

A note from Khaya

Life is like that sometimes is a journey through nostalgia, loss, and the bittersweetness of life. It revisits my childhood in Dutyini, a time filled with the vivid memories of growing up in rural Transkei. But as much as it captures those simpler days, this book also delves into the profound weight of loss – the ache that lingers when those we love are no longer here.

Loss is universal, but it's never simple. No matter how much we know it's an inevitable part of life, nothing prepares us for the void it leaves or the tiny, unexpected moments that catch us off guard and break our hearts all over again. Yet, amid this grief, life insists on moving forward, teaching us to find meaning in the pain and joy of the memories.

For some readers, a chapter or two may feel familiar, echoing parts of my earlier books. Don't be alarmed nor dismayed. In those past works, certain stories were briefly mentioned in just a sentence or two – enough to spark curiosity but not satisfy it. Over the years, readers have told me how much they wished I'd shared those stories in full. So, here they are, expanded and given the space they deserve.

The stories in this book, while deeply personal, are also

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reflections of the lives of millions of South Africans – their resilience, humour, heartbreak, and hope. The only difference is that I have been afforded the privilege of writing them down, of preserving moments that many others quietly live through without the chance to share them with the world. This is both a responsibility and gift I accept and hope to use with humility and grace.

Before I close, I want to address a subject that feels urgent but often unspoken: the disparity in book-buying, publishing, and reading patterns within South Africa.

White South Africans remain the largest book buyers in the country, a pattern rooted in the economic and historical inequalities that still shape our society today. Yet, within this group of avid book buyers, books by black writers are purchased in significantly smaller numbers than those by white authors. This imbalance reflects both historical and systemic barriers.

Economic disparities play a significant role, with black South Africans earning an average of just thirteen cents for every rand earned by their white counterparts, according to Standard Bank.¹ These realities make it more difficult for many black South Africans to afford books, limiting access to stories, including those by black authors.

At the same time, structural inequities in publishing exacerbate the issue. Between 2019 and 2021, white authors made up 58% of published fiction writers, compared to 31% for black writers and 11% for other people of colour, according to the *Mail & Guardian*.² Fewer opportunities for black writers to be published mean that their stories often struggle to gain visibility.

Compounding these challenges is the limited engagement

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with black-authored stories among white readers, who remain the largest segment of book buyers. Together, these factors contribute to a landscape where black stories – though rich in their breadth and depth – often fail to reach the audiences they deserve across all demographics.

This raises a difficult but necessary question: Are we, as a nation, doing enough to ensure that black stories are seen, heard, and valued by all South Africans?

Stories have the unique power to connect us. They allow us to step into each other's shoes, to walk paths we might not otherwise tread, and to see the world through each other's eyes. To bridge the chasms left by history and circumstance, we must embrace the richness of all our voices.

While black readers frequently engage with books by both black and white authors, I urge white book buyers to do the same: to actively seek out, support, and engage with the stories of black South Africans. If you are already doing this, I thank you. I encourage you to share these stories with your friends, family, and book clubs. Together, we can ensure that all voices are heard, valued, and celebrated.

A country that reads across its divides can grow beyond them.

As a final note, I hope this book reminds you that you are not alone in your joys or your sorrows. Life, as messy and unpredictable as it is, has a way of weaving beauty and meaning into even the hardest moments. And perhaps, as you read, you'll find a piece of your own story within these pages.