nooit probleme gehad met die inspector nie. "Julle rekords is op datum en jy hou die plek mooi skoon "het die hy altyd gesê. "Sien, as almal net doen wat hulle moet doen, sal ons minder moeilikheid in die land hê."(*She reflects for a moment , then she smiles ironically )*

I've always wondered about this "doing what you're supposed to do " . How are you "supposed to do what you're supposed to do", when the "doing what you're supposed to do," almost always, only benefits **other people** ? Reg en verkeerd is anders in elkeen se oë.

Mom and I never saw "eye to eye " on that one, veral **na** die crowning....

(*She is suddenly upset )* You see ? You see ? That's why one must never sit around doing nothing ! Dan dink jy aan dinge wat jy liever moet los !!

(*She gets up and starts unpacking her vanity case – placing cosmetics on the table.Muttering while she's placing everything-neatly into little rows)*

My 'n bleddie gat in die kop laat praat. Waste of precious time.  
Mens is so, so ...exposed.  
*(In silence, for a while , she starts applying make-up. )*

Ek sal smile en nice wees, want dit is vir a good cause, but they  
mustn't ask me questions. **No questions**. I'll just say, "What **is** this  
? A competition ? A pageant for pensioners ? ,Been there, done  
that, got the tiara, and we know "world peace" is impossible. ,  
thank you very much. "

Some of the girls were lucky. They got the right questions. I always  
got the wrong ones. *(a Touch angry, upset )*

Aspris vrae , moeilikheid soek goed. Niemand waarsku jou nie.  
Like an interrogation. Jy voel of jy voor 'n blerrie hof staan en  
jouself moet verdedig vir 'n crime ! *(Calms herself down for a  
second )*

Net een keer 'n vraag gekry wat ek voor die tyd gepractice het : "  
*(As presenter )*

Sapphire, what is your dream for the future ?  
*(As Sapphire )*

""To never stop dreaming. If we let our dreams die, we die ". Die  
een judge, cried real tears. And that's how I won the first round.  
Miss Africa South Cape regional finalist. I got it on that one  
answer,- there were far prettier girls than me.

Daar was nog 'n vraag wat ek gedink het ek was prepared ...

*(She suddenly stops, goes to her suitcase – rumbles through it )*  
Hell , I hope I packed the stepping. *(Produces a tummy slimmer –  
one of those one buys through VERIMARK )*

Gaan die ding nou nie als bo uitdruk nie ? Soos 'n stuk wors wat in  
te min tinfoil toegedraai is ...

"Bubbly personality ,well spoken " that was my thing. That's what  
the newspapers said. Other contestants were described as  
"elegant ", "beautiful" "glamorous " , Sapphie was "bubbly ", bekkig  
..en een keer "pretty. " Maar ek **was** pretty, selfs **beautiful**.  
Dammit , I deserved to win. Nie **alles** was smoke en mirrors nie. .

*(She absent minded strokes her less than flat midriff and tummy )*

It's strange, you know, everyone else is allowed to age – maar as  
jy eenkeer "mooi " was, then the natural course of nature is not

forgiven. They love saying “Hell, maar sy’t oud geword. “ But they forget to look in the mirror. ..

Ag, wadde hel, die ander girls het ook oud geword.... I hope.

*(She takes her cell phone from her handbag. Dials a number. Waits a few seconds. )*

Dolly ? Ja, ek is hier. Ek weet nie. Het sy geeet ? Jy moenie haar .... Ja, slaap by haar in die kamer.  
Wie’t toegesluit by die Den ? ..O.

**V/ O on tanoïd :” Ladies, we’ll be starting in 40 minutes .40 minutes ladies. “**

*(Sapphire gets a small fright*

Iemand praat hier oor ‘n ding. Ek moet gaan.Sien julle m^ore. Kyk mooi na haar .

*She pus down the cellphone,looks around the room to see where the sound came from. Finds it, goes to it, speaks into the tanoïd )*

Hello ? Hello ? I’m not ready yet...

Halliehaah , ek gaan nie klaar kom nie....

*(Now in a slight panic - she goes to her suitcase , takes out the shoes. She unzips her suit bag with the dress, places it on a chair, then back to doing her make-up, now at double speed. )*

There’s this, this thing that happens to you when you stand in front of an audience. Jy voel so kraal data jy dink manse kan **tot** jou insides sine, maar jy **will** alles wyes. You hate it and you love it. You feel so. weak and so strong.-all at the same time. But most of all you feel like you’re unique. Selected, chosen from all the other invisible people.

En jy **will net went. Nothing else matters.**

It’s not the prizes , I mean, jy gaan nou nie sê “No thank you “ nie, maar dies nie big thing nie. Jy will net went, cause you’d look so stupid if you lose.You just don’t want to be stupid, or invisible ever again.

Sy kon dit nooit verstaan nie, my Ma. I come from invisible people. My Pa, ek het **hom** nooit gesien nie, nie eers een keer nie. My Granny , sy was net visible vir die Oubaas daarbo, and when I was small – I always thought my mother’s two sisters and brother looked like Big Ben, want dis die prentjie wat ma vir my gewys het as ek vra waar hulle is. They were political exiles she said. And because of them running away, we were being watched, so ons moet invisible bly.

Onder Vorster se vinger - Visible coloureds were cheeky coloureds, and cheeky coloureds got into trouble. Jy moet jou gedra soos ‘n witmens, maar jy moenie dink jy is ene nie.

Ek was ook so. A carbon copy. Die call centre was die perfect job. Comfortably invisible. Net jou stem het getel. Niemand het geweet ons is ‘n mixed crowd wat agter daai ligblou mure werk nie. You just had to **sound** educated, white. En ek het geweet hoe om mooi te praat, is van kleins af geleer. Was taught by a master. “Sapphie, the first impression of a business, is the phone. “ And though we speak English at home, we must also speak perfect Afrikaans to our Afrikaans customers. Die pad na ‘n boer se hart, loop reg deur sy ore. You and I, we have to work a little harder to earn respect. “

Ek het baie keer die foon geantwoord (*She does a smooth voice – with a slight childlike quality* ) “ The Chelsea Board and Lodging, goeie middag, good afternoon.. “ standing on my toes behind the counter, rea-rea - ching for the register.

Toe ek op 18 die national call centre se “MISS GOLDEN VOICE “ Competition wen was dit maar net ‘n payoff vir al die jare se fone antwoord. Die prys was R20 en ‘n coral red draagbare radio, met cream switches. Oh, and a certificate, of course.

It was presented to me, on a stage, in front of all the managers and the bosses and the newspapers.

Hulle’t foto’s van my geneem, en ek moes oor ‘n microphone, in front of all those people , my phone skills demonstreer. “ Die Protea Group, the Protea Group , goeiemore, good morning. Kan ek help ? How may I assist you ? “

Then the crowd applauded and I had to do it all over again, en toe kom Meneer Marx, die grootbaas op, en oorhandig my pryse,.

En toe kry ons eats en snacks en toe kom sê almal “geluk “ en toe’s dit verby.

Na daai prys, het **my** switch geflip. I wanted to have a face with my voice. Fame over the phone, just wasn’t good enough. My “soothing, friendly tone” was gone. No matter how hard I tried, I’m sure the callers heard my frustration.

Toe hulle my daai oggend na die call centre manager --Mevrou Bonthuys se kantoor toe roep, was ek eintlik kalm. “If they fire me , so what.? I’ve already spent the R20 , and surely they won’t ask for the radio ?

Maar Mevrou Bonthuys was all smiles,. Skoon op haar stukke. Her usual strict smirk was gone. Daar was ‘n ouerige man by haar in die kantoor. Netjiese man, in ‘n smart suit. Handsome man. Wit man.

*(As Mrs Bonthuys )*

“Sapphire , dit is Mister Dave. Ons moet Engels praat , want sy Afrikaans is nie vreeslik goed nie. Mister Dave runs the Miss Africa South beauty pageant. You must have heard of it ?

*(As Sapphire )* Oh, yes, Mevrou , we always see their pictures in the paper , Pearl Jansen is beautiful, Evelyn Williams too, and last year’s winner Lydia Gloria Jonhstone – well, we have the same surname – but my mother says we’re not family.

*(As Mev Bonthuys whispering)* Ja, toe, toe dis genoeg...

*(As Mister Dave )*

Miss Johstone –I saw your picture in the paper. You’re a very lucky girl.” , said Mister Dave. “I have a proposition for you.-something which might just change your life ... “

*(Her make-up is now done )*

As jy onder die selfde dak as jou Ma bly,en haar kos eet, is **jou** lewe, **haar** lewe. Jy’s 18 en sy’s 40, maar sy weet presies wat jy wil hê. Your friends and the girls at work say “Ooooh, Sapphie, are you really going to pose in a swimming costume, and what does your dress look like ? And your mother says “ Over my dead body, there are things you don’t understand. “ What things Ma ? Never you mind , it’s cheap and immoral, just **don’t do it.**



*(She goes to her suit bag, containing the pageant dress, hesitates for a moment, then goes to where she saw the tanoid Speaks into it )* Hallo, excuse me.... Hello ? ... *(she sees a button, she presses it – speaks very clearly )* Hallo ? Excuse me, this is Sapphire Johnstone, Miss Africa South 1976 , please can you put on the aircon ? *(she waits a beat )*

Hoe kan daar niemand by die switchboard wees nie ?

There must be someone out there .... *(she makes for the “doorway “ in the wings –stops herself halfway. She stops because she realises she’s wearing a dressing gown . embarrassed laugh )* *(to herself )* Halliehaah, waar’s my kop ? ...

**VI O TANOI : Ladies , we’ll be starting in 25 minutes, ladies, 25 minutes.**

*(She rushes over to the tanoid – talks into it )* : Hello, It’s very hot in here can you turn up the aircon, or bring a fan ?

*(She goes to her suitcase , looks for her shoes, pantyhose, etc...can’t find it, slight panic, )*

Het ek dan nie die goed ingepak nie ?

Ek gaan nooit hierdeur kom nie.

*(Then she sees where she has already taken it out , and placed it. She sits down again. Another embarrassed laugh, which turns into a small , almost childlike sigh-sob, very vulnerable, very underplayed.Then, from a very quiet place )*

It was so exciting, so dazzling. Even the first round of the competition. No audience, no stage, no lights, no music. Just a dusty hall in Athlone on a Saturday morning. Hordes of coloured girls, and a small group of black ones. Some of us furiously combing our freshly Walla straightened hair , rubbing in *Ponds skin lightener*, pulling at the elastic straps and bottoms of our bathing suits, hitching up the dark brown pantyhose , smothering our lips in 3 flowers “*Dangerous Red* “ and spraying *Moon drops* perfume. Baie girls was so nervous dat hulle gestaan en bewe het in die Maart heatwave. I wasn’t scared- I just kept thinking, “Goodbye Miss Golden Voice – hello Miss Golden Face. “ They called us in one by one. “En wat is jou naam ? “ “En waar kom jy vandaan ? “ “Nou gaan ons bietjie Engels praat : *(As Sapphire )* My home language is English, but I’m fully bilingual.

Actually, I sort of speak this mix, dan wil my Ma die horries kry!  
(As judge ) Oh.um...yes... ..

“Sapphire, what a lovely name ... Sapphire ... why do you want to be Miss Africa South ? ““Well, who doesn’t want to be ? “ Toe lag hulle almal .Mister Dave , standing behind the judges winked at me and showed a thumbs up.

Ek was een van net 20 regional finalists. Ma wou nie saam pose vir die foto in die Cape Herald nie.

Sy was nie by die Regional Competition nie. Sy’t haar in Mister Selwyn se vrou se siekte – asthma and a nervous condition ingedink , haar Christmas leave in Maart gevat, en by ‘n distant cousin in Cradock gaan kuier.

Dit was net ek en die assistant manager –Juffrou Emily, wat jou ore van jou kop af praat , in die Chelsea.

Mister Dave het vir my ‘n sponsored rok van Foshini gereël vir die National Finals, en ‘n more “suitable bathing suit “ , die call centre het blomme gestuur, they even bought tickets to be there, elke mens wat ek ooit geken het was daar, but not her- oh no, my stubborn, conservative, hard hearted mother, was invisible.

Didn’t bother me . Life was far too busy. Newspaper interviews, public appearances , modelling classes , rehearsals for the pageant.....Baie fans en autographs..

Mister Dave het vir my ‘n secret mentor georganise. “Not a word to the others, Sapphire. We don’t want this to look like favouritism.” Elke Maandag , Woensdag, en Vrydagaand, as Ma by haar shadowy strangers gaan kuier, slip ek weg na Langstraat, round the back entrance, up the creaky stairs, to a purple door – in gold letters “Kevin’s finishing school. “ Kevin was eintlik Jacobus , maar nou was hy Kevin. Baie full of fancyness. “Sapphire -we’ll make you sparkle, my darling. “ Ek moes als van vooraf leer, - deportment - hoe om reg te staan, te loop, te pose, rye messe en vurke en glase , grooming, dress sense, alles. “Hello Eliza Doolittle “ het hy altyd gesê as ek by deur instap. Ek was altyd te skaam om te vra wie Eliza Doolittle is. En my ook vervies, ek het g’n “little gedo” nie, ek het bleddie hard probeer.

While far, far away in the Transvaal, a township was burning, there was only one State of Emergency in Sapphire Johnstone's life – would she wear the crown or not ?

*(Imitating a radio voice )* 'n 18jarige telefoniste van die Kaap , Sapphire Johnstone, is gisteraand gekroon as Mej Afrika –Suid 1976.Mej Johnstone, sal later vanjaar, saam met Mej Suid-Afrika – Lynn Massyn, aan die Mej WêRELD KOMPETISIE in Londen deelneem.”

The tiara kept slipping off my head , the sash was all skew , but hell, I was not just the queen of a speck on a continent, I was queen of the world.!

Selfs Ma het gehuil toe sy die nuus hoor. Gehuil en gehuil en nie opgehou huil nie. I thought, ja, jou stubborn ou merrie, now you're proud of me.

Toe Ma terugkom van haar sulking holiday , het ek die helfte van my prysgeld in 'n koevert op haar bed gaan sit. R1000. She didn't touch my peace offering .

Elke oggend was dit op my bed. Dan sit ek dit op haar bed, en vanaand , is dit weer op my bed. Went on for weeks, till I gave up.

Ma sat me down one night. Die aand voor ek Londen toe is.

*(As Mother )*

“Sapphie,please don't go. “

*(As Sapphire )* Maaaa... ek kom mos weer terug, dis net twee weke.

*(As Mother )*

That's not what I mean. There are bigger things happening than you girls dancing around in next to nothing . “

*(As Sapphire )*

Dis nie wat ons doen nie !

*(As mother )*

Do you understand what's happening in this country ? Do you realise what a State of Emergency means ? “They can arrest anyone, anyone, who they decide is anti government and lock you up without trial. And you want to represent **these** monsters ?

*(As Sapphire )*

“Ma, Mister Dave and the other the organisers told me over and over to please stay out of politics.I'm just representing myself, and other girls **like me** with dreams for the future.There's nothing

wrong with that ! I didn't cause apartheid, and I'm not going to fix it.

*(As mother )* You are part of this struggle , whether you like it or not

*(As Sapphire )*

“What do you want me to do Ma ? I could become Miss world ! What do you want me to do ? Throw away my one chance, and rather throw stones at the police like the others who get dragged away and killed ? Huh ? Is that what you want ? “

Sy't lank stilgebly. "it's winter in England . There's a new coat on top of your suitcase. “ Haar handsak gevat en uitgelooop.

*(As Sapphire )*

Where are you going ? I watched her leave by the back door. 'n Shadowy stranger het in 'n kar agter die hotel gewag."Ma, where are you going ?

*(As mother )*

“Why would you care ? “, she shouted over her shoulder..

*(Beat, beat )*

*(She sits down for a moment – it's clear she's not feeling well. )*

*(Beat )*

Ek was 18. Ek was in **London , England** . Ons het in die **Chelsea Hotel** gebly!

Dis 'n teken. 'n Lucky sign. Daar was baie mooi meisies, maar ek het die lucky sign ! .

Everything there was so big and different and **trendy**. En daar was regte hippies.En die beatles, en fashion en “groovy “ en “peace” en als.

Oh, ons is soos royalty getreat ! Like real beauty **queens** ! They showed us the Tower of London , and Buckingham Palace where a real queen lives, and Big Ben, and I thought of Ma's invisible family . And I wondered what “exiles “ really looked like. But Ma said they won't want to see me.

Die mans wou ons om elke hoek en draai “date “ - dinner and dancing by discos, maar die chaperones het ons die hele tyd besig

gehou.En dopgehou .En weggehou van die anti apartheid protesters en cheeky press vrae. And the press tried, believe me. Especially with Miss **South** Africa, Lynn Massyn. *(beat )* Wonder of sy ook vanaand hier is ? She was a sweet girl. Shame, poor Lynne. 9 Countries refused to send their girls in protest, because of her also being there. But Mister Morley, the big Boss of Miss World ,said not to worry, beauty knows no politics, we must carry on like nothing has happened.

*(Beat )*

Every year, since 1970 – there were two girls – A Miss Africa South , and a Miss South Africa, not a peep of protest.

Maar **nou** was my land ‘n oop wond, en almal het hul vingers in Vorster se bloedbad kom indruk. Pictures of children being shot in the streets of Soweto was in every newspaper, in every country, every day and ,suddenly according to international opinion - lily white Lynn, had caused it all. *(beat )* It’s hard not to be allowed to live in one’s skin.

**Ek** was uit my vel uit van geluk.. At last, **my** skin was in. Suddenly I was an “exotic beauty” like the Chinese girl, and Miss Jamaica.

*(Beat )*

I’ve forgotten most of the little irritations - the nerves, die bakleiry ,hoe moeg ons was. Dit het ek vergeet...*(beat )* **London, England.** A strange and wet and wonderful place.No signs on toilets and park benches, no seperate entrances... I wished I could live there forever...

**Tanoid : Just noise, can’t hear the actual call.static ,muffled voice giving the call, can’t make out much**

*(Sapphire gets up,removes her dressing gown. She is standing in a slip. She puts on her shoes –.Goes to the suitbag, takes out the dress, puts it on, she can’t zip it up by herself Tries again,can’t do it.)*

**Tanoid noise, with interference, static again, muffled voice.**

*(She glances at it, puts on her crown,, then shouts at the tanoi. )*  
*(Speaks into it )* I can’t hear you ! Ek’s doof . EN menopausal !!  
And it’s very hot in here !. Please – fix the aircon, or bring a fan.  
And can someone zip me up ? Please ?

*(Beat –she glances down at the dress on her body - There is very clear change in her demeanor)*

Peter Soldatos made this dress. He was a very famous designer. He made it specially for me. Mister Dave paid. Chris Levine made Lynn's dress, but Peter Soldatos made mine. I had it altered, so I can fit into it again, it **was** 33 years ago, you know.

Ag donder, dis te laat vir die tummy trimmer.

18 November 1976. Net vinnig trug hotel toe om te gaan shower, before our big night. I was too nervous to be nervous. Ag, ek weet ook nie **wat** ek was nie... *(beat)* Stupid ! Stupid !

A shadowy stranger in my room. My amper vrek geskrik. Toe skakel hy 'n lig aan.

Mister Dave ...sitting on my bed. Met 'n bos geel rose en so 'n groot wit strik om die cellophane..

*(As Mister Dave)*

Hello Sapphie ...

*(As Sapphire – it is clear she senses something is wrong )*

Mister Dave....

*(As Mister Dave )*

I came to wish you luck. I 'm told you are one of the favourites.

*(As Sapphire )*

The girls say I'll definitely win Miss Personality, they all like me... What are you doing here ? I mean, in England ?

*(As Mister Dave )*

I thought you needed a friend on your Big night..

*(As Sapphire )*

Thanks Mister Dave... Will you be there tonight.?

*(As Mister Dave )*

Of course. Somewhere in the audience, I'll be rooting for you. Tonight is a big night. Big Night. Not just for you ....

That's why I had my eye on you right from the start. I knew, you would be a worthy ambassador for your people and your country.

*(As Sapphire )*

Wel there's Lynn too...

*(As Mister Dave )*

Ah, yes, of course... but this is about you, and your future, and your people's future , and how proud your country is you. Sapphire, I know you're a bright girl, and bright girls plan ahead. Most contestants fail the question section ..We don't want that to happen to you ..So if, for instance , they ask you ...say, about apartheid...what will you say ?

*(As Sapphire )*

But they won't ask that, will they ? . I mean Mr Morley said...

*(As Mister Dave)*

We can't always control that. There are Media judges , and the British press can be very insensitive. ..Now, what would you say ?

*(As Sapphire )*

I'll just say....I'm Miss Africa South and proud of it..

*(As Mister Dave )*

Good girl. Be clever : Say "You're in the beauty business, because you're beautiful, not in politics, because that is an ugly business." Just do the right thing, and you're sure to win. " I'm so proud of you.

Geel rose en 'n soen op my voorkop. And then he melted into the dark corridor.

### **TANOID NOISE , LIKE AN EERY ,THIN SCREECH**

*(She listens for a moment, then puts her fingers in her ears, to drown out the noise . )*

*(Noise stops after 4 sec)*

Jy bewe en jy weet nie hoekom nie. Jy bewe want jy weet iets is verkeerd, maar jy weet nie wat nie.

Ons moes almal by reception wees, promptly at 6pm. Miss Nicaragua was missing. Someone said "Look in the bar, she's

always there.” Lynn hardloop elke twee minute toilet toe. Tasse en rokke en blomme en maniese meisies, Miss India screaming at me Haar land se regering het haar op die last minute onttrek, oor ek en Lynn altwee daar is.

It must have happened then, in the chaos - the envelope in my bag.

Ek het nie geweet dit was daar nie . I swear I didn't know.

I just didn't see it.

### **TANOID –CRACKLE AND FANFARE MUSIC SUITED TO BEAUTY PAGEANT , short sting.**

*(Very quietly, very vulnerable )*

Ek kan nie....My rok gaan nie vaskom nie... Ek kan nie...

*(She hesitates for a moment, then zips up her dress.)*

*(She closes her eyes for a moment, as if she is making a silent, but very profound decision )*

Royal Albert Hall.

Die mense, die cameras, die musiek. Jou tande sit vas teen jou lippe , maar jy smile dat jou mondhoeke kraak.

Jy haal nie asem nie, jy kyk net vorentoe ,jou ore suis..

All these people in Albert's Hall, all the people who have tv's watching all over the world...Ma, I wish you had a tv..., Call centre ek wens julle het al tv's gehad wat my kon wys, South Africa , stop burning and fighting and hating and killing AND LOOK AT ME !

### **TANOID – SHORT CRACKLE, THEN FAINT SOUND OF PAGEANT TYPE MUSIC being tested- like technical sound check.**

We did the dance steps perfectly, we sang the song. *“(She sings )*

“Don't go breaking my heart.” *(aside )* .Elton John en Kiki Dee..was **die** groot hit daai jaar... ..

Final 20 ... ek's in,, Miss PERSONALITY – and the winner is : MISS AFRICA SOUTH – SAPPHIRE JOHNSTONE !

Ma ? Sien jy my ?

Final 12 – I'M in. Lynn is out, shame , but I'm in !!



Question time.

Dankie Mister Dave. Dankie, dankie.

Ek het daai judge van die Londen Times uitgeboul, lekker skuins truggeklap met sy cheeky vraag oor apartheid. Miss Golden Voice was in control . (*Sapphire now in full youthfull , pageant charm mode* ) “Thank you for your question. All of us here, are in the beauty business, because we want to bring beauty to the world. Beauty and politics don’t mix -.

Faint applause. Hoekom klap die mense nie ? Hoe kan so ‘n groot saal so stil word ?

*(Hesitantly)*

I did the right thing. ...

FINAL 6 - They kept calling the wrong names ....

And suddenly .... Sapphire Johnstone , Miss Personality, Member of the final 12...became invisible.

Baie van die ander meisies wat ook uitgeval het, het gehuil, gevloek, geskel. Ek was stil, stomverbaas.

Ek kon hoor hoe Ma sê “I told you so. “

Back in the dressingroom with all the other losers. My mouth was so dry. Krap, krap vir ‘n peppermint in my handbag. Envelope. Plain white, no name on it. Lets binne in.

I opened it. Words cut out of magazines and newspapers:

YOUR MOTHER , – A BRAVE MEMBER OF OUR STRUGGLE. ,  
WAS ARRESTED YESTERDAY AND DETAINED UNDER THE  
STATE OF EMERGENCY ACT.  
TONIGHT IS YOUR CHANCE TO SPEAK OUT AGAINST THE  
HORRORS OF APARTHEID. DO THE RIGHT THING.

My voete het sonder my kop verhoog toe gehol. Op hierdie impossible skoene. My longe het gebrand soos ek daai lang gang aanvat verhoog toe “I want to answer my question” I screamed. I want to answer my question again !”

Niemand wou luister nie, niemand wou my ‘n kans gee nie.

Security held me back. Ek kon nie naby die verhoog of die cameras kom nie. Mister Morley's assistant slapped me. Deur die bek geklap. "She's hysterical, some of them get that way when they don't win. "

Twee groot mans in swart suits vat my hotel toe, nobody was interested in my hysterical ramblings. Die brief ! Ek moet hulle die brief wys !

Where's the letter ? Where are my things ?

*(As security guy – cockney accent ? )*

Calm down, luv. A posh geezer –said he's your South African organiser – he packed up your things. Look ,everything is here."

Nie alles nie.

Damn you , Mister Dave. Damn you.

**Tanoid : Crackle and MC's voice, male voice doing sound check : Testing, testing...Ladies and Gentlemen... please welcome our homegrown beauties from the past., and...here they come...testing..testing..." crackle and interference**

Was nie meer **my** huis nie.

Agtien jaar rondgeswerf in vreemde lande. Koud en nat en grys.

Political exile. Nes my Big Ben family.

Aunie Serrah looked just like Ma.

Ek het met elke koerant , elke radio stasie, elke tv programme wat ek kon, gaan praat. Miss Golden voice. But the novelty wore off.

Very quickly. " Just another desperate voice in the wilderness of world politics"said the man from the BBC. Hulle't verveeld geraak met so baie stories wat dieselfde is.

No sign of my mother, no news. Gerugte ,en raaiskote- maar sy't net verdwyn.

Ek moes ook.

Mister Dave en sy Department of Information het my "swart" gesmeer. "Sapphire Johnstone is 'n terroris wat die regering "gebruik "het "

Big Ben and their comrades said I was a liability .Too visible, too dangerous .Too focused on selfish reasons. Like finding my mother. *(beat)* I didn't like them anyway.

Altyd met my gepraat asof ek dom is.-Die agtertand klimmeid van 'n agtertand plek. .

Why do people who work for the “good of the people “ never think of the good of just one just one person ? My mother was a person!. Says who- “she was prepared to give her life for the cause. “ Wie de hel was hulle om dit te besluit ?

I didn't want to see the bigger picture. I just wanted to see my mother – LIVE, 3D and in living colour.

It all went so wrong...

Haliehaaa... ek wou net 'n kroon dra, nie 'n hele land se las nie...

18 jaar lank, was ek sonder land, sonder huis. Drifted through Europe. Washing dishes in dirty Bistros and wasting time in dead end relationships...Was nie my soort mense nie, no matter how hard I tried to fit in. It's like you see all the nice things through the window, but you're not allowed in. Ag, I don't know, maybe it's the weather that makes them this way – koud ,bleek en sonder spice en dunlip, soos waterige ertjiesop.

*(beat)*

Time to move on, again.

I finally came home -to a very new South Africa in 93.. “Where were you when we were suffering ? they said. “Huh, waar was jy ? Lekker dik gesuip en vetgevreet met sweedse geld ! “ Jy hou jou bek van die struggle af, jy weet niks daarvan nie ! Jou traitor ! You were a goverment puppet and then you ran away, soos 'n sleg meid ! “

Was ook nie meer my huis nie.

Die Chelsea hotel was ook nie meer hier nie.

Dis nou 'n bar met pooltables.

I found her in 95. In an old age home run by the Salvation Army. Sy't my gladnie geken nie. Alzheimers.

Ek wou net wegkom. Die pad het ons na haar distant cousins in Cradock toe gevat. Van voor af begin. I now **own** the vetkoek den. Dis nie groot nie, maar dis genoeg ..

Now and again, people ask me : “Rumour has it... dan s<sup>^</sup>e ek “Nee, dis net ‘n bleddie stupid rumour. “

Halliehaaa...

Nou gaan hulle my op TV sien en weet ek’t gelieg.

Why did I allow myself to be talked into this ? Bleddie stupid ou vrou... Faded fame is an ugly thing. Wie worry oor ‘n spul menopausal beauty queens ? Wie worry oor die struggle ?

Waste of time.

Ek gaan trip oor my rok. Donderse skoene.

*(She takes her phone. Dials, waits a while. No answer. )*

Hulle slaap seker al. Hoop sy’s orraait. Sy sukkel sonder my.

*(Beat )*

Sy smile die heelyd. Sy smile as ek raas, sy smile as ek huil, sy smile die hele donnerse tyd! ‘n Big ,blank smile.

It’s hard to say you’re sorry to a face fixed in a permanent smile. I don’t want her to forgive me, I just want her to listen, to understand. Ek wil net weet wat met haar gebeur het ! I’ve tried. “Ma.. when I was away ...what happened to you ? “

Haar smile sê niks. . Mona Lisa van die Karoo...

Ek het al so baie keer daai speech in my kop gemaak. The one I should have answered . Dit verander elke keer , soos ek weer daaraan dink. Soos die tyd aanstap. Soos ek leer van die krake wat deur ons almal loop. I’m still looking for that perfect answer. . But I never get it right. ..

**Tanoid : VERY LOUD. Sm voice : “ We apologise for the technical difficulties, ladies. Our system is now working. Two minutes ladies, two minutes. Our staff will come round to fetch you. Good luck, ladies!**

*(Sapphire stands frozen for a moment. She goes to the mirror , she puts on the sash. She fixes her crown. She moves way from the mirror, closes her eyes for a moment. Then opens it, and stares into the audience.)*

*(As the lights fade, she starts speaking, hesitantly at first, as if to build up some courage ,  
... bring beauty to the world...*

*then she repeats the following line , over and over again.)*

I'm Miss Africa South and proud of it...  
I'm Miss Africa South and proud of it...  
I'm Miss Africa South and proud of it...

*She is drowned out by a very loud , typical pageant type fanfare.*

Blackout.

**END.**