

Possession

By Yolanda Faye Holden

Certain cultures believe that possession is a way of dying temporarily. As the imposing entity enters, the host vacates their body – the soul goes into oblivion, and the victim can remember nothing afterwards.

Sadness Masipa does not know how to tell her conservative parents that she is pregnant. She does not remember when she fell pregnant or how it happened. On her way home from school, walking the seven kilometre dirt road back to the village, she can envisage their response as she confesses her secret: her mother wails hysterically, collapses to the ground while clutching her head in her hands. Her father tackles her with his fists – cursing and calling her vicious names. He might very well chase her away like an unwanted dog and instruct her never to set foot in his house again.

Late at night, while the township's children were sitting wide-eyed around the fire, her Zulu grandmother used to tell stories about the impundulu. The feathers of this incredible bird, which looks like a large vulture or secretary bird, are sold to sorcerers and sangomas who make magical objects with them. Sometimes these birds take the form of a handsome youth with an enormous penis and have

intercourse with a woman, who will give birth to strange offspring. A woman who has a child by an impundulu is accused of witchcraft and ostracised.

That evening, when Sadness tells her parents that an impundulu has impregnated her, everything happens as she had expected. The scrawny teenager rubs zambuck ointment onto her bruises, packs her possessions in a plastic shopping bag, and heads to a friend's house.

Three weeks from the first day of her last menstrual period, the fertilised egg moves slowly along the fallopian tube towards the womb. Within her womb, one egg divides and separates to develop independently with two amnions. The embryos burrow into the womb lining. As the cells divide, some reach out like roots to the mother's blood supply. The inner cells become the brain and nervous system, the skin, ears and eyes. Another layer becomes the lungs and stomach, and a third layer becomes the heart, blood, muscles and bones. The nervous system develops when a groove forms in the top layer of the cells, which fold to make the hollow neural tubes. This becomes the brain and spinal cord. The heart also forms and a string of blood vessels connects it to the umbilical cord. Twelve weeks after conception, the foetuses are fully formed. The twins are growing. Determined to be born, they have no intention to evacuate the womb yet.

“Hey Sadness, are you really going to go through with this pregnancy?” her friend asks as they watch the South African football team, Bafana Bafana, lose against Nigeria.

“I don’t know what to do,” she panics. “Isn’t it too late for an abortion?”

“It is never too late for an abortion. You are homeless, jobless and husbandless. How will you take care of it?”

“I don’t even have money to pay for the procedure,” Sadness sniffs.

“Don’t, worry. My uncle knows someone who helps people in your situation terminate their pregnancies.”

Sadness is stunned, “It’s illegal!”

“Not when you have been raped.”

The heartbeat of an unborn child is very fast, about twice as fast as that of a normal adult. Mpho and Ntwa are shocked. Will their young mother really end their lives before they even begin? Although their eyelids are closed, they sense each other’s presence as only identical twins can - communicating telepathically. Afraid and in danger they hold hands and make an emergency pact to survive.

A week or so later, her friend prods her again, “Have you thought about the abortion?”

“I cannot bear the thought of ending my baby’s life. Maybe adoption would be a better option ... my teacher knows a wealthy suburban couple who wants to adopt a baby.”

“You might be right. At least rich parents will be able to give the child what you won’t be able to - a home, food, clothes and a good education.”

“Do you really think that anyone is able to love a child more than its mother?”

Mpho and Ntwa are surprised. “Adoption is a welcome alternative,” Ntwa suggests. “What about your cultural roots?” Mpho argues.

“I wouldn’t mind living in a double-storey urban mansion – having the best of everything.”

Mpho is disappointed in his brother, “What about mom?”

“She will have an opportunity to finish school and start a new life somewhere.”

“Somewhere? Over the mountain and under the poverty line, where dreams of abuse and incest really do come true? No, let’s consider other options, my brother.”

The twins are growing quickly. Their faces are beginning to look more human, their heads more in proportion and less top-heavy. Fine hair begins to grow. Eyebrows, eyelashes, finger and toenails become noticeable. Each baby develops his unique fingerprint.

The boys are mischievous. They quickly discover that they can eat whatever they fancy by causing their mother to develop a craving for certain foods. In such a poor household their choices are limited, but Mpho develops a taste for sweet potatoes and Ntwa for peanut butter, and they wake Sadness up in the early hours of the morning to scramble an egg or to boil porridge. Although they have only tasted ice cream once, the twins agree that is their favourite treat. Their fatigued mother is not at all impressed with their whims.

One evening after supper, a feeling of digestive discomfort overwhelms Sadness. The shifting movements feel awkward as she grabs hold of her belly.

“Is your baby moving around?”

Her face lights up, “Hey, my friend, this is a strange fluttering!”

Her friend is thrilled, “Do you know what this means? The baby can now respond to touch and sound. You should start talking to the little princess.”

Sadness is upset, “It’s a boy, not a girl!”

“Don’t be so defensive. I bet you it’s a girl.”

Sadness remains adamant. “I bet you your only jersey that my child will urinate standing up. It will be winter soon and I need something warm to wear.”

“You have a deal. Anyway, you will have to go to the clinic sometime soon.”

Ntwa is grumpy, “I do not like that woman! I am going to kick her in the head for suggesting an abortion when she puts her ear against our mother’s belly again.”

“She was trying to help,” Mpho reminds him. “She is also still a child.”

“She is a nosy know-it-all. She thinks she's some kind of soothsayer.”

“Don't be so hostile. Do you want to end up like our father?”

“Don't be silly, we don't have a father.”

“Oh, but we do. His DNA is in our genes, remains our inheritance. But we are not allowed to speak his name in the holy presence of the womb”.

After her visit to the clinic, Sadness is twice as terrified as before. “Twins!” She cannot believe her predicament – her child-rearing expenses are going to double. A part of her is also excited – twins are special. Before bedtime, as she relishes the warmth of her new jersey, she fidgets for her creative writing workbook. English was one of her favourite subjects and she had big plans to become a famous author. Now, she is compelled to give up her dreams and concentrate on raising the boys.

In the dimly lit shack, she fiddles for the matches. After lighting the paraffin lamp, she flops down onto her mattress and reads her story of creation to the unborn children:

In the beginning, there was only water and chaos. The Supreme Being, a hermaphrodite, decided to create order by splitting itself into two separate gods – a god of the sky and a god of the earth. Now, as then, the god of the sky gives light and rain, but also brings drought and storms. The god of the

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

