Poems from *Complete Poems*
by Isabella Motadinyane

You pulled an elastic

You pulled an elastic
down my legs
i looked into your eyes
and said words
you wanted to hear

with the reflection of the moon on your face
tickling pores of awareness in me
i spread my sea wings apart
for you to come in

I was cooking

I was cooking in the kitchen
he sat there folding arms
my body carrying his eyes around
he was actually ogling me
huffing sounds suddenly emerged from behind
i slowly turned round fed up
knowing how sharp my tongue can be
he coaxed my smile
to melt the mask from my face
i grinned and said hi
he winked an eye and sheepishly asked
who is it that you are seeing lately
ag man
did he have possessions before
i thought aloud

My bruised soul

My bruised soul
colour my face pale
identity gradually fading
trying to stretch
wrinkle lines straight
On my face
ounces and pounds
drop and drain energy
off my shoulders weak
my night shrieks
shock the neighbours
“this is weird
is she eaten up by rooi miere?” *red ants*
they cry
feeling my pain
my tears
Pulling a sinking boat
created me pains

Sink a shaft

Dark night babe
toss and turn
the clouds above
you make the sober go drunk
come in from the cold
warm you up
sink down our throat
the clouds above
mountains so high
sink babe sink
sink a shaft
move slowly down the mountain
down our throats
toss and turn babe
sink on me
all night
dark clouds above
you make the sober go drunk
sink babe sink
sink it smooth
sink a shaft

Touting taxi

Touting taxi
topsy
turvey
pep talk
from Zola
to Jozi
music background
loud and loud
pep talk
trace
toilet tissue
tracks
van bo
ke bona dibono — *I see buttocks*
ke sa bone — *without seeing*
beng ba tsona — *whose they are*
taxi
topsy turvey
pep talk
constant thuggery
criss cross
cross pollination
Christianity charged
short cut corner
Magomosha style — *tsotsi style*
corner
Market and Nugget
taxi topsy
turvey
pep talk
drinking beefeaters
eyes off
melting bazookas
meaty juice
ba harela jwala — *they guzzle alcohol*
eke ba kgaohile maoto — *as if their legs were cut off*
kwala molomo lovey — *shut your mouth lovey*
ke mametse I'm listening to
touting taxi
topsy turvey
pep talk

Stella

Stella Stella
I've been to your home
I found your mama there
she said
you left long ago

I saw tears in her eyes
and I knew
it was real
Stella come home
to me
Stella Stella
there is no life without you
our kids are missing you
you know I love you so
come back
Stella Stella

Stella please come home
I've been to your home
I found your mama there
she said
you left long ago
left her sick
and hungry …

One leg in

One leg in
another leg out
tight me up
strongly sewn
visible mending
back pocket trademark
silver buttons attached
not woven once
twice or thrice
die is mos botsotsos *(skin-tight denim jeans)*
back pocket
front pocket
nog 'n maal talk to me
die is mos botsotsos
pull high
stretch on a high way
ons pedestry moet doves *we travel with doves*
no attention to whistlers my weebit
no hearing sweet nothings
strongly sewn
die is mos botsotsos

Nonhlanhla

Nonhlanhla is gone
tears pearls laughter
dreads survey my toes
touch of anguish
pat my mind
the target is found
Nonhlanhla is gone

They nailed her
pink nails oozing
they dragged her
reshuffled her
off the ground
pinned her tongue
hanging loose
blood pool flooded
to dry up heavens
Nonhlanhla is gone
staring
into the dark
tired of Nkosi yami *my Lord*
go away
biting my lips
my dark room walls
caressing the belt
to end the beginning
of a far away song

In my mind
Zion bells ring
bayavuya *they are happy*
umoya wami uyakhathazeka *my soul gets troubled*
voices crying
in the dark
darkness
swallows the light
my heart
has stopped beating
no mercy in Zion
Nonhlanhla is gone

Hoshe ngwana

Hoshe ngwana
gata o gatoge
melodi kafa le fa
ngwana dikoti marameng
pososelo eka naledi
sefahleho sone
botjhitja bo kgatlang mahlo
re bone mesebetsi ya hao
naheng mona
ba reng
o sekobo
ke baikaketsi
ba lese ba iphore jaalo
shine bright sunbeam
hoha
kana wena o motswa mantlha
gata o gatoge thope
shine bright sunbeam
hoshe thope
hoha
moo o fetileng
ho sala dinaledi
ho ha
thebetha Mohlakwana
thebetha Mofokeng
re bone mesebetsi ya hao
digaboi di tseleng jwale
raak hulle dizzy ousie
slaat hulle giddy poppy
ba fehlile jwale
ba ho bapallang sax

Hey babe

Hey baby
walk with a strut
draw all the whistles
with the dimples in your cheeks
smile like you're a star
as for your face
its roundness pleases the eye
here in the country
those who say
you are ugly
they lie to themselves
let them fool themselves
shine bright sunbeam
wow
you're the best
walk with a strut girl
you are number one
hey girl
ho ha
shine bright sunbeam
when you walk past
wow
stars are left behind
pride yourself Mohlakwana
pride yourself Mofokeng
make them dizzy sister
hit them giddy doll
they have arrived now
those who play sax for you

trans. Lesego Rampolokeng

Rope sa motswetse

Basadi matlung
banna ntle
ho qaaka mona
banna akgelang
pelo ya morena
melamu le se e lebale
phala di be ho lona
ho qaaka mona
mosadi a tswa a kgenne
a jele sekaja
fuba di le moyeng
mose o kuketswe dinokeng
monna qosheletsaneng
tedu hase tsa botsofe
tedu ke tsa lekaota
mosadi wa chobolo
o lebisitse bohale lekaoteng
la hloka ho tsotella
la tswela pele le peipi
phate tsa lahleha motseng
tjhaba sa hloka kgotso
fanang beso
fanang ka tlotla
fanang ka kgotso
fanang ka rope sa motswetse
le ahe kgotso motseng
Morena hlwella dithaba
o kope kgotso ho ramasedi
a ho sedimosetse
rapedisa pula Morena
kgomo tsa ntate
di tshwerwe ke lenyora
baahisane haba mahlong
ba hadiketswe
dithose melomong
metsi ha hosa kgellanwa
tsena ditaba di mahlong

Thigh of the new mother

Women indoors
men outdoors
there is a problem here
men throw out
the heart of the king
do not forget your fighting-sticks
keep your whistles with you
there is a problem here
a woman came out angry
in full flight
chest puffed out up in the air
dress hitched up to the hip-bone
man run and hide (deep in the undergrowth)
beard belongs to the lone warrior
the woman who is a shrew
pointed her sharpness at the young strong warrior
he paid no attention
he just continued smoking his pipe
blankets got lost in the neighbourhood
the nation was without peace
give us peace
give us respect
give of peace
give of the thigh of the new mother
build peace in the neighbourhood
king climb the mountains
ask for peace from the almighty
may he bless you
pray for rain king
my father's cattle
they are thirsty
neighbours do not look one another in the eye
they have had fried for them
seeds in the eyes
we no longer draw water for one another
these matters are in the eye

trans. Lesego Rampolokeng