

kagiso lesego  
**MOLOPE**



**THIS  
BOOK  
BETRAYS  
MY  
BROTHER**

**OXFORD** literature for southern africa

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SOUTHERN AFRICA

# 3

IT WAS A SCORCHING December afternoon, six months after our move up to *diEx*. Basi was still in that phase when he was pretending (for our mother's benefit, and only she believed him) not to be spending much time with Kgosi any more. He was like an undercover detective, watching our mother's every move, asking her questions about where she was going and when she would be back so that he could time her departure with Kgosi's arrival. He would phone Mabatho, a girl who lived two houses away from Kgosi, because Kgosi's family didn't have a phone; and she would hang up the phone, run out to Kgosi's house and bring him back to her house. My brother would phone a few minutes later (impeccably timed, he liked to brag) and Kgosi would pick up the phone. They would arrange when to meet and then Kgosi would come up as soon as my mother had gone out. As always, Basi was diligent to a point where I could imagine him working successfully as a spy.

But something happened that day that made my mother change her mind, and she turned back after Kgosi had already started walking up the hill.

So, walking with four other boys, Kgosi arrived too soon, and saw our mother's car still parked outside. I was upstairs in my room, and I watched them duck behind a neighbour's van as my mother took her time in the driveway. I was squinting against the morning sun that flooded through the window of my room, wanting to see who the other four boys were – but

they had their backs to our house as they hid behind the truck. All I could see were their neatly shaven heads and newly broadening shoulders, their clean clothes ironed and crisp.

To my left, in front of the garage, my mother slung her handbag over her shoulder and clicked her heels together as if to get rid of dirt – even though there probably was none, this was a long-standing habit. She examined the cleanliness of the car and then said something to Lolo, our sometimes driver and the man who had just washed it, and he quickly skipped over to open the gate. He always hurried when she asked him to do something – I think more out of respect than urgency. I hated watching him run like this. It made him seem a lot younger than his white beard suggested. But my mother always watched him with a look of contentment, satisfied, I suspect, that she was being obeyed.

She got into the driver's seat, rolled down the window and yelled up at me. "Stop gawking at the neighbours. You're making us look envious."

Then she put on her sunglasses, reversed the big red Mercedes and drove out past Lolo, who stood holding the gate open. I had jumped away from the window at her instruction and worried about whether the boys knew that I had been looking at them. I ran to the bathroom to check on my hair, put on lipgloss and then I took a minute to decide if my skirt was too short. I heard my brother's voice, which carried from the area between the house and the back room up to the bathroom window.

He said, "*Ma'gents*," which was how he and his friends greeted each other. Someone said "Heita!" and then the voices faded with their footsteps as they walked up to the gate. My parents had put in lots of pretty grey pebbles on the walk so that you always heard people's footsteps coming and going – a sound I had always found reassuring until years later on the day it became terrifying to me.