

Category B: Creative Writing (Essay)

The Girl In The Mirror

The past few weeks I have not been able to recognise the girl looking back at me in the mirror. Her eyes are melancholic, her face is in a constant frown, and she is tired of all the injustice. But today she was gone and I could finally see myself staring at me in the mirror, my eyes glistening with spirit and hope; all because it was June 16.

June 16. The day we've all been waiting for. This day has been overwhelming my thoughts for weeks now, since it is the day we finally become free. It's the day that the government will listen to us, and the day that we, school children, change our country. I glanced at the clock and saw that it was time to leave. I took one last satisfactory look at myself in the mirror, then stepped into the streets of Soweto.

An abundance of school children littered the tarred streets. Excitement and various conversations filled the air, creating an exuberant atmosphere; I couldn't help but grin. I stumbled through the crowd and to the front in an attempt to find Athandwa, my boyfriend. He was having a conversation with one of the leaders, when he saw me and beckoned me over. I walked toward him and was immediately embraced into a hug.

"You seem happier today, " Athandwa commented, breaking the hug with a smile etched into his face.

"Well, it's finally the day we make change, of course I am."

"Are you ready?" he asked, concern swirling around in his eyes.

"Yes. We'll be okay Atha, stay strong" I reassured him.

He was about to say something else when the leaders called for everyone's attention. It was finally time.

June 16 was everything I imagined it to be. A united community, peacefully protesting against Apartheid. We marched through Soweto with our fists and placards held high, with a spirit like no other. Our parents stood by their doors, curious yet supportive. Everything was going well, until the all-too-familiar police cars arrived. A short but tense silence followed. I could sense Atha's nerves, and squeezed his hand in support. We then continued protesting, since we were not harming anyone. That was until a loud crackling noise was heard, and our vision became blurred; teargas. Agonizing screams pierced the air, demolishing the optimistic mood and panic set in. Gunshots rang through the air, and chaos erupted. Children were crying, students were running, and innocent people were dying. We ran until our legs couldn't handle it anymore, and amidst all the smoke I saw a familiar hand reaching out and begging for help, and only in that moment had I realised that Athandwa was no longer standing by my side.

When I reached him, fear and panic took over me. Crimson blood was seeping out of his stomach, fast. The time between me reaching Athandwa and us hiding behind the abandoned school bus seemed like years, but it was merely a few minutes. I wrapped my blazer around his torso in an attempt to stop the bleeding, but time was running out and we both knew it. I held his head in my trembling arms, his cries haunting the air. Tears were forming in my eyes, and Atha's erratic breathing slowly came to a stop.

I was overcome with sadness and sorrow. It felt like I had just lost part of me, and I didn't know what to do next. I wanted to do nothing but sit by my Atha, but I knew that I had to leave, or else they would catch me. With a heavy heart and tears streaming down my cheeks, I covered Atha's eyes and said my final goodbyes.

While I was leaving him, I glanced over my shoulder and saw my reflection. It would be a lie if I said I wasn't surprised.

The girl in the mirror was back, and she wasn't going to leave for a long time.