

CHAPTER 3

THE SCRIPT: BASADI BA TSWARA

3.1 ACT 1: AIDS AND THE TERRIBLE TWINS

Aids approaches Dina holistically to gain power over her. It uses its strengths as a master of the physical destruction of her body. Aids breaks down Dina's immune system completely and subsequently creates the opportunity for numerous infections to take control of Dina's body. The sores, the skeletal appearance of her body, the hair loss, the weakness, the pain on her face, the constant scratching and the loss of bodily functions are all visible signs of the work of these infections.

Aids also slowly but surely takes control of Dina's mind. At night, Aids keeps Dina awake with the constant scratching caused by the infections. Physically exhausted, it then uses the dark to scare her. It calls on its twins, Stigma and Discrimination, to contaminate the mind of Dina's uncle's girlfriend, the woman that clings to the man (the uncle) in the drama. She is petrified of Aids and a willing instrument for the tricks of the twins. Knowing about the fear of the dark that Aids has created in Dina's mind, the girlfriend switches off the main switch in the matchbox house, causing the backrooms to be consumed in total darkness. Petrified and trying to get away from the fear, Dina rolls around and falls off the bed. As soon as her screams of pain fill the air, Stigma and Discrimination tickle the girlfriend until she screams with laughter. During the day, she shouts remarks to passers by in the street in front of the matchbox house: "Aids lives here, Aids lives here." It is then that anger and frustration jump on the power wagon with Aids and the terrible twins, Stigma and Discrimination, aiming to disempower Dina totally and to leave her without hope.

Stigma and Discrimination also stand in the way of the community caring. When people hear about Dina's illness "they visited because they wanted to see for themselves but after seeing, they stopped coming", says Noluthando.

3.2 ACT 2: THE CAREGIVERS

But the women and other visitors to the backyard of the matchbox house challenge the power of Aids by their presence. Noluthando, Dina's sister, gets out of bed when she hears the screaming of Dina at night and lifts Dina back onto the bed, calming her down. Early in the morning, shortly after breakfast, Mpeki and Sunette visit her, attentively listening to her storied experiences. A little later in the morning, Dina's mother, MamaDina, joyfully sings her way into the room and soothes away her fear with the magic of touch. She washes Dina, dresses her, puts ointment on her sores, combs her hair and lifts her onto one of the plastic chairs where she can sit upright. She listens to Dina's stories of pain and frustration. Then she puts a fresh blanket on the double bed, sweeps away the dust, opens the windows and sprays air freshener in the four corners of the room. Mid-afternoon, sister Nora pays a visit to Dina. Sister Nora is the coordinator of a home-based care program. She asks about Dina's health and gives her medicines from the hospital. Through these caring experiences, Dina claims back some of the power lost to Aids and the terrible twins and a smile of hope lights up her face.

As her sister departs, the priest from the Zion Christian Church enters Dina's room. The women of the Church accompany him. Dina looks up at Religion next to her bed and he winks gently at her. The priest condemns the power that Aids has over Dina and rebukes Aids. The women of the Church sing hymns. It is then that hope is revived within Dina. She believes that one day she will be able to wear one of the uniforms again as she makes her way to church. She smiles at the thought of herself walking again.

3.3 ACT 3: A DESTRUCTIVE PARTNERSHIP

Through the presence of the women and the Church in the previous act, Aids feels the power and control over Dina slowly but surely slipping through its fingers. It makes a plan to regain its power. Knowing that Care is easily manipulated, it befriends Care masterfully in its quest for power. Aids persuades the home-based care nurse that good care is only possible through the use of Western medicine. When Dina refuses to drink the Western medicine from the hospital, the nurse furiously storms out of Dina's room, never to return again. Dina experiences feelings of rejection and anger. Aids befriends these feelings to break down Dina's resistance to infections. She scratches herself viciously and her coughing becomes more intense.

Aids also manipulates Care into exhausting Noluthando and MamaDina. MamaDina starts dragging her feet during her visits to her daughter and her merry songs dry up. She cries quietly where Dina can't see her. Her burden of care is becoming unbearable. She seems incapable of really helping Dina as the bedsores and the pain are getting worse every day. Perhaps a hospice will be able to take care of Dina properly. MamaDina feels so tired. The mere thought of her younger children and Dina's daughter at home fills her heart with devastation. Care has become a heavy burden. She fakes a weak smile when Dina looks up at her. Poverty, the dog of Aids, comes licking at the feet of MamaDina. Her husband works in the Limpopo Province and sends money home frequently, but this month the money is late. Dina asks her mother if she has food for the children. As her mother explains the situation, Poverty jumps on the bed and nestles itself against Dina. She struggles to breath.

Noluthando thinks about her childhood dreams of studying engineering and starts blaming Care for shattering her dreams. She feels old and ugly. She opens a drawer and stacks away her make-up.

She no longer jumps up at night to help her sister when she falls off the bed because of the tricks of Stigma and Discrimination. She doesn't have the

strength to clean the soiled bedding. She wishes her uncle who lives in the matchbox house would help her, but he obeys the rules of Patriarchy, who prohibits a man from doing a woman's work and caring is after all a women's job. She draws the curtains in her sister's room and wishes that her sister would die.

3.4 ACT 4: PREFERRED STORIES OF CARE

During their latest visit, Mpeki and myself feel the heaviness in the house, resulting from the destructive relationship between Aids and Care. We decide to reclaim some of the power by befriending Care. We draw back the curtains in Dina's room and listen patiently to the storied experiences of care of Dina, MamaDina and Noluthando. We hear the desperation in their voices. Today is the day for Dina and Noluthando to fetch the child support grants at the offices.

Stigma and Discrimination make a trip to the grants offices very difficult, embarrassing and shameful. The uncle doesn't allow Aids into his precious car. Noluthando needs to fetch a wheelchair from the municipal offices and then wheel her sister through the community to the offices. Stigma and Discrimination fill the bystander's hearts with fear and they either stare openly at the passing parade or talks behind their hands.

Mpeki and myself respond to the need experienced by Dina and her sister Noluthando, and we take them to the grant offices with their car. I also buy Dina some of her favourite food: chocolate, yogurt and fruit juice. Mpeki chases Poverty away by sharing food and some money with the family. Mpeki and myself invite Noluthando to a movie at a big shopping mall. Noluthando carefully takes the make-up out of her drawer, she dresses herself up and meets us at the centre. She gets to choose the movie and the three of us have great fun. Noluthando's father phones from the Northern Province, thanking us for taking Noluthando to the movies.

The next day MamaDina suggests that we go to the Municipal Offices to transfer the ownership of the matchbox house onto the name of Dina as the uncle has no right to occupy the house. He tore up the title deed a long time ago but MamaDina knows that her father left the house behind to be inherited by his grandchildren, Dina and Noluthando, because they were the ones that took care of him until he died.

Mpeki and myself take a trip with MamaDina to the Municipal Offices to sort out the matter. I also volunteer to find out whether there aren't any medicines which Dina can use for her scratching. I also pay a visit to the hospital in the backdrop and bring some plastic gloves with for MamaDina. MamaDina wears them ever since. The care provided to the two sisters and their mother fills MamaDina with renewed energy. She starts singing again, while touching Dina, washing her and clothing her. Noluthando is once again wearing make-up. I ask Dina how she feels about her mother taking such good care of her. Dina replies "I love my mother too much". MamaDina's eyes fill with tears of pride. She was so happy that caring could be so meaningful to her daughter. She tenderly touches Dina's hair.

Noluthando suggests that it would be better if she could access the child support grant on behalf of her sister. She doesn't mind, because she loves her sister and she cares for her. When she storied her experience of care, she titled her preferred story: "Caring for someone you love." Her father has secured her a part time job at a chain store in Centurion, a suburb not far from Atteridgeville, and she is excited at this new venture.

MamaDina, Noluthando, Mpeki and myself have befriended Care and we are a formidable team as we reclaim the power taken from us through the relationship between Aids and Care. MamaDina acknowledges that women are very strong and that caring makes women strong.

Dina starts asking questions about Mpeki's life and my own and gives us some sound advice. One week we can't visit the family. At their next visit,

Dina tells us how she missed us. Dina's father also came to visit her. She adores her father. She adores him because he buys medicines for her from the ZCC shop. Religion is her hero and the medicines make her feel much better. She believes that the medicines will give her the strength to one day walk again.

Dina surprises all the women with her preferred story. She no longer pays any attention to Stigma and Discrimination. When the girlfriend of the uncle shouts things to people in the street, she stops yelling at the girlfriend to stop the shouting. Stigma and Discrimination are not worthy of her attention and she reports that without attention the terrible twins becomes useless and stop their tricks.

For a very long time, Dina didn't want to go to the hospice although her mother and father thought it was a good idea. But today Dina agrees. Mpeki and myself promise to visit her in the hospice. Noluthando greets Dina with tears when she leaves the backroom in the yard of the matchbox house for the hospice. Three days after submitting her to the hospice, Dina passes away.

3.5 ACT 5: THE FUNERAL

The women are devastated. MamaDina doesn't talk, she just cries and cries. Mpeki and myself grapple to understand what happened since there were no visible signs of deterioration in Dina's health during the last few weeks. Dina was looking so well with all the care she received from the women, the priest and her father.

Dina's father comes home from the Limpopo Province. He blames the hospice. They promised him that they would give Dina the spiritual medicines from the Church, but when he went to fetch her things after her death, he found the unopened bottles on her side table. On top of everything, the report

from the doctors says that she died of AIDS. He feels that they have no right to document her death in that way. I ask whether I can contribute anything towards the costs for the funeral. He asks politely if I could assist with the rental of a toilet to which I agree.

Many strange faces visit the matchbox house during the week of mourning. A tent is pitched in front of the house and three hundred chairs are hired. Noluthando serves cookies she has made with some other strangers from margarine, sugar and flour. She still wears her make-up.

During the week of mourning and on the day of the funeral, amongst the crowd of strange faces, are also a few familiar faces: Religion, Stigma and Discrimination and Poverty. Religion consoles MamaDina through songs and prayers. Stigma and Discrimination visit to see if Dina really died of “the illness.” As the week of mourning is drawing to an end, Poverty finds a hot spot in the sun to lie, waiting patiently for the day of the funeral. He knows there will be plenty to eat.

The family asks me to say something at the funeral after the sermon conducted by the Priest because I am a friend of the family. I explain to the sea of strange faces that I came to understand the real meaning of caring during the time that I knew the family. I talk about the care provided to Dina by Noluthando, her mother, her father and the Church. Afterwards, Noluthando is crying. She says it was the first time ever that someone recognized her and thanked her for taking care of her sister.

3.6 ACT 6: AND THE WINNER IS ...

Aids's dog, Poverty, has moved in with MamaDina after the funeral. MamaDina is now taking care of six children in her shack in Jeffsville: seven year old Naledi and five year old Ntswaki, both Dina's children, fourteen year old Lerato, eleven year old Neo and nine year old Maserami, all three MamaDina's own children and two year old Manakedi, Noluthando's child (Noluthando is now working more frequent shifts at the chain store).

Most of the money that her husband earns is being used to pay off the loan for the funeral. Although the ZCC Church has a funeral scheme, MamaDina never enrolled in it. There is no money for food or taxi fees for the children to go to school. But MamaDina lives her preferred story: she still believes a woman is very strong, so strong that she can even hold on to a sharp knife at the blade to protect her children. She will protect her children like a chicken. Religion also makes her strong as it did her daughter and she prays to God for strength.

The social worker of *Heartbeat* says that she will help MamaDina access foster care grants for Dina's children. This will bring some more money into the family and help to keep Poverty at bay. Poverty is becoming more arrogant every day.

MamaDina's husband phones me to ask about the grant, but I say that the Department of Social Development has to grant permission at the Children's Court for the organisation to do foster care placements. However, the organisation is currently stuck and awaiting an answer from the Department of Social Development. They have made numerous phone calls and are still awaiting an answer.

King Patriarchy nods his head in approval. The ancestors of this family had stuck to his rules. MamaDina never finished school because it was not expected from girls to study. Gender stereotyping and culture determined that women should bare children and care for them in the private space of her house while the men would work in the public domain, providing care by earning an income. Women can earn some income doing things from home, but they should stay home and never earn more than the men. That is not allowed.

The curtain drops while MamaDina is preparing the last few spoons of pap from the bag for the seven hungry children, on the two-plate stove in her shack. The youngest one is crying. Two of the kids are fighting over a tomato

and the eldest child sits in a corner staring at nothing. Then a two-metre tall figure with bulging muscles emerges from the side curtains. He grins maliciously as he grabs MamaDina and pulls her by the hair through the shocked crowd. Her body is chained and she doesn't make even the slightest of sounds.

The rhythmic sound of drums turns the crowd's attention back to the stage. In the spotlight in the front of the stage are two figures. They are embracing each other, both wearing black coats and black masks: Aids and Care. Care holds the tongue of MamaDina in his right hand. He bows. Joining him on stage is the dark figure with the malicious grin. "Meet my best friend ever" Aids shouts, "Injustice!"