

Into the Grey

By Sandy Masia

Copyright 2015 Sandy Masia

Smashwords Edition

Smashwords Edition, License Notes

This book is licensed for your personal enjoyment only. This book may not be re-sold or given away to other people. If you would like to share this book with another person, please purchase an additional copy for each recipient. If you are reading this book and did not purchase it, or it was not purchased for your use only, then please return to your favourite ebook retailer and purchase your own copy. Thank you for respecting the hard work of this author.

Table Of Contents

1. [Dry Fountain](#)
 2. [Burning Up](#)
 3. [Letters of Life by Lauren Pillay](#)
 4. [I Bleed Ashes](#)
 5. [The Hole](#)
 6. [Walk Quickly by Lauren Pillay](#)
 7. [Girl in the Rain](#)
- [About the Author](#)
- [Before the Cult](#) (Scarleton Series' extract)

The Dry Fountain

The first slap on my cheek sizzled. The second burned and I recoiled, instincts dictating my actions. I told myself I deserved it. The third brought tears to my eyes and the fourth sent me to the floor like a bag of potatoes. Through my bleary eyes I could not make out his face. It would hurt even more to see it. I held the tears in my eyes a little longer so I would not blink. Suddenly a boot to my stomach banged the air out of me. Wheezing for breath, curled on the floor, father's voice rang in my ears. I felt his rage again and again until the air seemed to have frozen.

One more...one more and I am gone, I thought.

"Stop it!" mother shrieked. "You're killing him...stop it!"

I saw her feet advance toward father's from behind. Wrestling, they shuffled in a dance. She had her heels planted in the carpet in her attempt to pull him back. Stumbling backwards with empty hands she fell on her side, wincing, gasping. We exchanged a heartfelt gaze. Her face glistened with tears and compassion. Grief marked the lines on her face.

Please...let me go mom. Please I cannot live knowing what I have done to you.

I lay there on the floor of the living room like a drunkard on a railroad . Shifted my gaze to the ceiling, her face too hurtful. I lay on my back and stretched out my arms like Jesus on the cross. With every blow to my ribs my body jerked and then I tasted blood. Coughed more blood. Then...

"Stop!" she shrieked.

"It's his fault!" he bellowed.

"We'll lose another son!"

Panting, he stopped. A scowl on his face, one of confusion and disgust.

No! No! You can't stop now...

He looked in my eyes and he knew what I was thinking.

“No, sonny, I'm not giving you the easy way out on this one,” he said hoarsely.

I drifted off...to the beginning.

Kenny was immersed in what he was reading. Alone at the desk by the window. He never lifted up his head to watch the traffic or the birds on the telephone wire. Many times I would come and go without a sign of him being distracted or aware of it. I admired that quality about him. I worried, though, that he missed out on a lot. The smell and sound of breakfast, the sunsets and all the adventures of thirteen year-olds.

Then there was a sound, an approaching noise from the street. Kenny raised his head. He inconspicuously inspected himself in the mirror, brushing bread crumbs off his white shirt and resetting his glasses. He put on a baseball cap over his unkempt hair. He then settled in his chair and waited as three girls passed by, Kenny could not take his eyes off one of them. She walked slightly behind the others and was quieter than them. There was a mystery to her, in the same way a girl with tattoos, black hair and piercings might be mysterious. She was meek, mellow and walked smoothly in her dress like she was gliding. If Kenny, in that state, were to take the place of a drooling dog in a picture I do not think anyone would notice a difference.

“Kenny!”

“Whoa, shit. What the heck, dude?” He seemed flustered.

“I called you like three times, you shouldn’t even be a bit surprised.”

He opened the book, flipped through it and settled at a random page. He pretended to have been reading it all along. A glance up at me told him I wasn’t fooled. Sighing, he put it down and sat on his bed.

“What were you doing, hovering around like that?” He asked.

“What were you doing?”

He snorted. “Um...I don’t know. Reading I guess,” he replied sarcastically.

“Is it?”

“Yeah. What’s with that face? You know I read. It’s like I told you. I was err...um... I don’t know.” He ran out of words.

“Yeah... sure.” I paused and grinned.” So what were you reading?”

“Um...pashas...stuff,” he mumbled, not a bit convinced by every word. My brother had never been one to risk lying, and it showed.

I gave him a questioning look, my eye brow raised.

He frowned.” What?”

I laughed.” Is this why you spend so much of your time in here? To catch a glimpse of her?”

“Who? No. I read.” He reached for his book and touched it, but did not pick it up.

“I know her,” I tempted. Saw him struggle to overcome his pride and ask me. Staring at the floor. “Her name is Casey.”

He swallowed.

“You know they’re going to the spot. That’s where I met her. Kenny, if you dig this girl that much, why don’t you come with me to the spot?”

“The spot?” he asked incredulously.

“Yeah.” I was whispering so mother would not hear. She was in the kitchen but still I was in her house. “There were no trips to the library all this time.”

“Huh?”

“Yeah, one day you can tell mom you’re going to the library with and you can get to see her in her underwear!” I chuckled.

He tilted his head and put on a wry smile. “I’ll think about it!”

I got up. “By the way,” I said over my shoulder as I reached the doorway. He delivered a keen glance. “Um...she has no boyfriend and it won’t be for long.”

“Well, then let’s go today!”

“That’s it, china!” I grinned. There was wrongness to this but I couldn’t quite put my finger on it.

I do not know what hurt me most. The inability to save him or that I am the reason he died. It is the mistakes we make with good intentions that seem to hurt us most. Especially when they cannot be rectified or undone. My pillow was soaked in my tears. My skull dry and tightened, a headache throbbing relentlessly. My heart like a soggy blanket pressing at my chest and lungs. My eyes were sore; they could not stand a second of sunlight, so I stayed with my curtains closed and in bed like an immobilised patient. I had no idea how many days had passed. All I knew or did was avoiding my parents. Did not help that much because every now and then I could hear mother weep. I never got used to the grief in her voice as she wept. Never knew I could cause someone so much agony. Sorrow hovered above the house like a ghost. It was winter in here, hollow and lifeless. Every now and then there would be a faint knock at my door; when I opened it, my food would be left there at my door step. The meals were stale and exanimate. One bite and I knew it was born out of the disdainful

hand of my father. It is difficult to tell if his apathy and lack of effort was due more to heartache or hatred. It did not cross my mind that maybe he did not want to see my wounds. He just knocked on my door and turned away. My injuries are of little concern to anyone now after what I have done. I reckon they will not care if I ran away or died. I owed them an insolvent debt.

I heard a faint knock at the door. I climbed out of bed and hobbled to the door. “Mother?” I said, startled. She stood there her eyes bloodshot and hair a mess. She smelt of mourning. Her face overwrought with grief.

She shuffled past me like a ghost. Stood by the window, her back towards me. I slumped onto my bed, my heart pounding. How do these conversations start? She stirred the curtain, allowing a bar of sunlight inside. “I am the only one who is going to hear you out. Might as well tell me what happened.” She spoke gently, but with no feeling; no hint of life in her voice. Again guilt stabbed at my heart.

“Mom-” I began, but she interrupted me.

“We both know that Kenny wouldn’t and didn’t. So tell me what you did?” she snapped, her voice just on the fringe of a sob.

I took a moment, and then began. “He never had any friends. All he did was go to school and back. Then he would lock himself in his room and read. Even at school he did not have any friends. All he did was hang at the library or read during lunch. He needed friends, someone to appreciate what he had to offer. How could someone be happy while leading a life like that. Other kids were starting to notice this and I saw an opportunity to try and help him...and...” my voice trailed off. The guilt squashed the air out of me. The more I spoke, the more its grip tightened.

“And then you took him to the river,” she whispered.

“There was a girl he liked. And this is the first time Kenny ever showed interest in anyone except his books. I knew the girl from the spot-“

“Wait,” she interrupted.” All those times you said you said you were going to the library, you were lying?”

“Yes, I was going to the river. I am so sorry, mother.”

There was a pause as she looked at me, considering this information. There was nowhere I could put my eyes. Shame and panic mixed in me and built up in the silence, until eventually she said, “Carry on.”

I hesitated. “Yesterday...they went. I mean the girls. And then I convinced Kenny to come with me. Thought he would be safe with me because... I am good swimmer, you know,” I felt like I was disintegrating, beginning to sob. “He got in swam with me for a while. He was enjoying himself and the company we had found. And then the tide came in...and I could not save him, mom. I tried and tried, until my arms were dead and a pain was inside my entire chest. And I wish I could have. If there was anything I could to save him I would have done it. If there was a way to bring him back, even if it meant giving my own life, I would do it.”

She stood there unresponsive and silent, gazing through the window or at some distant past – I could not tell.

“The worst thing is... I dreamt about it months before. It was exactly like it happened. I should have known. I’m so sorry, mama.” I paused. “How is dad?”

“How do you think he must feel?” she gave me a piercing glance. I was transfixed by it. “You took his favourite son.”

“I promise I will be twice the son I am.”

“That will not bring Kenny back. Your father loves you, but this is not something that he can forgive. He is angry, like I have never seen him before.” Her words were spoken with the kindness of a mother but the hurt of a bereaved parent. “Your father expected you to behave like a man. What has he got left to cling on to?”

Since then it seems I have absorbed Kenny into me. I started being more like him, seeing things the way he could have. Enough so that I would not forget the paramount pieces of myself. I felt like a burden most of the times; my presence seemed to be what brought Kenny's absence alive. It lodged into their hearts, making a void, felt mostly by my father. It brought him a great dislike for me, which he proceeded to show through pointing out every blunder I made. Every chance he got to show appreciation he took it for a change to daunt me and humiliate me. I could only feel compassion and a great sadness towards it; it must be terrible to feel the way he feels. Not being able to do away with the pain. For once in my life my father had something he could not fix and I was to blame for that. I allowed myself to endure in the hurt because I felt I deserved it, and that I could atone for it. Kenny's death, like all deaths had changed everything.

Forgiveness is not an overflowing fountain...I know that now.

THE END

Burning Up

He thought he would never pull another one, his breath that is. His knees were shaking. His heart pounding on his chest like a mammoth grappling for escape, hysterical and frightening. Soon his body trembled from all the places he thought impossible, his belly and butt. It felt like spasms. His thoughts screeching in his mind's path-ways, he could hear them under his scalp, temples and ear. They were reckless race car drivers, reckless because they had somehow decided to race drunk. They were hard to neither grasp nor follow, a complete discord riddled with panic and imminent disaster.

I can't do this, I can't do this! No, we have to go now!

Lebo looked at him from the driver's seat, slightly amused by what he was seeing. A grin began to form, wide and then wider as a funny thought crossed through his mind. It was his nature to be laughing even in times of tragedy, as far as he was concerned the world took itself seriously and everything and anything when looked at the right way is funny. There was no line for him, everything went. It took a close friend not to be offended, even they struggled at times, and a great blind tolerance to appreciate him (none of which people in societies would have). One time Tami told him his dog drowned in the pool and had died, a close pet of Tami's. "I'm pretty convinced that Sloopy is a person in the inside" Tami had once told him. When Lebo received the news of his friend's pet, Tami's eyes red from crying and cheeks glistened with tears, he burst out laughing. "It's not a sign of lack of empathy," he told Tami. "I do this sometimes and I don't know why. You know me .I love you man". It got getting used to. Other than that Lebo was a supportive, loyal and an understanding friend. Secretly Tami called him Reliable Lebo.

Tami's chest kept convulsing. His mouth gaped and eyes bulging, "I don't think I can do this. We should go back. Please, this was a bad idea. I mean who does this..." he spluttered on to contradict himself and into incoherency.

Lebo giggled. "Whoa , whoa. Calm down before you bust a vein ,buddy."

Tami gazed at him, desperate for anything that could help him get rid of the anxiety. He licked his lips. "No, buddy. No."

"No ,what?" Lebo asked, frowning with a smirk on his face, trying to restrain himself from laughing.

"C'mon, you know what I mean. And don't laugh please, I can't have that right now." Tami's voice trembled.

"I am sorry. But do you know how crazy this looks from my side right now?"

"Everything looks crazy from your side."

Lebo retrieved a cigarette from his pocket and lit it. "Believe me everyone would agree that this is a little crazy."

"Can I have one, please?" He grimaced. "I'm stressed out."

"No, you can't have ciggy before a date. She will smell it on you. Some girls don't like guys who smoke I told you that. It is not sexy or cool. This is not high school, bud," said Lebo.

He sighed. "What would you have me do now?"

Lebo pulled on the cigarette. "I want you to go the restaurant, pick a spot outside under the shade. Make it a romantic lunch. Just be yourself and be a gentleman, okay?"

"And you?"

"I will be right here in the car watching. She won't see me, won't mind me because after all it would just appear like I am waiting on something else. Not necessarily you. I will be patient. I won't embarrass you by getting out of the car to get you." He paused. "If I get bored or hungry I will go eat somewhere else and come back. Not very far from you. Cool?"

"Cool."

“Now go out there and text her, tell her where you are.”

“Alright.”

As Tami opened the car door to walk across the street Lebo called, “ Hey, Tami.”

“Huh?”

“Good luck.”

Tami smiled. “Thanks.”

“By the way, a perfect place for a first date you chosen.”

“Thanks.”

Lebo nodded. “Alright. Now go!”

She arrived no more than a few minutes after Tami had settled on a table by the railing on the corner, a shady place with a breeze blowing through. Tami caught a glimpse of a woman wearing a black blazer, sunglasses, hat with a stylishly wavy brim and a pencil skirt showing off her hips. Her clutch bag in her left hand. Her walk appealing and graceful. She was a creature of striking beauty. The sight of her rendered him heady. Her incense preceded her, filling his nostrils with spellbinding joy. The shackles of anxiety around his heart began to falter. She was walking her way with such confidence and vigour, a part of him believed she must be lost because surely that couldn't be her.

“Tami?” She grinned.

“Yes?”

“You look slightly slimmer than on your profile pic.” She observed, still on her feet.

Tami got to his feet, offering his hand. “You look...better.”

She shook his hand. She took her sunglasses off and put them on the table. Then pulled out a chair herself and sat down, leaning back comfortably. She squinted. “Better?”

“Yes.” Tami sat down.

“What is that supposed to mean?”

“You look better than I expected. Beautiful.” Tami paused. “Gosh, it is finally nice to meet you. After three months of constant texting and video chat here you are in front me. Never thought it would actually happen.”

“Why not?”

“You are always so busy with work and you must have a lot of men grappling for you. Never thought I had much of a chance. Never thought you would actually choose me to go on a date with.”

“Well, you seemed like a perfect match. And thank you.”

He stared at her mesmerized by her full lips and smoky eyes. “Damn!”

She giggled. “What?”

“You are much more beautiful in real life. What is someone like you doing on a dating site?”

“Well, it is not for losers anymore, is it?”

“Of course not. But still. Have you considered gaining a lot more weight and burning your face off?”

She frowned. “Why?”

“Because of all the attention you get. Must be overwhelming. Getting hit on every second by every jerk with a stick between their legs. And the freaking catcalls must be annoying.”

She laughed. “Your humour is strange.”

“Wow, I just made you laugh. Never heard a sound so heavenly.”

She blushed. “You’re sweet. Thank you.”

“Wow. Well let me stop drooling and focus. I haven’t even asked you how you are.”

“I’m well. Work is great, life is great. Thanks. How are you, sir?”

“I’m crapping my pants right now trying to figure out a way to impress you.”

He laughed and so did she. “I’m well thank you. I’m just glad that we finally managed to do this. Are you hungry?”

“I’m not the kind to come to a restaurant full.”

“Okay. I took the trouble of asking for the menu already.” He smiled, nodding. Impressed with himself.

“Thank you. That is gentlemanly of you.” She comically curtsied with her upper body.

He laughed, delighted with her.

Her facial expression changed, as if something was foul with the air around her. She sniffed around. “Do you smoke? You smell like cigarettes.”

“No,” he lied. “I was with a friend of mine who smokes maybe that’s why.”

She nodded. “Alright. Good. Smoking is a complete turn off for me. How is one gonna date a person who she might not have a fruitful future with anyway. It is waste. It is still the biggest cause of death in the world. Did you know that one of two smokers will die from smoking?”

He cringed. “What? Really?”

“Yeah. Those aren’t the best odds if you ask me. Now why would you pursue a future with a person like that. It is futile.”

The rest of date went well, shifting from evangelical tobacco companies bashing to conversations that were delightful and simmering with humour and mutual understanding. He realized unlike his previous dates, nothing about her demeanour and quirks he found repelling or annoying. Her profile on the site did not do her justice at all. She was much better in person, an enticing pleasure. Her voice pleasing to his ears and her casual touch undoing. She did

exceptionally fine and that surprised him. The food was good and all seemed to be in place. No annoying noises from street or from other customers, things were magically well. It was as if angels were orchestrating the whole date. The most surprising of all was how well he carried himself, not making himself come across as a loser. When something slipped that he construed to be detrimental or a turn off it got received as a turn on to his surprise. He couldn't make a mistake. His chest swelled with confidence and his voice rang with pride. Their hearts danced and swayed in the atmosphere. Their faces fed joy and calm into each other, the stars had aligned and the heavens were revolving around them. Surely the occasion was sanctified, a devil with a pitchfork would fail to ruin it. At last Tami had found something that harboured tremendous potential.

“I think I gotta go now. I had a great time,” she said. “It is quite sad that it has come to an end.”

Tami laughed. “I don't want you to go either. Wish we could stay here forever and order all food and drinks there is.”

She smiled. “Me too. Why does life has to get into the way of such wonderful things?”

“Wish I knew.” He shook his head.

She looked down into her hands. Reached for her bag and made as if to search for something inside.

“Don't worry about contributing anything to the bill. I got it.”

“Really?” she smiled.

“Yeah. Sure, Wouldn't be gentlemanly.”

“Thank you. You are great.” She grinned, mesmerizing him with her gaze. She sighed. “Do you have a lighter?”

Without hesitation he retrieved it from his pocket and gave it to her. Then she scowled, at first he did not understand why. Then he realized he had fell in her trap.

“Wow. You lied to me,” she said. “You do smoke.”

“Um – “

“I don’t have time to waste. Good luck on your search.” She stood and gathered her things while he just sat there with a stupid look on his face, convicted and guilty. Before she left she added one more thing, “You had a chance.”

As Tami climbed into the car, his shoulders slumped and with that look in his face, Lebo asked , “What did you do?”

Tami settled, staring into the air. “I messed up. She was perfect and I messed up, buddy.”

Lebo cackled. “I’m sorry. But what did you do? Seemed to be going fine to me. I’ve no idea what you could’ve done that ended it so quickly.”

Tami gazed at him. “She doesn’t like smokers.”

“What?” Lebo chuckled, tears starting to take form. “I told you not to tell her.”

“I didn’t,” he wearily said. “She had a her own way of finding out.”

“Man,” Lebo wiped a tear under his eye. “I’m sorry ,bud.”

His second laughing spell would be worse.

THE END

Author's Note

This story was written for a South African girl's magazine for a few bucks. It had to be fewer than two thousand words so it did not leave a lot for me to do. I always have a dark tone to my writing I think, and here I was forced not to do that which was a strange experience but I hope you enjoyed it. A female friend of mine loved it so maybe I did something right.

Letters Of Life

There's so much a man can do and this was one of those times. I stared blankly at the smog filled air, it was the last time I'd see this station. The last time I'd smell the freshly ground coffee and cigarette smoke. She became my only escape, the reason I travelled to distant lands and never wanted to come back. Yet this time I wouldn't return.

Dear Agatha, I won't return. Not now that is. Of all the possessions in the world I could've taken, I had my briefcase, one change of briefs, a toothbrush, my shaving blade and her cinnamon tobacco. She knew I loved it. She wouldn't be mad.

She knows being a man isn't easy. We have too much responsibility and not enough release. The world depends on us to be strong and courageous. I want to go back to a time of sword fighting with sticks and riding bikes at midnight causing raucous.

Where are those times Agatha? Do you remember our first kiss, New Years Eve? We were an hour to early for the countdown remember? Because our time was wrong on that old kitchen clock in my grannies kitchen. We beat the year before it could beat us. From then we fought. Fought to hold each other, fought to be accepted, fought for freedom in a world that had too many locks for me to be a man and bulldoze them down.

I tried to be strong for you, encouraging you to put the remarks aside. It hurt me too you know Aggie, no matter how hard I tried to conceal it. Deep under my layers of woven cloth, the pain lay, screeching every time we made a new memory, because it knew the end was near and our hearts would crash and burn into the embers of your incense stick.

Thank You for previewing this eBook

You can read the full version of this eBook in different formats:

- HTML (Free /Available to everyone)
- PDF / TXT (Available to V.I.P. members. Free Standard members can access up to 5 PDF/TXT eBooks per month each month)
- Epub & Mobipocket (Exclusive to V.I.P. members)

To download this full book, simply select the format you desire below

