



Mother to Mother (Bluestreak)

By Sindiwe Magona

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Sindiwe Magona's novel *Mother to Mother* explores the South African legacy of apartheid through the lens of a woman who remembers a life marked by oppression and injustice. Magona decided to write this novel when she discovered that Fulbright Scholar Amy Biehl, who had been killed while working to organize the nation's first ever democratic elections in 1993, died just a few yards away from her own permanent residence in Guguletu, Capetown. She then learned that one of the boys held responsible for the killing was in fact her neighbor's son. Magona began to imagine how easily it might have been her own son caught up in the wave of violence that day. The book is based on this real-life incident, and takes the form of an epistle to Amy Biehl's mother. The murderer's mother, Mandisi, writes about her life, the life of her child, and the colonized society that not only allowed, but perpetuated violence against women and impoverished black South Africans under the reign of apartheid. The result is not an apology for the murder, but a beautifully written exploration of the society that bred such violence.

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Mother to Mother (Bluestreak) By Sindiwe Magona Bibliography

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

The senseless killing of Amy Biehl, a young Fulbright scholar who had gone to South Africa to help residents prepare for the first democratic elections in the history of that country, is the basis for this novel. On the day before she was scheduled to return home to America in August 1993, Amy gave a ride to several co-workers who lived in the poverty-ravaged all-black township of Guguletu. Rioting students pulled her from her car and stabbed her. South African novelist and short story writer Sindiwe Magona eschews a tabloid recreation of the crime, envisioning instead the world of Amy's killers, and creating in Mandisa, the mother of one of those young men, a martyr whose heart and life reflect the tragedy of apartheid. As her son Mxolisi's guilt is revealed, Mandisa mourns him, equating her loss with Amy's mother's. Determined to strike a common chord of grief with the woman she views as her Sister-Mother, Mandisa laments the circumstances of her own life, thereby hoping to explain her son's actions. She recalls with affecting clarity her coming of age in a stern but loving community whose reliance on established customs are a refuge from the relentless and brutal change instigated by the government's apartheid policy. Happy until the age of nine, when her family is forced to relocate to a desolate patch of land, Mandisa becomes a mother at 15 and a housemaid shortly thereafter. Mxolisi's introduction to racial violence occurs as a child, when he witnesses the shooting deaths of two older boys whom he idolizes; by age 20, he's become a respected leader of the student revolutionary movement. Although Magona's pacing seems irritatingly slow at times, the mood becomes taut as Mxolisi and Amy approach their moment of destiny in this chilling and ingenious docudrama, a noteworthy American debut for a writer whose work has received well-deserved praise in her own country. 3-city author tour. (Oct.)

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From Library Journal

Based on the death of Amy Biehl, a white American student killed by black youths in South Africa in 1993, this novel looks at the murder through the eyes of the killer's mother (in the novel, only one youth committed the crime). In a letter to the murdered woman's mother, Mandisa tells the story of her oldest son, Mxolisi, born when she was 14. Growing up under apartheid, with little education, crushing poverty, and no hope for the future, Mxolisi becomes one of the lost ones, so full of rage that every white face becomes the enemy and freedom is won only through blood. Yet as Magona shows, each character must share some responsibility for the tragedy that destroys two families, making this more than simply a novelization of a headline. Magona's portrayal of one mother's suffering is written with depth, honesty, and compassion for all of apartheid's victims. First published in South Africa in 1998, this is recommended for large public libraries and libraries with collections of modern African literature. A Ellen Flexman, Indianapolis-Marion Cty. P.L.

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From Kirkus Reviews

A black South African writer, now New York-based, debuts with a novel that, as it seeks to explain the real-life 1993 murder of young American Amy Biehl, is often more an angry indictment of apartheid (justified) and of whites in general (less justified). Biehl was an idealistic Fulbright Scholar who, while working on a democracy project, was dragged from her car in a black township and stabbed to death by a mob of young blacks. The Biehl family has been remarkably forgiving, though the youths were subsequently released. The narrative takes the form of an imaginary letter written to the young woman's mother by Mandisa, the mother of one of the accused, 20-year-old Mxolisi. She attempts to elucidate why her gentle son became a killer, recalling her own childhood and the brutal relocation of her entire community to Guguletu, a segregated area in a barren place far from the city. At 15, she accidentally became pregnant, which, as much as apartheid, led

to a hard life for both mother and son: Mandisa, forced to leave school, became a maid and reared Mxolisi alone. Eventually, bright Mxolisi also dropped out of school, in his case because Mandisa could no longer afford his textbooks. He was soon active in the "No Education Before Liberation" movement of the late 1980s, as black children left the classrooms for the streets to protest apartheid in increasingly violent ways. Popular and gifted, he became a leader of the gang that would turn murderous. The story, a heartfelt brief in support of a son and a lost generation, has a vehement, polemical tone. Whites are described as the "scourge" that must be removed; Mandisa tells Mrs. Biehl that "people like your daughter have no inborn sense of fear. They so believe in their goodness" that it "blinker(s) their perception." The prose is also uneven, and the voice far too sophisticated for a narrator of supposedly limited education. A disappointing take on a vital, relevant subject. -- Copyright ©1999, Kirkus Associates, LP. All rights reserved.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Adrian Kao:

In this 21st hundred years, people become competitive in each and every way. By being competitive today, people have to do something to make these survive, being in the middle of often the crowded place and notice through surrounding. One thing that at times many people have underestimated the item for a while is reading. Yep, by reading a guide your ability to survive increase then having chance to stand up than other is high. For yourself who want to start reading some sort of book, we give you that Mother to Mother (Bluestreak) book as starter and daily reading e-book. Why, because this book is greater than just a book.

Mark Montague:

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Carol Ton:

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Danny Solberg:

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