

## **Hope is**

Niven Govinden

Hope, in writing, is a fresh page. Hope is the start of the day. Hope is a triumph over fear: the fear of making a mistake, of taking a story too far in the wrong direction, of being lazy, of being boring, of phoning it in. The fresh page erases all that and gives you hope.

Hope is in reading, and in finding yourself through books; finding your people. And somehow through those books and the feeling of being seen and understood comes a desire to write your own words; the novels or stories you love, providing a spark that powers you through snatched mornings or weekends at your desk, in the park, the staff room on your lunch break, on the top floor of the bus on the way home. You maybe fixate on one writer who looks or sounds like you and think, if that person could make it as a writer, then maybe there's hope for you to occupy a similar space.

You have no connections to this world bar a groaning shelf of treasured novels and a heavily used library card. You don't know any of these people in real life, and half your idols are dead anyway; the publishing imprints you start to form an instinctive connection to still as distant and impenetrable as the font that declares their addresses on the inner pages: Thirty-Two Bedford Square London; 625 Madison Avenue New York.

Hope is a group of sentences that spark into life, the fire in your belly at a novel's genesis, and the relief that you can cast aside the baggage of before, which is how you refer to your previous novels. Only those books are always with you no matter how hard you deny their presence and influence. They are the pathway to your current desk and the millstone that threatens to drown you there, should you over-think where you are.

Hope is the knot that untangles in the middle of the night; which has you reaching in the dark for your notebook and pen - or phone, whichever is nearest. How many riddles that left you paralysed at your desk for several days are solved in this way; your unconscious mind doing the work you struggled to do before elsewhere; your hand, leaden; your mind similarly clouded, stubborn and obtuse.

Hope is the relief you feel on reading those middle of the night sentences the morning after. Not always, but often enough still to still give you faith in the process; a needling that will always rouse you from bed whenever those thoughts come, for to ignore them is to turn down the good advice you were always waiting for.

What you learn in labouring over page after page, book after book, is that writing is not a romantic enterprise: it's mostly fearful, and takes its toll physically and mentally. You wouldn't do it if there were other ways to make your voice heard; if you felt the urgency elsewhere. But there it is, and here you are.

### **Niven Govinden**

Niven Govinden is the author of five novels, including *All The Days And Nights* which was longlisted for the Folio Prize and shortlisted for the Green Carnation Prize. His second novel *Graffiti My Soul* is about to go into film production. His third novel *Black Bread White Beer* won the 2013 Fiction Uncovered Prize. He was a judge for the 2017 4th Estate/Guardian BAME Prize.

A recording of this talk can be found on the WritersMosaic website at

**[writersmosaic.org.uk](http://writersmosaic.org.uk)**

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