



Pauline Omoboye

Purple Mother

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For Josie Parkinson

Many thanks to...

My mother, Sylvia – my life
My father, Ioswell – my smile
Bridget – my partner and my sunshine
My children, Mark, Clare, Kemi and Remi – my inspiration
My grandchildren, André, Tai-Rho, Kaeden, Renée and
Rochelle – my future
My sister, Mumba (Maria) – in every sense of the word
My brothers, Leroy, Clifton, Stanley and Cecil – my heroes
My nephew, Duane
My nieces, Cettina and Arniecia
My goddaughter, Rhea
My cousin, Ruth
My true friends, Judi and Marguerite
Lemn Sissay – who helped me realise my gift
And everyone at the Pankhurst Centre

Introduction

I started writing as a child when I used to make greeting cards for my Mum. As a mother of four and a grandmother of five, my family are still my main source of inspiration. It's not always easy to find the space to write, living in a house shared by four generations! I keep note pads and pens stashed away in bathroom cabinets, under the bed – anywhere I might be able to sneak off to for a few moments' peace.

Most of my poetry is based on true experiences, my own and those of the people close to me. But I also get ideas from the media. At school I was really struck by the war poets and liked to look deeper into the meaning of things. Some of my poems try to bring to the fore issues which I think are important – the kind of subjects people don't like to talk about. As a poet I always try to be open and honest with myself. I think it's important that writers don't censor themselves or shy away from difficult subjects.

I believe words are very powerful. I had a forced break from writing for a few years due to family commitments and really missed that creative buzz. It was very scary but exciting getting back on stage to take part in the Manchester Poetry Festival slams. As soon as I felt the audience's reaction, I began to enjoy myself. When I'm up on stage I feel like a peacock: standing tall and proud, spreading out my majestic feathers, revealing my hidden depths. Winning the Stage to Page Competition has given me back my confidence – I've now got new words to share with all those who want to listen.

Pauline Omoboye

The Whole Of Me

Part of me lived
While part of me died
Part of me screamed
While part of me cried

Part of me strong
While part of me weak
Part of me yelling
The other scared to speak

Part of me here
The other part there
Part of me strong
While part lived in fear

Part of me healed
While part of me bled
And part of me lived
While part of me dead

Part of me present
While part of me doped
Part of me wishing
The other part hoped

Part cared for my children
While buried inside
The hatred and anger
The search for my pride

Part of me willing
The other part able
Then all of me threw
The bad cards on the table

Finally solid
And all my tears shed
I banish the nightmares
And hold up my head
To sing out the words
Of my favourite song

There's something inside so strong

And by looking within
Just see what I've found
The best of me brilliant
The whole of me sound

Part of me wicked
The whole of me wow!
I'm Pauline
I'm sexy
Just look at me now.

It's All Wrong

It's alright for you to tell me 'Darling'
That I mean more to you than your life
And that if you didn't really love me
You wouldn't have me for your wife

It's alright for you to tell me 'Honey'
That I'll see you when I do
Then expect me to be sat here
When you arrive in a day or two

It's alright for you to tell me 'Love'
That two wrongs don't make a right
When I meet you at the disco
Though you said you were working nights

It's alright for you to tell me 'Sweetie'
That all I have, I should share
But whatever's in your pocket
Is yours, so it stays there

It's alright for you to tell me 'Bastard'
But it's not alright for me
So do us both a favour
And leave my life to me.

Facts Of Life

It isn't just a coincidence
Take my word for it
It's a fact
This is my actual colour
I am naturally black
My hair has more than a kink in it
My eyes are meant to be brown
My lips, my most prominent feature
Are the most well-spoken lips around
And I know that my hips are distinctive
And my legs are strong and they're firm
But it's my heritage that holds most importance
And it's this fact that some folk should learn
We are what we are
There's no denying
We see what we see
And that's no lie
And if some people misunderstand me
It's because my culture they cannot deny
Some say that they hate all the 'Darkies'
Then order their sun beds in bulk
And when their skins are wrinkly and patchy
It's at us that they look and then sulk
So I'll tell you
It's with feelings and a great honour
I'll always stand up and I'll say
I'm **African**
It's a fact
I'm happy
And I'm special
In a unique kind of way.

24th December 1956

She came to this land '56
She sailed the ship for weeks
Left a homeland and her family
For riches she did seek
Followed a husband to a country
For a future she could not predict
To a land of milk and honey
She was made to suffer it
She came with a tiny baby
Six weeks old, lay in her arms
To a land so cold and lonely
Nothing to protect her from all harm
To a house with many strangers
In a room fit for a pig
But she made this place a home
And raised her kid
And like all the wives before her
She soon found a factory job
And woke in the early hours
Just to earn a few measly bob
Left her kid with an unworthy minder
Set out at the crack of dawn
And with fifteen others in a minibus
They would travel until morn
The conditions, they were treacherous
And although she did despair
She came to make some money
Just enough to pay the fare
And send for the son she had left behind
No money to bring him on the boat
And every time she whispered his sweet name
It brought a lump to her throat.

She came to fend for her family
Left behind in that beautiful land
Where the sun shone and reflected
Its beams amongst the sand
Where the sea so blue it shimmered
And rippled laughter in its depth
She came and barely whispered
And she often wept.

Many a tear she shed in silence
And every two years she bore a child
She cooked, she cleaned, she polished
Worked all the hours that God sent
But hard work and perseverance
Paid off in the end
She came
She saw
She conquered
And she's my mother and my friend.

In Your Day

Alright, alright I know mum
When you were my age
You had bread and dripping for tea
And you didn't have TV
You had to queue in a line of six
To get in the bath for your daily dip
And then the water was barely clean
Oh! Mum your day was really mean
I know I'm being selfish, mum
When I ask for a new suit that costs forty-five pounds
When you had to wear your sister's hand me downs
Dresses with hems
That touched your ankles
And sleeves hanging over your finger tips
Oh! Mum your times were really mean
Alright – I won't answer back
You never did – you never told a fib
You had to carry coal half way round town
And buy essentials with half a crown
I know mum
No pudding after your Sunday joint
But mum I don't really see the point
And I'm certain my brothers and sisters don't
But after all I am nearly thirteen
And I know your times were really mean
But I want a party to celebrate
Oh mum, change your ways
It's never too late.

No Regrets

It's been more than five years
That I've managed alone
I've cooked and I've cleaned
I've established a home
I've woken in the night
To the tears and the pain
I've told them I'm sorry
When they've mentioned
Your name
I've wiped up their blood
I've acted my part
I've sewn up their clothes
And I've mended their hearts
My life I have altered
To revolve around theirs
I've prayed to the
Lord Jesus Christ
That he'll answer my prayers
And whenever I'm lonely
The children rarely know
Because I've learnt
That with patience
My love I must show
And whenever I get angry
I'll never forget
That my mother stood
By me, so I have
No regrets.

Coping

I cope
Four kids
A home
I cope
Electric bill
Gas bill
Water rates
I cope
Buy new shoes
Need a new coat
School trip to France
I think I cope
Grocery bills
Headache pills
Council Tax!
Yes... I cope
Feed the goldfish
Take the dog for a walk
Entertain friends
Hoover... cook... polish... mop
I know I cope
Be doctor
Be nurse
Teacher
Psychologist
Referee
Father... Mother
Peacemaker
Dictator
Councillor
Listener
Ignorer
Judge and blooming jury
And they have the cheek to call us the weaker sex
Jesus Christ
We definitely cope.

Black And Beautiful

Mummy can you tell me something true?
Is there something special about me and you?
Are we like Martians who come from space?
Why do people stare at me in disgrace?

My hair is combed,
My clothes are smart,
My teeth are sparkling white,
My shoes they shine,
The school bag's mine,
My trousers not too tight.

Mummy can you tell me something, can I ask you true?
Is there something special about me and you?

Son, listen carefully, you're perfect and you're bright,
The only thing that you don't have is the colour skin
that's white.

That's why they think you're different,
The facts are clear and true,
Being black is beautiful,
Like perfect little you.

Love You, Mum

Can I have...
Can I have a lolly mum
Can I have a pear
Can I have...
What's in the cupboard mum
Can I have...
What I see there?
Can I have...
Can I have 5p mum
Can I have a drink
Can I have...
That straw in the draw mum
Can I have...
That cup on the sink?
Can I have...
Can I have some dinner mum
Can I have some cake
Can I have
It on my special plate?
Can I have...
Can I have a hug mum
Can I have a kiss
Can I have
All of your love mum
Can I add you
To my can I have list?

Rose In Full Bloom

Who is this person I see before me?
No longer pigtailed hair
And dimples of innocence – in its place
Is the gracefulness of womanhood
Which ever so gently and silently
Creeps and seeps beneath the skin of childhood
No longer to be the she
Who confided and trusted me
With her most private thoughts
No longer the bashful ploys
Used to twist me around her little finger
Instead comes independence, opinions
And self concerns
I yearn for the girl I once knew
But I know
I will no longer find
The girl with the pigtailed hair
And the dimples of innocence
Instead –
Before me is
Woman.

Beating The Door

Another violent pounding
At my front door
Another disheveled body
Collapses on my floor
Another weepin' baby
Confused and distressed
Another disturbing chapter
In this repeated text
Another badly beaten body
Clothes in shreds
Another beating undeserved
Deep gashes to her head
Another scar upon her body
A deeper one in her mind
Another case of vicious violence
Of the most degrading kind
Another silent crime unreported
Kept locked up inside
Another unrecorded incident
Too ashamed to confide
Another sleepless night
And the fear of more
Until the next innocent victim
Comes knocking at my door.

Untimely Thoughts

Like the springs of a clock
My hands are bound
Within my mind is a battle
As the time bombs explode
And grenades are triggered
My thoughts
My thoughts
Repeat and rattle
Bullets penetrate my dreams
Emotions are discarded shells
And the bayonet so cold
Makes me shiver
Torn like flesh... shh
Ripped at the seams
The commotions of war
Are my actions
And the tic... tic ticking is the sound
In my head
And my scream... ssss
Like the siren
Is piercing
...but time
Just stands still
Like those
DEAD.

Lovers' Tiff

Why is it when the seagulls fly by
In the radiant blue sky
And the sun laughs out loudly
Come and play
You hang your head and sigh

When the green waters ripple
And the yellow sands
Beckon your feet to feel
The warm grains trickle
Between your toes
You hesitate and shiver as though chilled

Then the subtle breeze whispers
Calling your name, playfully
Tugging on your hair
Wafting cool breezes across your lips
Caressing your cheeks
And with a hint of a smile
You decline the offer

The colourful postcards
Bucket and spade dreams
Tug at your heartstrings
And the fluffy white clouds
Reach down to mop away tears.

Drink Me

I, like coffee
Rich and dark
Ripe to perfection,
Lie waiting for your tender touch
And you, like cream
Smooth and soft
Flow and blend
In perfect harmony
With me, inside of me –
We are coffee and cream
We are the dream
Which lay asleep
Only to be stirred
With the golden spoon
And now our
Cup floweth over
Simmering to the brim...
Drink me.

Miss P

Unlike Humpty Dumpty who sat on the wall
I stayed on
Unlike Jack and Jill who went up the hill
Not even a drip drip drop was spilt by me
Unlike Little Jack Horner
I sat right in the middle of the room
With the biggest strawberry ever
Unlike Little Miss Muffet without the bonnet
But with a purple pair of Doc Martens
I got a clear glass jar, covered the spider
And watched it for a while
And very like one of the stars in *Twinkle Twinkle*
I shine ever so brightly
And wonder not
This is me – Miss P.

Remembering

We stood with lighted candles
Remembering those who died...
We stood with lighted candles
Baited breath
Remembering those who died...
We stood with lighted candles
Baited breath
And tears in our eyes
Remembering those who died...
We stood with lighted candles
Baited breath
Tears in our eyes
Sorrow in our hearts
For those who live
Remembering those who died

Innocent Until Proven Guilty

Three black youths, one the owner of a car
Followed by police
They won't get far
Although quite innocent
And still not charged
The street is a courtroom
The judge is the Sarge

I was a witness
I naturally shook
My mind in turmoil, my body deep in shock
I was a witness
I naturally shook
But all I could do was stand and look

Total provocation is what I saw
Vicious manhandling and plenty more
Shouting abuse – unnecessary force
Police against black – naturally, of course

Innocent bystanders shout in disgust
Male onlookers join in the fuss
All quite reluctant, we view the situation
Everybody anxious, we shake in desperation

I was a witness
I tell no lies
Seeing is believing
I heard the cries...
...I saw the young policeman, handcuffs in hand
Beating the head of an innocent man
I heard the yell, I could almost feel the pain
As the weapon was lowered, again and again

I was a witness
A witness I was
I saw the injustice take part in the Moss
I saw the youths bundled in the van
Dragged down the street like dogs – not men
The sorrow I feel...
The hurt so real...

But only a witness what am I to do
But tell you the story so sad and true

Ceasefire

On Thursday the 27th March 1991
The streets were afire
With the sounds of a gun
It happened in Gooch Close
Around nine o'clock
Markings of chalk distinguish the spot
The rivalry about drugs within the Moss
The sight of an eye is what one lost
The other got a bullet in his hip
The price they payed
For a gang's ego trip...
So handsome a boy and only aged twelve
Another file to gather dust on the shelf
Until the next victim
Maybe a relative of yours
Who may die so some mad men can even their scores
A mother of four
It frightens me to see
The turmoil and murder in my community
When so many of us try
To live in peace
And pray for the gunfire to quickly cease
To open our eyes in the morning
Without hearing the news
Of another mother's anguish
Of the child she may lose
Ceasefire!
Ceasefire!

Play With Me

No reward in the boring task of ironing
No pleasure, though I seek it's hard to find
As I place my best trousers all lovingly
On the board, reminiscence in mind
As I spy the clothes label from Etam
I remember the day that I bought
The purple trousers, my favourite colour
Among the sale items I sought
I notice the perfume still lingers
As the steam from the iron does hiss
And the stain from the curry made in Rusholme
My God was I really that pissed
I remember as the Lenor scent does linger
That Comfort is what I like best
And the raindrops that tap on the window
Are singing a song with the rest
I listen to the music in the background
And notice as the iron starts to sway
And the flex takes my hand and asks kindly
Let's dance, let's iron, let's play.

Come On Then

Look at me how hard I am
Do you want to be in my gang
Do you want to have a cut of this money
Hold a real gun in your hand
Do you want to have loads of girls hanging around
Wear the latest designer jeans
Armani shirts and aftershave
Trousers with sewn in seams...
Come on just join in my gang
I'll show you all the tricks
'They might be rather 'shady'
But believe me, it's worth it
Just take a look at my trainers
You won't see these out on sale
They were imported from America
It pulls all the girls, never fails
I just flash my gold medallion
Take them out, treat 'em like queens
Just look at me, how hard I am
I can fulfil your dreams

Do you want to be in my gang?
You too can have all this
It's money easy come by
With only a slight risk
You might get held at gun point
But I tell you it's a buzz
Just come on join my gang
You'll soon be one of us.

Policeman's Lot

It definitely is reality
And a shocking state of our times
That the increase in gang culture
And the rise of gun related crime
Sends goose bumps around by body
And a searing pain into my head
When I wake up in the morning
And hear another child is dead

I think of those policemen
Who parade the streets
Keep up the fight
Their bodies padded for protection
Tiptoeing through the night

And while the innocent are just turning over
In their warm and cosy beds.
The police are trying to lower statistics
Not find another young child dead.

The police give lectures on peer pressure
And where it could all end
And tell you trying to keep face
With your buddy, mate or friend
Could take you to a mortuary
Laid out upon a slab
And your parents crying,
Screaming 'my son he's not bad'
He just got caught up in this awful mess
A crime he did not intend
It was not intended
To reach such an horrific end
With a bullet wedged into his head
Another in his back

And the policeman holds his hand out
Gives your arm a reassuring tap

He tells you that he tried his best
His colleagues did the same
They trudged the streets and toured the schools
A lot of it in vain
They tried to get the kids to listen
And face the cold hard fact
That the lesson in this culture
Is a bullet in the back
And that even those of innocence
Not even in the game
Because of mistaken identity
Could end up just the same
So my job is very difficult
And its more than just a shame
But I'm quite sure I'm not the one
Who should face all the blame.

Catch Me If You Can

He only has to put one foot outside
As natural as can be
Going about his private business
Just some mates he wants to see
When just around the corner
In wait and ready to pounce
It's the local 'unfriendly' policeman
Quite eager to announce,
'Come on now lad, where you going?
Give us your name.
What's your address?
I'm only stopping you to protect you
Before you get yourself in a mess
It's obvious you're looking for trouble
I can tell by the colour of your skin
And the clothes that you are wearing
You obviously don't fit in
You're one of the local trouble makers
Just wipe that smirk right off your face
I'll show you my authority
Put you right back in your place
I can make your life a misery
Call my mates – put you inside
Now stand up – look up – pay attention
I'll ensure you lose your pride
I'll make your life a misery
It's nowt to me you've done nothing wrong
I couldn't give a monkeys
Oops a Freudian slip of the tongue
I know your kind look for trouble
It's a noted statistical fact
And it's proven it's because –
Your colour skin is black...

You don't seem to have a record
I've just radioed to base
It's obvious we've not had the chance
To put you back in your place
But watch your back
I lie in waiting
Just step one foot out of line
And I'll make sure that I get you
For every relevant local crime
It's really quite a pity
I'll just have to let you go
Not even any back chat
The code of conduct you must know
But watch your back
You know I'm looking
And least of all when you suspect
I'll be in waiting round the corner
With my nigger fishing net.'

Mama's Cry

I've tried my best to raise my child
The best way I knew how
But he's barely recognisable
When I look at him now.

He had the best of everything
I worked hard to provide
I walked the path of goodness
I did nothing bad to hide.

My family all respectable
With manners well sought after
With intelligence and ambition
A family full of laughter.

I've shown my son right from wrong
And how he should behave
I gave him lots of pocket money
And taught him how to save.

He had a brilliant education
Left school, grade A's and B's
A Saturday job earned him money
He had all that he could need.

I'm not sure when the change began
But it happened oh so fast
I thought it was a phase he had
I prayed it wouldn't last.

But gradually the signs were there
His trousers half way down his bum
And phone calls from the college came
To tell me about my son.

'He is mixing with the bad' they said.
'He is missing out on class.
The lads he's hanging out with
Are handling lots of cash!'

I couldn't quite believe it
But knew my son was not the same
And my instincts clearly told me
He was caught up in the game.

I remember when he came to me
About peer pressure from his mates
And the ribbing and the name calling
Was something he did hate.
He said he'd try his best to flee
And not get caught up in the crowd
But that it felt like he was whispering
Not shouting it out loud.

For no-one out there listened
They just called him a wimp
Said if he didn't join them
It was because he hid
Behind his mama
And if he was a real man
He would live in a real man's world.

As a mother I tried to reason
And listen to his plight
And tell him men of courage
Used their intelligence to fight
And that he didn't need any weapons
To show how brave he could be
And if he really wanted to succeed
He would listen hard to me.

But peer pressure got a hold of him
Held him with a grip
And every time I held out my arms
My son ignored it.

It's a lesson to all you mothers
Who try your best to hold on tight
And spend your sleep time worrying
Way deep into the night
That there's only so much you can do
When you have tried your very best
So just leave it in the hands of God
And he will do the rest.

Pauline Omoboye has been published in many anthologies produced by Crocus, Nailah, Arrival, Stride and Sista Talk as well as in the local press. She has appeared on radio, television (briefly) and in many theatres and schools throughout the region. She was voted the judges' winner of the Manchester Stage to Page Poetry Competition in 2004.



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