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There Must Have Been A Storm

by
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the degree of Master of Arts in Creative Writing.

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This work has not been previously submitted in whole, or in part, for the award of any degree. It is my own work. Each significant contribution to, and quotation in, this dissertation from the work, or works, of other people has been attributed, and has been cited and referenced.

Signature:

Date:

Signed by candidate

April 2004.

There

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To freedom within!

Contents

Acknowledgements	•	i
Contents	•	ii
Synopsis	•	iii

There Must Have Been A Storm

1	•	1
2	•	8
3	•	22
4	•	29
5	•	42
6	•	54
7	•	59
8	•	67
9	•	72
10	•	77
11	•	81
12	•	86
13	•	92
14	•	100
15	•	110
16	•	113
17	•	120
18	•	126
19	•	129
20	•	138
21	•	142
22	•	149
23	•	150
24	•	158
25	•	162
26	•	164
27	•	171
28	•	175
29	•	181
30	•	187
31	•	190

Synopsis

There Must Have Been A Storm is a realist novel set in Cape Town from July 1988 to January 1989. Against a historical backdrop of political turmoil and the repression of apartheid, three women meet and forge close bonds. Lesley, Rita and Doya appear superficially to have nothing in common but each woman carries within her a storm which truly motivates her movements. As their friendships deepen the threads common in all their lives unravel and stretch from Moçambique to Kalk Bay, from marriage and economic entrapment to a love of words.

Lesley is an Observatory teenager who, having finished school, dreams of becoming a writer. She tries to become a journalist, but her life is dominated by familial responsibilities and tension with her parents. She develops a supportive friendship with Rita after Rita's injury in an accident. Lesley plans to attend the Freedom Concert in Harare, move out of her parents' house and possibly study in the New Year, but her attempts to save enough money are continually thwarted. Instead she moves in with her boyfriend and his friends, but with no independence or opportunity. After she joins Rita and Doya for a New Year's party her outlook changes and she seems capable of achieving her goals.

Rita is a middle-aged Afrikaans woman. She has moved to Observatory from Paarl following a series of family tragedies which have left her alone, detesting the life and society in which she grew up. She has rebuilt her life around her house and garden. A nightmare disturbs Rita's peace and leaves her injured. While bedridden she is helped by the supportive charm of Lesley. Once active again, she discovers new sides to herself, exploring parts of Cape Town and completing some work on her house. She meets Doya, a Moçambiquan woman of her age, and they strike up a fun and easy friendship. Together they visit beaches, explore Cape Town and plan New Year's celebrations.

Doya has arrived in Cape Town to pursue the life for which she left Moçambique fifteen years previously. Deployed to Cape Town to look after her employers' new house before they move from Pretoria, she has plans to develop. She has been through a journey of self-discovery that has given her a unique understanding of the world and the political climate of Southern Africa. She meets Rita, and through this friendship and the friendship of her other new friend Paluka, Doya establishes her independence in Cape Town.

Chapter One

Lesley tucked her notebook under her pillow and stared into the street through the window of the room she shared with her younger siblings, Sian, Madon and Tina. In the moonlight quiet, concentrating vividly, she sometimes watched the stories which played on the underbelly of clouds between her and the stars or against the next house, Daniel and Dirk's, behind the apple tree in the side garden. She hurried to describe these visions but their details had been vague for quite some time. Lesley saw only the street, car roofs bumper-to-bumper down both sides at night. The task she now contemplated was to write something new, something she had invented. A story, but not a tragedy. A melodious story, a story based on harmonies and polyphony.

Peace, love and harmony. Lesley got it from the hippies and students living in her area but she got it. Totally. Her stories had been unsuccessful with everyone but the hippies, owing primarily to the schmaltz factor which people rejected as incongruous. Lesley realised that the problem lay with hyperbole. People accepted only one side of the parabola. Most accepted supernatural effects if the results included genocide. Global harmony did not convince them. Where they would accept bombings, invasions and rape they would never admit true love, emergency stays of execution, joyous celebration. These were not borne out by reality.

"That's it? A party, where everyone dances and gets pissed?"

"Yip," Lesley would nod.

"And then the cops arrive and arrest everyone!"

"No, that's it, that is the end."

"And not one of those pissed bastards goes mad with a machete in the bathroom?"

"No."

"Got a light?"

It irked Lesley. She wanted to spend her whole life enmeshed in story lines, stroking words into existence, giving to each one its proper proportions and equilibrium. She refused to concentrate on death, destruction or nothingness but believed in the capacities words held for multiple values, multivalencies. She was sure she could write a story using a very old trick from before she could read, when she heard words fold around the mouths of speakers, adapting their identity to the specific measurements of each mouth and personality. When all the children were supposed to be sound asleep, she

stole through the door and into the passage to where, breathing slowly, she could hear the conversations ebb and flow between the adults. Lesley always waited a distance from the room in which they all sat. She was no eavesdropper. Her mother warned her that eavesdroppers never hear any good especially about themselves so she knew she was transgressing some kind of barrier. She listened just to hear, just to know that they were there.

She could tell when the evening was going to end, that people would come to lift sleeping children and drive them home to be tucked back into bed without their ever waking. When she heard the sound of lulled helplessness from the grownups Lesley flew silently back to bed and dove beneath the covers, exhaling her breath at the very top of her nostrils lest its thickness gave her away. As the door closed behind the adult Lesley would gasp, her lungs exploding. Sometimes she ventured back, mostly she lay waiting for the panic and adrenaline to subside. Frozen as a stone carving, she would fall asleep to the river sound playing over and over in her mind, trying to make it as harmonious as possible. Layers would lodge and fuse as a music chord resonates as pleasant, even luxurious, and Lesley followed these noises, moving them to where they produced harmony the most frequently. It was a soft trilling noise, quieter than a child sleeping – little eyes and mind calling back to an already-populated inner world. Why should one child dream more than another? What do they dream?

When she first discovered that words did not merely float around adapting themselves to different mouths but could also be appended to pages and whole stories recorded and held comfortably between covers on bookshelves Lesley plunged into them. She soaked up stories as a sponge, enjoying thinking of it in those soggy, turgid terms. She was hunting out the story, chasing out the action in the verbs. The words flooded against her heart as if she were infinitely expandable. Caught in a current, her mouth full of bubbles, the stream cascaded past her faster than it could carry her along, leaving small pockets of air as it spun around to collect then dump her on hurrying past. It made her remember her name clearly.

All the children's books were in a bookcase in their room, some of their parents' too. She could always be tempted by a story already written; neat, chapterised wisps swung together as ribbons of history, complete. Some of these she had read many times, such as *M*A*S*H* and *Lady Chatterley's Lover*. Others she read once and never opened again. At school, Lesley read in the school libraries. In junior school she read by shelf, science, Afrikaans or history. In high school she clicked on to genre and read Eliot, Dickinson, Head. The windows were covered in wire mesh for most of the week but on Tuesday and Thursday afternoons Mrs Boyle, a small woman with a woollen wind-hat who usually worked at Tamboerskloof Primary, took down the mesh, opened the windows, returned and stamped out books. Mrs Boyle always waited ten minutes after the final bell before she opened the doors. A little unfair, to outwit the very pupils whom the library was supposed to benefit, but it was so peaceful that Lesley never mentioned her qualms. She read undisturbed. Now she used the public libraries in Observatory and town, her preference being the ochre building which housed the symphony orchestra as well, if she had time to get there. Occasionally, strains of music recitals wafted up the giant staircase that ran the depth of the building. The secret instruments were tucked somewhere behind blue and white posters, recital adverts, from which the string instruments seemed to vibrate in time to the strains as she went from floor to floor.

She had been to the libraries up at the university, sat in the cavernous rooms and spacious chairs. She had continued even until April but the police regularly tear-gassed and sjambokked students picketing on De Waal Drive defending the plight of detained students, striking workers and freedom fighters. The university was only one kilometre away from the president's residence. Sometimes the army blocked the roads and simply fired at the students. Point blank range. Other times they set up a search pit beside the officer who usually directed morning traffic at that intersection. Armed with handguns, sjamboks, cuffs and shotguns with rubber bullets they refused to allow those without identification onto campus. Lesley once watched a guy get detained right there, beneath the bridge. If he showed them his student card that was his mistake but from Lesley's perspective there was not enough time before they had pulled him from the car, practically through the window. Sometimes the police even went onto upper campus and fired through the priceless library windows. She had seen agitators shot in the teeth with buckshot and rubber bullets. It was almost August and still she was wary of going there.

The main thrust of that reading spree was over; Lesley organised her duvet over her feet admitting to herself that she could never again accept reading on its own. She believed that everything in the world would make sense if she read enough whereas she now knew that there would always be gaps, question marks with no stops beneath them, only the inkling of an endpoint, the smudge of some other tittle. She had settled for some time to listening to the sound of the different stories engaging with each other. How they overlapped, where they met and where they parted, the melody.

The locks on the front door chunked open. Lesley and Sian shrank into their beds and listened. Madon and Tina slept evenly. No shouting. They breathed. Lesley crept out of bed to switch off the light and close the door; light, light as a butterfly, careless as a shingle. She turned back into her blankets as if she were asleep. Her mother might call her to talk with her parents. Lesley did not want to do that any more. Her parents discussed many things late at night, but past a certain hour neither could remember what each had said specifically nor what had been said generally so they used Lesley to remind them like a prompt in the wings. It was difficult to observe normal allegiances during arbitration. She had failed both before, which both parents seemed to take as a betrayal, a personal correction on her part of their critical faculties. Once she tried to go back to bed; that went down brilliantly. United they stand. Lesley ended up sitting there for two more hours while they discussed her. Now when she heard footsteps down the passage she immediately pretended to be sleeping for as long as necessary. Her mother might stand calling over her for five or even ten minutes.

From the kitchen came the clink and splash of coffee on the boil. Music and easy conversation flitted through the walls. As she relaxed, drifting off to sleep, Lesley registered a chopper, softly distant. A second churning blared fatter, a third. They drew closer, heading up from Rondebosch East or Mowbray. She did not react. Observatory was safe after the raid the week before. The choppers approached clearer. Salt River? Woodstock? Lesley peeped under the curtains. Helicopters hovered above their heads, blades blistering insistently, rifles glinting as soldiers dangled from the side. Men thudded into the street, Lesley watched them drop from the sky like lemmings.

A raid!

Lesley scrambled out of bed. "Sian! Madon! Quick, cops, get up!" She was

practically shouting, the helicopters shook the whole house. The knocks were heavy on the front door. Tina sat up blearily.

“Oh Lesley! My ears!”

“It’s the piggy-wiggies, we’re in the cupboard again. Sh, now; don’t say a word,” Lesley scooped her into her arms in one move and one after each other the siblings climbed into the hanging cupboard. They sat down on shoes and fallen clothes, shuffling to fit into the spaces. The searches were usually shorter than two minutes. Observatory was a grey area; it had been a safe suburb. The army still raided the secret rooms and attics looking for the most foolhardy of freedom fighters and draft dodgers. The helicopters pared off to the left and the trebles reverberated inside the cupboard.

Tina shifted on Lesley’s lap. “It’s dark, Lesley.”

“Sh, Teeni-Tini,” Madon soothed her. Taking her finger in his, he jiggled it gently. They waited. Loud voices boomed from the top of the passage behind them, their mother’s voice rose periodically. The children heard no words. Only tones.

Tina huffed again, “What’s happening?”

“Quiet as a mouse! Pretend we are in the room and we can see everything in it, and let’s play I-spy,” whispered Sian. They leaned forward.

“I spy with my little eye, something beginning with ‘d’,” Sian mouthed.

“Door!”

“Yes!”

“‘W’.”

“Window!”

A shake of the head.

“Wall?”

“Good!”

They could play like this for hours if necessary. Distracting Tina meant distracting themselves once it got to word games. They whispered stories at night, a sentence each, or two. Silent laughter wracked through their backs as they unravelled hilarity and paradox from each other’s mouths. As the four settled, booms became whistles. Their parents both shouted loudly. Thuds crashed heavily down the house into their room. The children pulled in closer. The doors of the cupboard ripped back.

Rifle butts.

“Kom uit!”

Lesley started to shake. The guns. Tina curled into Lesley as two huge arms wrenched Sian and Madon out of the cupboard. Lesley stumbled up keeping Tina close against her body. A soldier of Lesley’s age cocked his head at her. It would have been a greeting but for the rifle between them. She stared back at him so he could see how scared she was in case he ever had occasion to doubt. The four siblings packed into each other, clutching each other, arms haphazardly tucked away from their own bodies onto each others’. Their belongings flew all over the room in a spread-eagled puppet show. What was wrong with these people? They were wasting their time looking for terrorists in those cupboards. Who cared about the communists? Surely the communists were not as dangerous as these boymen and their stupid search for evidence?

“‘C’,” mouthed Sian.

“Carpet?”

“Cupboard? Covers?”

“Ceiling.”

“Mmm?”

“Ceiling.”

The soldiers cockroached with exaggerated walkie-talkiness to vans and left the street. Adrenaline and defiance spurred those quick minutes as everyone took stock of the damage. By the time the neighbours gathered in the middle of their street and stood counting children in nods of heads, their eyes were bright against the night sky. Leaning against a car or a wall they all compared tallies and remonstrated politely across the narrow space. The air was cool enough to be refreshing, perfectly still. It would not be long before the jokes began.

“What do you get when you cross a pig with a hippo?”

“Anyone seen my baby-doll Stalin?”

“Think I’ll do some affirmative resting tomorrow.”

“Tax return?”

“God helps those...”

Devil’s Peak loomed tall, nosy beyond roofs and electricity cables. At night it seemed compressed into the backdrop, close and imposing but permanent. Nothing could tarnish it. Lesley imagined she could reach out and hoof herself to the top, hoist herself up to swing over the scene. Her thighs had enough energy for the two strides she measured as the distance she would cover. Madon and his friend Mark watched for choppers atop signposts at the end of the street. The only way up was to shin up the post which Lesley could not do despite years of coaching from her brother. She swung round the pole below him. If there was news worth hearing, she was in the right place for it.

“Madon! Where are they? Can you see?”

“Naught,” he called. “They’re gone.”

Madon landed beside Lesley. The front door at Number 1 opened and a plump pretty woman with long hair loose behind her stepped into the street as Mark jumped down to join them.

“Oh!” The woman peered confusedly at Lesley, Madon and Mark in turn.

“Hello!” Lesley giggled at the surprise on her face. “I’m Lesley.”

“Hello,” the woman replied. Her smile spread lopsided through her cheeks, pulling her wrinkles out. “Rita.”

Lesley, Madon and Mark jogged back home through the moonlight. Lesley dawdled at her gate watching Daniel walk back to his house with Rita.

“Hi Lesley! You know Rita, from number one?”

Rita knew none of her neighbours aside from Daniel, whom she had met through the vegetable co-operative.

“Ja, we met outside just now.” Lesley smiled at Rita. “Hi again Rita.”

“Ja, hello,” Rita’s voice caught, “Lesley.”

“Did they turn yours upside down? Ours is a complete pigsty now, they’ve thrown everything around.” Daniel took Rita’s elbow and she glanced backwards nervously. “I know it’s late, but I think we should crack open a bottle of something. Sherry? What do you think?”

“They were so young,” Rita replied.

“I know, only children, it’s crazy. Coming, Lesley? Sherry’s on the pigs,

courtesy of the house.”

“Okay, but I’m not drinking,” Lesley replied. They walked inside. The lounge was large and cluttered. Three couches surrounded the low-burning fire in a horseshoe.

“This is Dirk, my housemate,” Daniel introduced Rita. “I’ll just be a minute.”

“Hi Dirk!” Lesley threw herself down beside him as he piled books from the floor.

“It’s okay, I was meaning to alphabetise them,” Dirk smiled ruefully at a dusty spine in return of her greeting.

Rita managed a small smile, more of a nervous twitch, before she sat down in front of the waning fire. She patted a cushion absent-mindedly, leaned forward. Was it ruder to put logs on a host’s fire or to sit by and watch it go out?

“Yes Rita, please toss on a few,” Daniel nodded at the wood stacked beside the fireplace. “There’s coal in that box on the right. I’m afraid there wasn’t any sherry but I took the liberty of pouring us all a vermouth on the rocks. I hope that’s okay?” He placed a tray with three glasses of vermouth and ice and one glass of orange juice on the table.

“Now, jazz? Or something a little more,” he raised his hands like a conductor, “placatory?” He drew a thick curtain over the bay window and stared thoughtfully at several shelves’ worth of records. Lesley settled her feet into the couch across from Rita. Soon quick beats played gently and Daniel passed drinks to everyone.

“To late night sojourns!” Daniel toasted their combined good health.

“Late sojourns,” repeated Rita and swallowed her whole drink in one gulp. “Excuse me! I must have been thirsty!”

Daniel gulped his drink. Laughing, Dirk followed suit and fetched the bottle. Lesley picked up a nipped joint from the ashtray. “This anybody’s?”

Daniel shrugged his shoulders.

“Dirk?” Dirk muttered in the corner to himself.

“Dirk?”

“Hmm?”

“Can I have some of your boem?”

“Sure. Go ahead, make my week!”

Lesley smiled and lit the stompie. “Alrighty then,” she said. She dragged deeply.

“Shit, look at this!” Dirk waved a pamphlet at them. “NUSAS! A fucking NUSAS pamphlet and those boere didn’t even smell it. Not a whiff. It just proves, it’s not a question of if but when they’re going to release Mandela.”

“Oh ja? How do you work that out?”

“They’re getting lazy,” replied Daniel.

“Hey broer, they pulled us out the cupboard with rifles at point blank range,” Lesley responded.

“Genuine?” Dirk looked at her squarely. “Okay, but did they look at anything? I mean how they used to; reading each contents page and piling things up here, there, you know? They did not even bother to look at anything tonight. I could have had du Bois, Biko, COSATU, any of those, and they would have thrown them around just the same.”

Lesley considered it, Rita too. It was true the soldiers had not paid the slightest attention when they had emptied the cupboards and shelves. There was a time when they could arrest you simply for having a Russian toy soldier on your mantelpiece and the

army went through toy boxes looking for them.

"They were looking for people. They would have found a person," Rita reasoned.

"A person? Behind these books? Can't think who they wanted, Mini-Mouse probably, or Thumbalina."

"Thumbalina!" Lesley nearly choked laughing, "Ja and Little Jack Horner! Playing the rocking defence!"

Rita sat back in the cushions to watch the fire pick up in dashes blue then orange. Her hair caught the heat and warmed her face. The small party continued ripping off the soldiers, mimicking their stupidity. They spoke quietly. Subversive utterances carried detention without trial.

Lesley walked home calligraphic, light as a ribbon. She entered the house to voices in the lounge. Her mother called her.

"Lesley! Come in, sit down, where have you been? We need a fourth for bridge."

Lesley knew better than to disobey. She sometimes enjoyed these games. They all played. Even Tina played *Memory* and *Beggar-My-Neighbour*. The best kind of present to give was cards. You could spend weeks choosing between pictures on the back for someone's birthday present or just as easily pick up a pack on the way past the bottle store for wine or a little something more.

In the lounge sat her mother, her mother's best friend Gwendolyn and a guy who Lesley did not know. No one introduced them or mentioned her father. The two women were focused and manic.

"Do you have a headache?" Lesley had used this excuse not to play. She was beginning to regret it. "Do you still want to see a specialist?"

Lesley sat down. Her cards were already dealt and piled before her. She sorted them and prepared to bid. Her mother put on a cassette. They taught her bridge but not canasta. This word Lesley had heard ring over dummies as the last tricks were revealed and a sigh was rung for a different kind of playing, with new rules to observe. The games were quick and no one spoke except to comment on the play of the rules and their various inadmissions or poetry. Poetry extended especially to a finesse, the successful squeezing out of a king, a queen, a jack. Even a five would bring gasps of surprise and furrowed brows. Otherwise, scores of rubbers were tallied in utter silence.

Lesley did not once miss a card. She knew which were out, where each lay and how to hold on to her trumps just in case there would be a chance to use them.

Chapter Two

Several hours later Rita jolted awake. The fear of her nightmare stuck to her mouth. Her eyes opened wide and stretched tingling to the tips of her ears. Her nape felt bolted to her bed. She gazed at the ceiling. Under the duvet she was stifled, sweating. What smelt? She listened for sounds, ultra alert. Extra energies, harmful energies, emanated from an unfathomable origin. An intruder? Aside from the French sliding doors in her bedroom which locked on the left and could not be opened except with a pickaxe, the windows throughout the house were small and heavily burglar-barred. A smudged figure caught her eye through the doors, a person bent over. Rita blinked. It disappeared.

The back of her throat prickled alert. Rita tilted her head up off the bed to find her nightmare splayed across her courtyard, framed within the sliding doors. The whole bloody mess of her dream posted from wall to wall. The same picture she left in her mind's eye not twenty seconds before; Rudi and Alain, her beautiful boys, run through the bush. They push in black and white, their faces moulded in horror. They move with absolute precision but heavily, they can not propel themselves fast enough. Rudi skids, falls, seems to jump back; with a flash of light half his head is missing and Alain steps back and collapses, calling to her.

Rita inched up her bed as Rudi began to rise but he bled badly from his head, but brains oozed around his forehead, but blood dripped from his chin. He teetered, wavering. Surreality begged her absence. Rita tried to close her eyes or look away but her eyes paid attention only to Alain dragging himself towards the sliding doors across the courtyard. Where once was a limb only blood gushed around torn flesh, across every square of paving brick red with green moss, small hanging plants and fynbos, ericas, soft. Rudi raised his hand to his head and then out to her. Alain continued toward her.

The room began to whirl, the pictures skewed. It seemed they both would enter her house. Rita watched the vortex around her, afraid suddenly to her core.

"Don't you realise, you are dead? I am the one left alive! When will you leave me alone? To run my real life in peace? Do neither of you care about that?"

She crouched up on her bed. Escape routes flashed through her mind but it was checkmate; they played by rules she did not understand. Rita threw her arms out to them both and shouted, "Why? Why are you doing this to me? Why are you doing this?"

Why?"

She got off her bed and walked toward the sliding door. She watched as they painstakingly heaved themselves, wounds stripped and gaping behind them, on their elbows toward her, toward the house.

Rita dropped to her knees. "I can do nothing about it, boys. Nothing. Can you hear me?" Growing hysterical, Rita stood tall, her arms outstretched. "Give me a chance! Just one chance!"

They did not respond. They never did. Just ploughed steadily onwards. Rita's reflection appeared in the glass, her arms outstretched, her face turned down, eyes dark and angry. Her core bounced erratically elasticised, searching high and low for truth, for stability. Furious that she should be the subject of such a picture for any reason on earth Rita screamed, "Stay away! Leave me alone now, my boys! Why must you come to my home to torment me? Please!" She was almost screeching, "Get – Out!"

They seemed to falter. Rita waited, then suddenly she turned and sprang toward the bedroom door, but too quickly; she slipped and landed hard, twisting her leg, whacking her head. She was almost exactly on their eye level through the glass as she raised her neck. Her teeth tasted sour. Without stopping or looking behind herself Rita crawled through the passage into the lounge. She slid up against the wall where she could not be seen from the courtyard, cowering in her pyjamas, breathing hard. So, she was still carrying their story, she was their reflection, she was their mother. She had always known that her happiness depended on theirs, was dedicated to theirs, glued to theirs, created theirs.

Her eyebrow was already fat, a rough graze outlined beneath her fingertips. Rita cupped the wound to stop the blood from pounding. Her knee stung blind. Had she broken it? Rita turned her leg back to look at it. The skin was hard as lemon-rind, the same proportion too. A bruise rose, bubbles of blood beaded in the centre like sweat on petals on the hottest day in summer. White tinges embroidered the fringes. Her head swung, her stomach hurled.

She listened for sounds of Rudi and Alain from outside. All she heard were her teeth clacking against each other as her jaw shook – was it from pain? Was it from shock? Rita tried to slow her breathing by opening her mouth but her jaw kept swinging and jumping wildly. Snot dripped into her mouth. Where were those boys? Could they see her now? Had they so little respect for her sanity that they could reduce her to a shivering wreck like this? And what was that picture of them? What were they doing there, at all? Like that? Why were they so mercilessly bloody? They no longer helped her pick up the pieces of her life they insisted on them, scattered and tattered, obstinate stains from the past.

Rita listened again. All she heard was her own jaw quivering.

They had never entered her home, not even when she tried to invite them. They had been quiet for a while but their last return was not a pleasant situation, nor the time before that. Rita wiped the drool from her chin. She refused to look at the windows. She placed her leg gently on the floor, turned around and lay with her face pressed close between the bookcase and the wall, balancing her legs so that her knee was on the ground but took no pressure. The smart would wear off. The cold would numb it and keep the swelling down.

They started coming back two days after their Memorial Service. The first few times were gut-wrenching but eventually Rita adjusted. Sometimes she felt able to transmit beams of information almost on a conveyor belt to their essences, telling them how she loved them, how glad she was of their presence, trying to get them to come in. They responded in thought-waves which spilled out, nudging her heart. But they just waited, staring, never uttering a word. Rita caught herself doing crazy things when they arrived. If they were late she played to them and retold their stories, reminding them of important things. If they were early she packed a picnic and walked to the stream with the basket over her arm and ate her sandwiches with her mouth wide open like they both used to when they thought food extra delicious. They always waited a way away from her and although they would not play with her Rita felt their presence as protective. They watched her and they watched over her. That was the deal she kept while she swam beside the trees. In quieter moments she reflected that her sons could not truly be returning to her. They were dead, killed in service defending the border. In those estranged minutes they seemed at best like evil spirits in league with the devil. Rita thought then that she had gone crazy. Her mind had packed in from the shock of her massive loss, the suicide of her husband, the deaths of both her sons in the army and both her parents in a Worcester tunnel accident all in the same year. Her father spent time on the farm but she rarely saw him and even more rarely her mother, she did not notice their absence any more when they were dead than when they were alive. She told no one about her time with her sons. She knew once the word was out it would not be put away until she was. She told herself then that her life could only get better, she had nothing left to lose. The most difficult thing in the world is for a parent to bury a child.

Their old returns were gentle, not imbued with this absolute disrespect. They needed something but accepted nothing she offered. She should chase them out, run after them with her broom. But that was mad, there was nothing there, only air. What did they want? Rita closed her eyes. The only sound she heard was a wild silence which widened in her ears. A hollow echo, a tape-recorder on pause, expectant. They looked so terrifying that night that she thought that they would kill her.

Silence furled over her body.

Had they?

Did they want her life? Was she dead? Was it that easy, that simple a slip?

Rita stared at the skirting board. She had moved from her bedroom to the lounge. But if her sons could range around in this ungainly fashion almost five years after their deaths then she could move from her bedroom to the lounge. Since these boys began returning she had learnt that death was just as much an occupation, a way of being, as life. Death was no earthy regeneration nor spiritual conjoin; Rita kicked out, instantly the wound in her leg flared. That was proof enough. If she were not dead she might as well be. She sat up, grabbed her knee around the joint to block the pain rushing up and down her body. How could she be living through this? Was everything she had done in vain? Was her whole life to be trashed over and again by this story? Rita twisted around the pain itching into her hip and spine. She was supposed to be having her grandchildren to stay at Christmas; turkeys, presents, her sons, their wives. Her life was supposed to be utterly different. She needed her legs to work but she could not move. She lay down again, breathing against the muscles in her lungs. Nothing she had been born to accomplish would come to fruition. It was all over. Gone.

Rita moaned, clutching her head, beginning to cry.

“Get out!” She mouthed the words desperately to the skirting board. The paint shone briefly and the vapour evaporated.

“Get – Out!” Rita stressed her words. Her vapour glistened a few seconds longer, fizzled, dried out.

Crawl out and move on. She did not have the energy to go through the process again. When Rita moved to Observatory she was in an inspired daze that applied no limits to her energy. She moved her belongings under cover of daylight, one small load per week. She varied her route through Stellenbosch, Wellington and Gordon’s Bay. She went to bed at nine, put out her light by ten and woke at dawn with fire in her calves. But now she was older.

Crawl out and move on. The idea was preposterous. They should leave her alone, not she them. Where could she possibly move that they would not find her? She did not tell them she was leaving Paarl. Not even God would help her, although Rita’s stomach lurched in hope as she thought of it. But she had evicted God from her life when Rudi and Alain first began coming back. She had made up her mind not to pray or attend church rather than risk the loss of these unearthly reminders of the highlights of her life. She could not turn to His ways now.

And no one had come. No one had found her. No one had even looked for her of which she knew. This was no longer a sign of her genius, it was a disgrace. What if she had killed herself? That was probably exactly what they thought she had done. In any event there had been no snoopers of which she knew, no telephone calls clicking off in the small hours of the morning, which comprised their usual tactics for finding people. No one was obviously concerned about her absence. Rita had an idea of what they thought of her or had thought about her when they discovered her disappearance. She could not go back to them, no. She could not face them.

The most difficult thing in the world is for a parent to bury a child.

And Ryno? Where was he that he could not also return to her, to help with their unruly sons?

Ryno had never involved himself with their children. Rita was never a partner to him. She was eighteen the day she had accepted Ryno’s invitation to his parents’ home for Sunday lunch. Ryno was more than she could ever expect. She was so excited she barely confirmed that she would ask her father who sent the message back that Ryno should come and ask permission if that was his true desire. But after the wedding Ryno turned to her father for advice about the farm. He did not discuss his work with her. When Rita joined the two men on the stoep after she had finished in the house they fell silent until not Ryno but her father commented on her dress or her hair and asked what they could do for the young lady?

If he had lived, could their sons also have?

When Rudi and Alain died Rita wished that Ryno had killed them and been done with it. His sparing of them seemed a sick joke, a pitiless reprieve. Most took out their whole families with them, you would hear about it in church. Rita had been unexpectedly happy in those thin months, unexpectedly free, for he had saved her and the boys. When Alain left for Basics he grinned cheekily as Rita kissed him goodbye. Rudi was due home in a little more than three months. Everything felt secure, it still balanced.

Rita could not swap that year for Ryno’s life, deep in her heart she could not. The

sum could not be equalised between his life, their lives and her life, or the years she had spent in her new life. She would still be on the farm counting days on the calendar and it would probably have been worse. Ryno would probably have told her about their deaths, probably while she stood over the stove, his thick voice bubbling up like the stew boiling fast.

Janus told her. He told her about Ryno too but Rudi and Alain stood right beside her so Janus told them all, not just her, and the bad news was mixed with this relief that she and her sons were all still alive. That afternoon she was alone in her vegetable garden on the sheltered sunny slope behind the farmhouse, sweating as she turned the soil in the sunshine. The neat rows of vegetables were almost finished when she straightened her back, blotted her brow in the crook of her arm and focused on the horizon. A car cut through the farm road from the main road. Rita peered at the vehicle ready to throw herself to the ground if it were one of them, come to talk the talk. Since Ryno's death all manner of men had been to visit her. She knew what she was supposed to do: mourn, convalesce and remarry. She was too exhausted, she was not yet ready and she did not want to be in their lucky dip, as if she and her effects were on auction. Janus! Rita charged down the slope, pulling her gloves off and wiping her face as she ran. Janus was different. He was the best man at her wedding. He treated her like a princess.

He was not at the back door. Rita huffed round to the front. "Yoo-hoo! Hallo, Janus! How are you? I was up in the garden."

Janus stepped up from the wall as she reached him. She kissed his cheek, leaning on his arm to tiptoe up to his face. Janus was a tall man, thin too. His eyes were misty, Rita could not see into them.

"Janus? Are you alright?"

"Rita," Riet-ah, "I must speak with you," he stammered. On seeing his face and how he turned from her to gain control of himself Rita brought him into the house and sat him down in the kitchen without pressing him further. She still did not imagine that this was her bad news he delivered. To maintain his composure Janus looked at the table and at his hands.

"It's your boys, Rita. Your boys."

"Oh, yes? What have they been getting up to?"

A tear landed on the top of his shoe, rolled almost to the ground and was absorbed in the stitching of the sole. Rita leant forward to ask what her boys could possibly have done to cause him to cry. Her powers of deduction worked despite her disbelief, the room dimmed, her face shrank.

"But, Janus?" Rita spluttered, coughing. Her chair reversed unmotorised through the kitchen. "Both?"

Janus' eyes pulled strangely back into his face as if a lever pulled taut inside his brain.

"It's you, it's you I'm worried about now," he tilted his head away so that she did not see him crumple. "What will you do? I'm so sorry," he whispered.

They were on the border. There was a trap. Limpet mines, laid beneath the ground. The entire unit was lost. Aside from one man who was urinating and caught up to the devastation. No one had found the bodies yet. The investigation had already been running for three months in case they turned up.

"Three months?"

“Ja, we always wait, Rita, just in case... But, especially in this, your, uhm,” he hesitated.

“But the letters,” they were collected in a bundle behind her. “I had one from each of them last week!”

Janus sat with her throughout the night, Rita twisting up before him to exclaim something then sinking back in confused silence, her finger over her mouth. Her brother Wynand arrived from the farm in Malawi and stayed two nights with her before moving to town. The army made all the arrangements. That was their speciality, arranging things. Both sons, a big memorial service, an extravagant occasion. Women sergeants balanced their condolences with inquisitive bureaucracy. According to their lists, decisions were easy. The army priest who ministered to Rudi and Alain three days prior to their deaths would conduct the service. Pallbearers would be soldiers; were there any particular friends? The morning of the Memorial Service had dawned misty and cold. Rita rose and dressed, with each second unable to believe the motions she performed. A young soldier fetched her in a sedan car. He tipped his hat and leant forward on one leg but Rita was relieved at his silence. Farm workers alighted bakkies and minibuses. The cavalcade took off down the short road to the church which glowed orange beneath its steeple. Wynand waited at the entrance. Rita stepped out of the car focusing on her shoes, on the toes, on the hem of the veil in her hat. The weather was cold but the church was breathy, hot. A hush fell as she entered and began walking down the aisle on the arm of her brother, losing everything with her head held high, trying to look them in the eye. She imagined being airlifted and dropped into her front row seat. A band struck up. Greasy love. The whole of Paarl was there. Most were at her wedding, the christenings, Ryno’s funeral and her parents’, after the car accident. Their eyes on her felt different from when she had married before them, been widowed and orphaned before them. Rita tried to smile at someone but it was impossible. Everyone stared straight ahead. Some even hunched their shoulders against her tragedy. They only looked at her if they thought her unaware. Rita felt unreal. Not make believe, but unreal. The coffins were the same size which was a mistake because Alain was a foot taller than Rudi. Ryno’s body had been in his coffin. His head was clean so it was impossible to see the shot unless you tilted his chin. None of it was her own, not even her actions were her own. Yet it was she who walked towards the coffins, with real feelings. She, a black widow, a failed bride.

Afterwards, Rita preferred to be alone and stop the buzz in her ears but it was impossible.

No one dared to ask how she was. The numbness on her face was telling. They fussed and empathised. They gave her easy sentences. All she had to do was repeat the lines they offered; the most difficult thing. Rita gave them the words of God, of country. It was a dream; if she behaved politely she would wake up and go on with her normal life. It was a nightmare; she was somehow stuck in the wrong loop. But when did the nightmare begin? With Ryno’s suicide? Her wedding? No one asked her real thoughts. She would not discuss herself, none of them did. Often they moved half-heartedly towards her only to slide away from her again. Something was going on, there was some titbit they omitted. Rita could feel its importance. She saw it in their eyebrows which flashed raised as they approached. She felt suspended then, dangling over a precipice. If she moved she would fall and she did not want that. Just as now she wanted to survive, she had wanted to wait it out and continue when she was safe. They touched her arm

which Rita had stored against her chest from the draught. They wanted to open her up to them. But the numbness on her face had not penetrated her innards. Neither had it pierced her mind but Rita caught such thoughts and stopped them blankly. When her arm would not move they shook their heads.

The letters still arrived.

That was June. By the beginning of August it had been raining every day for six weeks and it seemed to Rita that the whole universe was in mourning with her. The rain struck like salt water in a sea storm, whipping against the house. It woke her, cold, hard. Rita half expected to find pellets of blood pelting down from fat bullets such as they used on safari. The rain was that thick, that pasty.

Whose blood? In the mornings the mountains were full of waterfalls and none of them were red. Only transparent purls tore the rock face. There was so much water that the world became submerged. All necessary objects lay clearly beyond the clasp of fingers. Where were the insects? Birds stayed in the beginning but even they disappeared after their nests drowned for the eighth time, their eggs finally flying when the water weakened the structures and the nests no longer held their weight. Butterflies, ladybirds and fireflies, none remained at all. Dense black clouds rolled in unrelenting waves on the houses in the valley.

Rita watched the weather move. From within that solid blanket she could see the colours more precisely. Her eyes did not strain against the details. Her sight adjusted to the pitch and she melded into them.

Four months that winter continued, electricity blinking on and off in a staccato visual medley. Trees were uprooted, roofs torn off, dams flooded, the landscape rearranged by erosion. The mist rose sometimes, the skies cleared infrequently and the sun shone briefly hot and steamy. Rita watched from the vegetable garden as people in the valley came outdoors with spades and rakes and green garden bags to unplug the drains at the end of the roads. But no sooner had they finished scraping the loose soil back onto the earth than the wind would start up again, howling around bare branches as loudly as if they had been leafy. Everyone retreated indoors defiant and unbelieving.

The whole winter people brought her food. They appeared progressively more compact beneath firm tucks of collars and warm jackets as they dashed up to the front porch with neither free time nor hands for an umbrella. They had forgotten that all the big eaters in the house were dead. Resolution and contentment coloured their cheeks and eyes.

The men were more affable than were the women. They were already comfortable in rainproof clothing. They sometimes asked for a cup of tea which request Rita always obliged. No one stayed for longer than twenty minutes. Her darted responses and blank stares had succeeded in stopping even the most furious of questioners. They owed her absolutely nothing. She was no longer the wife of Ryno de Wet, promising young farmer and Colonel in the Reserve Force. Nor was she the mother of two sons. She was not even the daughter of Meneer en Mevrouw Koekemoer. She had nothing aside from the land. If she accepted their help she would be a volunteer, a woman coming to them with nothing to barter in her own name, as if she could not manage on her own.

Bottled vegetables, her garden saw her through. She baked her own bread.

On a purple day, dark and smoking as the night, Rita fetched two boxes of old

cloths from the attic to pad the windows and doors which rattled even with the shutters and locks fastened. From room to room Rita hung cloths in windows and doorframes, strung them the length of picture rails. Rain seeped into the main bathroom and the entrance hall. The fabrics were soft and thin from age and overuse. They did not provide much insulation. Rita emptied the linen cupboards. She had never thrown away a single cloth from her life. She had given some away and she remembered both the recipients and the circumstances of each gift as clearly as if they were assembled on the floor before her. Her memories warmed her cheeks as deeply. Rita unpacked every cloth in the house. What were all the stories, truths and intimacies in the particular spreads of colours? Birthdays; Christmases; a full house on the farm or away in game parks. Mosquito nets and groundsheets. The house was a great deal warmer with all the walls padded inside the buffeting wind. The boys returned. Their shadows fell to the north. Rita waved and threw cloths over windowsills to remind them too. They advanced and settled across the paddock from her.

Her life had seemed liveable again. She would not be alone. She could play with her memories and wait for her sons to return, that would be enough. In the evening she sat in an old reed chair on the front stoep to watch the rain. The Paarl mountains loomed tall and ominous. With their tips shrouded it seemed that they stretched to heaven and made the valley a citadel, safe from intrusion. A sedan car rolled smoothly up the driveway. Elisma. Her beige car did not upset the symmetry of the colour scheme in the garden and the clouds. Her bredie which she tipped partially uncovered toward Rita was a mixture of colours that jarred against each other and scrambled themselves out over the view. Rita sank her head back into the landscape. Elisma disappeared into the house. When she returned she pulled up another chair and sat down beside Rita with her legs crossed and her back straight.

“You really can not go on like this. You have got to get yourself right,” Elisma began.

The rain started up louder. Elisma continued undeterred, “You have a lot to filter through; your feelings, your plans. But you must realise, it does not help to feel meaningless. You must be strong! You gave so much more than most people for this country. You must never let your soul give in. Rejoice for your sons. Be happy that you loved them. Go on again.”

The rain began to deluge as if a swimming pool drained over the house. Elisma inched forward and insisted bolder than ever, “You are not the only one suffering you know.” Grey mists shaded over part of Rita’s view as a watercolour. The deeper greens in particular mottled into each other to form a black or purple, Rita could not decide which as Elisma’s words sifted through her mind. “Try to focus on what you have been spared. You still have your home, your life. In the squatter camps whole families have drowned. The army has had to go in to clean up the situation.”

If there was compassion in Elisma’s tone her comparison overshadowed it. The boys grew restless. Rita knew Elisma would not see them. They died in the army. They had been far from her then. Where the woman got the idea that Rita thought of her life as meaningless Rita could not work out. And Rita noted the omission of Ryno from Elisma’s list of important reasons to stay happy.

Elisma slapped both hands on her knees and stood up. “Don’t forget the bredie,” she called before reversing down the driveway with practised skill.

Rita put the bredie in the freezer and went to bed to try to get warm. The walk-in freezer on the back porch was almost full although Ryno and her father had built it to take four full carcasses as well as normal groceries and cuts of meat, perlemoen and crayfish. What would she do when it was full? She pushed against the mountains of the valley to spread them back to the sea and reach it herself. But the rocks did not move. The valley did not enlarge, it shrank. It threatened to suck her under the floorboards. She ached to see the straight long road out of Paarl, the tall trees which lined the open land.

Again Rita pictured those tall trees along the national road. Anew she pushed against those mountains. She did not move. How long had it been? She stared unblinking and dispirited. Hours? She could not even swallow. The sneaky question retraced its dimensions, chillingly coherent. Had she killed herself despite all that she had tried to save her self? She felt nothing, not even her knee. Plus, completely insentient, she recounted these memories to herself with neither query nor passion. She simply observed them as if they were a movie-reel. Was this her life flashing before her? Was she dreaming?

Rita waited, unsure of how to answer the question. How would she know for certain?

So, she was going crazy after all, not to know whether she had crossed the line. Rita sat up and held her knee. The outside had swollen like a tennis ball but there was surprisingly little blood and the colours were spectacular, reds and purples mingling. They would cover it with a cast if she had broken it. Rita bent it a little. She was sweating. She needed to rest it on something other than the floor, something softer. The couch would be warmer and it was not too far from her. As Rita sized up the distance she realised how ridiculous she had been to stay on the floor. Although the pain would be severe all she had to do was get there. The cushions would do as blankets. She would be warm.

Rita braced her arms behind her. Moving against the pain; she had done it before in anticipation and she could do it now. As she slid over the short metres riddles of a box of snakes soared through her muscles up her back, into her arms. Trying to push the rivulets back was like trying to get them to sleep all packed up together. They had to organise themselves before they could rest. So this was it, this was what she had been working to avoid. Pain, the madness roved across her as she moved, a laser beamed into her, a feather blew over her. Rising to her head, quite ticklish, it nearly made her laugh. Except it seared, sharp. It really made her cry.

Long after Elisma left that night Rita got out of bed. She knew she had to act immediately or regret her laziness later. If someone caught her playing with the boys at the stream perhaps, or talking to her sons from the back door, they would do something. Put her away somewhere. They would call her dangerous. It happened occasionally, people without family were removed to places that the church only visited twice a year. Greasy Love. Rita could not bear the idea. She began folding the cloths, resolved to get rid of them. She packed the cloths into plastic packets and piled them into the car. She would take them to the flood victims where they would be in use, not packed away.

Once Rita had loaded everything into the car she stood back, confused. She had filled the boot and half of the back seat. The cloths did not amount to much, packed neat and flat. She still had the rest of the back seat, the front passenger seat and all the floors. She could hardly make out she was doing anyone a favour with these paltry contributions.

Rita drove the car to the back and emptied the dishes from the fridge onto the cloths in the boot, across the back seat and over all the floors. All the food had been prepared in the previous two months, all had been frozen within three hours of preparation. As for the bowls, she would replace them from her own kitchen. The women would enjoy the story of the missing dishes more than all the food they would ever have served in them.

The front seat was still empty. Rita gathered raincoats, gumboots and jackets, threw them in. She made a cup of tea and drank it slowly. Cape Town is not quite an hour from Paarl even in that kind of rain. The road is lit until just outside Kuilsrivier, then the city plunges into darkness. It was still too early to see properly. On a whim Rita took the Somerset West turnoff and drove out to Gordon's Bay. She stopped on the beachfront for a take-away coffee. A thin orange line glowed over the landscape as if the mountain blocked a fire.

Rita drove back past the airport towards town. In the new day the townships were visible. A large queue of drenched people with bottles and jugs and other containers wound around a truck dispensing fresh water. It was true, Elisma was right. Roads had been washed away and rivers burst all across the Flats. Normal water supplies, such as there were, were contaminated. People lined the streams staring into them.

"Yoh! Jongani bafazi! Ngumntwana!" A man wearing a large pair of plastic trousers waded toward the baby floating on the water. He picked the child up by its feet and walloped it.

"Uswelekile, uThixo!"

Three women turned beside the woman who wailed, supporting her as she almost collapsed. They led her to a shack where many people gathered around her. People skirted the water, eyes glazed with the fear that they might also find what they were looking for. Rita chose her route and drove. The police at the township gates searched her car and almost did not allow her to enter. Rita explained that the food was from her church and the cloths were donations. She almost begged them to let her in but she remembered that they did not respond well to begging. They would consider her crazy if she told them what she really thought. Rita lowered her eyes and said something about the Lord and the blessings that the church sent, how disappointed everyone would be to take their dishes back with the food still in them. Cooking was a matter of national pride. The soldiers at the gates let her in. They even offered her an escort.

Rita drove as close as she could to the shack where she had seen the group enter. She walked the remainder. A young woman with waterlogged hands saw her approach.

"I have food, just here outside."

"Uthi unokutya ngapakhathi."

Three men stepped forward. Each man and she returned to the car to fetch the food and the cloths, two or three dishes and cloths at a time. The shack was submerged in water up to her calves. Many people sat on crates or stood, their shoes in plastic bags, shifting their feet, talking. The woman whom Rita had seen earlier sat quietly with the dead child wrapped in blankets. With steps taken carefully in the mud they shared out the briedies, the stews, meatloaves and chicken pies, the biscuits, rusks and melkterts, coats and boots.

Rita drove on without a clear destination, wanting to be just anywhere but at home with all the silences and absolutely nothing to do there anymore. Rhodes Memorial was closed. Rita got onto the N1 home but on a whim she swung off to Pinelands and the

next sign she read said, 'Observatory'. Odd, but fitting, to see her sons in the heavens, to put them away safely up there. Rita followed the signs, parked beneath a bridge and walked down to Observatory Station instead.

The station was neat. Two women of her age waited on both sides of the tracks, handbags over their arms and jackets to their knees. The air was crisp. Sunshine lit odd angles beneath the bridge. Rita scuttled down the subway stairs, crossed the platform, followed a walkway to another subway. Salt River she knew from the railway line, Woodstock too. Mowbray had the big highway, Settler's Way. But Observatory?

She was back at her car when she spied a small shop which was open behind heavily barred windows.

"Hello," Rita mouthed at the young shopkeeper who tallied a list of figures on a cardboard box.

"Hello! What can I do you for?" He underlined his total and turned the cardboard down on the counter.

"I am looking for the observatory?"

"Well, you are close, just take the second left on the other side of the river." He pointed with his pen and started out of the shop. Rita followed him a short distance up the bridge. "This is Station Road. It becomes Observatory Road on the other side of the bridge."

He squinted in the morning sun. Rita nodded.

"Just follow Observatory Road over the robots and go straight across the river. The observatory is on the left, not more than a hundred metres in a straight line from here. On the same road as Valkenberg."

"Valkenberg?"

"You know, the mental hospital?"

"No."

"It's on the opposite side. Just behind those trees."

Rita laughed. "Those trees, on that hill?"

"Yes." He grinned questioningly but when Rita did not respond, he turned back to his shop. "You know, most people don't know Observatory is named after the observatory. They don't even know there is an observatory."

Two hot samoosas, a koeksister and an Appletiser later, Rita followed his directions. The small sign read "South African Astronomical Observatory", the gates were locked. It was a Sunday. Rita parked her car on the grass outside and walked around the perimeter. Inside were mysteriously designed buildings, several domes. An outcrop of Table Mountain peeped through the gaps between the buildings she skirted. Tall grasses and reeds surrounded the premises. They smelt beautiful in the early morning light. Behind the observatory ran the highway upon which, Rita recognised from the M-NET building, she was supposed to be travelling home. She could see all the way to Signal Hill, buildings tall and wide in the city centre. To her left her view was practically clear to Durbanville. Fawn reeds and grasses gold, burnt orange; how could such a rural area be right in the middle of the city? Rita sat in her car watching the suburb beneath the mountain, compact and ordered in a way she did not understand. It had made sense to move to a place of which she had never heard, where she had never been. No one would know who she was. There would no more raised eyebrows.

She saw all eight show-houses in Observatory that afternoon. Cape Dutch

homesteads, cottages, terraced rows. The houses were bleached and the streets small but all of Cape Town seemed like that after Paarl so she did not think too much about it. If she could just move here in secrecy everything would be okay. Her choice or theirs. Neither option amounted to anything in the end but they took it personally if their suggestions were refused. They preferred it not to get to that, they made it look happy, voluntary; like love. Greasy love. No one had ever escaped. Not once. That's how Rita knew it was greased. It was so smooth, it had to be.

No one had escaped of which she knew, but she had. She had saved herself. What force made her move in time? What had protected her? Rita still did not know what had saved her. A sick guilt had arrived then and grown in her gut, threatening to wrench the words out of her stomach as she spoke with those people and performed their charades, as if she did really owe them her plans and explanations. In the end it had been a flush finish, pure luck. Only the soldiers arrived, uniformed, armed, with their half-looks threatening to turn into questions albeit concealed. Rita noticed the irony.

All that Rita took for her new house was her bed. That last night Paulus and Karl helped her move it. Rita dismantled the bed and carried the pieces out to the bakkie herself, only the squeak of screws turning to give her away, but the headboard and footrest were too heavy for one person, especially down the stairs. After supper Rita went down to the labourers' houses to ask for help. Paulus and Karl nodded their heads at her brief and soft request, she could not breathe and talk simultaneously, she found. Sure, they agreed, that was not a problem. When all the pieces were stacked up against the wall in her new room in Observatory Rita was desperate to get straight back to Paarl. She was terrified someone would visit her at the farm and discover her plan before she could actually leave but Paulus and Karl put the bed up for her. Paulus insisted. He seemed to appreciate what she was doing.

"As mêem net vir vyf, tien minute sal wag, sal mêem rustig kan slaap, as mêem wil?"

Karl leant against the wall, right foot beside his left knee, screwdriver lax in his fingers. He spun it round, smiling.

In the time it took Rita to make tea the two men assembled the bed on the same spot upon which it still stood. The three sat atop it together and sipped their tea to test their sturdy work. Rita thanked the two men who laughed as always, Rita did not know why, nor why she forgot to stop herself in time. As they drove back to the farm Paulus and Karl seemed to nod off beside her. Rita knew they were awake, their postures prepared for turns in the road. She was grateful for their compassion. They reached Uitersfontein a little after midnight. The house loomed luminous from the turnoff. When she switched the bakkie off there was silence.

"Naand julle; lekker slaap," Rita called low after Paulus and Karl. Somehow they were already a good ten or fifteen paces from the car.

"Naand," they returned.

Rita let herself into the old farmhouse through the kitchen door as if to go to bed herself. The door slammed behind her, echoing as she crossed the kitchen. Her tread tapped shrill across the tiles so that Rita stopped at the passage, nervous suddenly of the vast hollow to which she had expected still to bid goodbye. She was more intimate with the house by night than day but each room seemed to gape off the middle passage and stretch to the unknown. She turned back to the kitchen and almost slid to the floor but she would have missed the lights' going out. From the window at the sink she could see

clear over the houses and the fields. Rita swung herself up to the draining board and waited in the shadows.

Perhaps it was the sudden idleness of waiting as compared to filling every single second of each day, perhaps it was the habit of falling asleep as soon as she had finished a day, Rita grew weary as she waited at the window. Her eyes had hooded over. Ryno's suicide, her sons' murders, her house, the farm; images compacted quickly over the landscape. The Memorial Service, her vegetable garden, Bienkie; her sons as small boys. Her wedding. Her parents' deaths, their birthdays. Thinking of everything that had happened and all she was leaving behind made Rita's head heavy. She leaned against the wall but to see the lights go off she could not face into the kitchen; the draining board was too small for her to lie down.

Rita had to stay awake. She could not risk being there for milking. Her legs were almost numb, her toes frozen. Her arms, cheeks, hands grew colder. Her breath hung vaporous before her, Rita pushed her face into its warmth for her nostrils, her cheeks. She had emptied the house of the clothes and personal belongings of each family member but not of furniture, carpets or curtains. It should not have been that cold. She rubbed her thighs thickly and jumped down from the sink to stamp some sensation back into them but it was only when Rita blew on her fingertips and felt her lips crack that she had realised how close it had really been, how near she had finally ended up coming. Would she have made it, even for one more day?

Rita turned her lips inward and covered her mouth with her fingers. She breathed through the narrow opening onto her fingertips. The lights in the smaller houses went off and still she waited. Even the dogs had to be fast asleep or their barking would rouse someone. Eventually she had slunk into the bakkie. She let the handbrake out and inched forward, her door still ajar. She freewheeled down the driveway, centimetre by centimetre, gliding. She hit the road, pulled the radio out of its handset, switched the headlights on and dipped smoothly into second; pulled the door tight, third, fourth; fifth. She was gone. She had left. This was the part which Rita had not yet conceptualised, she was free. In the dark cabin, blue shining from the dashboard, she felt miraculous. She drove straight down the N1, slowing and speeding alternately, and arrived at this house at four-thirty with only her handbag on her arm, shaken and cold as stone. She locked the garage door and walked through the back garden to the front door, twitching at the smallest noise until, blood rushing against the insides of her ears, she was safely inside the house, the walls enveloping her. It was already her partner, she felt it welcome her as she sank down on the empty lounge floor. And Paulus and Karl were right. She had no strength to tie her hair back, let alone twist thirty screws into that wood.

Rita heaved herself onto the couch where she lay, breathing hard, flat out. She made it, living in extra time. She had won almost five years and this house, the first and only place she could properly call home. She looked out of the window, saw the pale blue glow.

Only her bed, nothing else. Not a picture nor a plate nor a candelabrum.

The cold exhaustion which set in her bones that last night made Rita long for warmth and stillness. The craving stayed in her marrow for a year. Her arms were heavy, her muscles tired, Rita did not understand why. She lolled up, a beached whale on the shore, to eat or bath and occasionally to dress and go for fresh food. Later she rolled back down to sleep, her eyes closing before her head hit the pillow. There was also the

problem of Ryno's bakkie. Much more useful than her Cressida, but how does one reregister a car? She had barely left the house until she started the renovations the following year and that was a complete accident. There were shops within walking distance on Main and Station. In the mornings she lay in bed testing her muscles against the images of herself in her thoughts handling and picking out the odd chunks of cement which covered parts of the garden. Sometimes splinters ground around her feet, later Rita pounded the concrete with a heavy piece and exhumed a slither or two. Rita accidentally flung that first layer of surface rubble into the far left corner of the garden, which saved her making that mistake with the rubble when she turned the soil. By the time Rita realised her mistake she had amassed enough rubble to lay a rock garden.

A herb rock garden. Fennel along the fence, shade for the mint. Lavender into the middle of the garden, a windbreak. Basil, rosemary. Echinacea. Rita bought compost and potting soil, smoothed and sculpted the proportions. Once she started renovating Rita drove again, with the same number plate, but it took almost that full year not to wake up expecting to hear the boys beside her bed, asking her to picnic with them. Or to see Ryno standing beside the orchards, listening to her call to him.

The house looked completely different then. Someone else's wallpaper, linoleum, thick paint on the wood. Rita ignored those layers for that first year. In the second year, she mentioned the blisters on the window frames to Wim at the hardware store on Lower Main Road and he sold her the blowtorch second-hand. She sold it back to him when she had finished. Rita stared at Oregon pine floorboards hidden under linoleum, carpets and paint after already having blow-torched through seven layers of paint on the skirting boards, doors and window frames. She bought a floor-sander on the same scheme and set to stripping the lot. The work was satisfying, Rita would catch herself drinking a coke in her shorts and a vest, feeling like a lumberjack. When the floors all shone with gleaming finish Rita could not help but paint clockwise around the house. Off with the wall-paper and undercoats, she used that sugar soap, she wished it were edible it smelt so sweet. Her bedroom, the entrance hall, the lounge. The bathroom, kitchen, tiles hammered off walls, then the pantry, with the difficult angles between the shelves. When everything was clean she painted the new undercoat. She painted honey, orange; yellows against white.

Sometimes tired of sawdust and turpentine, Rita turned herself back to the garden for a week or two. She set the stoep the previous summer with concrete she mixed, straining against the spade, and poured between four pieces of wood. One square each day through summer. When the cement was almost set, Rita pressed broken tiles from the bathroom and kitchen into the surface. The pieces glittered and shone in the rain like stars. The whole project substantiated before her eyes without a day's worth of planning. It had taken her fully five years to accomplish, one thing after the next. Only the back shed remained; Rita needed a drill-bit to wire electricity through before continuing. The question of how to electrify the shed had drummed around in her mind since the washing machine flooded and almost fried her when she nearly stepped in the water. It took her ages to consider actually drilling a hole straight through the wall, and Rita wondered, where in the wall were the electric cables?

Chapter Three

Doya closed the kitchen door and took her breakfast of jam sandwiches and tea up to the grassy nook set with stones like a throne from where she could see the furthest over the Tokai valley. She ascended the incline slowly, set her breakfast and herself down easily and leaned against the stones to watch the day unfold. A fringe of overgrown cut-flowers dangled in a dell around her head. Everything was quiet aside from the hum in the garden. The quiet was riddled with happiness, just as a warm current sifted on the breeze around her face warming one cheek where everywhere else was cooler.

Slowly Doya chewed her sandwiches, sipped her tea. The sun would rise behind her. Doya would not see it for another five hours. When it did come peeking through, it would be through the gap in the mountains that lay to the north of her and not the east. The day would grow into light and clarity as a picture emboldened beneath a torch-beam. What is a thing too afraid of the sun ever to face it directly? Doya thought the dawn from that perspective was marvellous. It was as if the darkness never brought about a halt to the day, merely a duller version. If Doya woke before the birds she bet herself that if she should rise the hand holding that torch would automatically shine it on her. Was it coincidence that this morning she had won her bet?

Doya smiled. She held the sleepiness of one who has eaten a large meal and is now prepared to recover. The crazy lines which seemed even recently to be etched into her face had eased and her eyes were soft with the peace of survival, her body was calm with certainty. She was still powerful. The calm on her face neither revealed nor completely disguised the anticipation which curved excited in her stomach. She had many dreams to pursue, now, suddenly. Coming to Cape Town opened up gaps, a new series of dream exit points. She believed in dreams. Not the dreams of her sleep which tore her apart if she allowed them to. She believed in dreams of the real world, of who she chose to be. She had dreamed of the sea, of living close to the ocean as she had as a child, and here she was in Cape Town and still moving. She had feared she might never regain the tingling happiness she knew scabbling along the beach at low tide as a young child with her siblings, watching waves, playing with shellfish, but now she felt it. Keeness; come back again. But she would not move for the next few hours. Doya knew the value of sitting very still for the memories of which she often had no preconception to wind around an image and burst into colourful dimensions. Sometimes she saw nothing.

Then she listened instead to the different voices of her life which murmured gently at the back of her ears. Doya was used to the sounds of her memories. She encouraged them.

At midday she would go inside for a siesta, perhaps she might unpack a few boxes. Doya was not terribly concerned about the boxes. The Berthas were still finishing up in Pretoria until the end of the year. She and Mr Bertha, they insisted she call them Mr and Mrs Bertha, brought the first load of furniture, electric appliances and utensils, clothing, cushions, fabric, books and artwork to Cape Town three months earlier. Mr Bertha left the sedan car in the garage and flew back to Pretoria. Doya remained in Constantia, Cape Town, charged with setting the main house and her own cottage to the order that the Berthas expected and guarding the property from the squatters who could have set up on the land if they had known about it. At the end of the each month Mr and Mrs Bertha both drove down to Cape Town, Mrs Bertha in her station wagon with the trailer and Mr Bertha in a truck loaded with furniture and plants. They unloaded their belongings which Doya unpacked and cleaned according to Mrs Bertha's prescriptions. Mr Bertha attended long meetings and Mrs Bertha went shopping or worked in the garden, alone. Doya had not imagined that Mrs Bertha had instructed Anile in the grounds just as she instructed Doya in the house. The Berthas had left his rooms empty when he inexplicably did not return from holiday that year but Doya still had not considered that Mrs Bertha weeded or raked. Knees down in the dark soil she prodded rents throughout the beds, drawing, labelling, planning.

The Berthas had been different over the past year, as if they thought one thing but said another. They were unusually awkward and generous when they offered her this chance. Did they think she would refuse an opportunity to live alone in Cape Town, to be their housekeeper when they moved property? Cape Town, a peninsula, surrounded by kilometres of ocean. She accepted their offer but since she considered it Doya knew she would not continue to be their housekeeper. What her new life would encompass was still a mystery to Doya but she knew that life would offer her something new. She felt elated watching the new shoots of old roots outside in the cool dawn.

Doya relaxed into the earth. The Constantia and Kirstenbosch mountains framed her view. She had been up Table Mountain and she knew Constantia to be roughly behind the far head of the table. Doya remembered the top of the mountain as the spine of an animal bending low to drink from the sea and the sea as vast, undrinkable. The white fringe embroidered the coastline two centimetres this way and two centimetres that beside the narrow city. Doya trod lightly on the mountain. The animal was free to pull up its head or flick its tail at will and send everyone on it flying into the ocean. The freedom of which it reminded her gave her stamina. Doya also knew the view of the mountains from Carols-by-Candlelight nights and the nativity plays in the Bishop's Garden. She had attended both, both times she had been to Cape Town with the Berthas. Doya knew how strong the wind was. The little children ran around to the music all aglow in the evening candlelight. In the darkness people bumped into each other and jostled through the crowds and Doya would be just the same as any other woman carrying a child wrapped in a blanket or an empty picnic basket clanging loose cutlery. People would smile, impulsive, uninhibited to pass around the energy that she needed. They realised too late that she was an extra. They were already looking into her eyes to find that they were identical to their own and lead in the same manner to the centre of her soul as for any pair captured at so short a distance. The people even extended themselves

occasionally to looping their arms around her shoulders and singing into her ear in a conciliatory, helpless manner. Such small doses of genuine love, inspired by the love of God's born son or the ironed collars of the tenors against the neat fringes of the sopranos, kept Doya alive.

She had seen the coast where the two oceans meet and spent the afternoon at the penguin colony on the way back from the meeting place of the two oceans to town. At the gate to the penguin colony the guard let them in without saying anything. Perhaps a minder had wiped sand from his sandwiches and his eyes after the fullness of the tides. On that beach there were so many places in which to play that it was impossible to watch the children all the time. Doya kept one eye on the children and one on the penguins. For some reason she found the fat waddling birds to be interesting as they organised amongst themselves. The turtles at Ponte d'Ouro were also absolutely innocent of everything that seemed to matter in her world.

Doya did not normally accompany the Berthas on family holidays or excursions. She prepared for them and cleaned up for them in the houses they rented. Mr Bertha sometimes insisted that they needed her to help them, otherwise the days were exactly the same as if she were in the house in Pretoria, occupied with beds, kitchens, bathrooms and washing machines. She spent years fighting herself when she first discovered the incarceration of her new life. Was this her punishment for running away? Did her desire to escape her circumstances originate in her evil, selfish ways? Doya believed then that she had brought the loneliness and dangers on herself when she left Moçambique and her family. She should have stayed. Since childhood she had known the fate of women who ran away. Some said the best thing that could happen to them was that they would become birds and fly to their destinies in the realm of the ancestors. The way they said this made it sound like a calling.

Doya was lucky, or at least as lucky as she had been unlucky. Lucky to have realised in time that her unluckiness was not hers particularly, it was as common as the heinous crimes on the television news, it could have happened to anyone. Many people had suffered far worse trials than hers. Moçambique had been decimated, communities disbanded. The whole continent seemed littered with bones and landmines, like the news programme with that blonde woman from the casino, her murder finally solved. Doya threw up when she saw the shallow graves and the grey picture of the blonde amongst them.

Doya was not going to look for bones. That was not her responsibility. That was the work of history, for each and every human in every age to consider and acknowledge the magnitude of the loss, the scores of skeletons, the amount of painful dismemberment. If each person picked up one bone the bones would still never all be buried. How would she tell one bone from another? How would she ever know the difference?

Doya sipped her tea. This whole discussion was behind her. She was not a bird, free as a soaring wing, nor was she sold into slavery. She had no need to fear any decision she took nor any intolerance toward it. If she failed or if she did not it hardly even mattered. No one could punish her. There would be movement, just because. There always was. As for a place within that, Doya had remembered that it is always there if she believed enough to look. She had been living like that for ages already; in the smallest places finding evidence of life, of joy, even growth. And Doya had also seen that the cycles depended on her. Somehow they needed her to acknowledge their power

or it would have faded.

But a new phase should look different, evidence far more abundant than sunbeams shining through the rooms she cleaned. She needed to feel the inside of life again. It would not be long before she saw the sea. She wanted to dance, to feel the movement of her body close to another, to listen to busy music and drums. Slowly she stretched, feeling her muscles pull and her neck loosen. Doya was exploding with energy, triumphantly grateful to have lived, to be alive. Doya remembered living from years before. Walking down the beachfront, the air cool against her calves, talking to Jean-Pierre about the life she planned. Of course Jean-Pierre had been rude, he was always rude about rural people, but Doya did not mind. She was a young wife then in a growing family with co-wives and children. She dreamt still of profits earned through hard work and saving. Lourenço Marques was busy. Rich tourists came from the continent and the city flourished, notwithstanding Salazar's reign and the Catholic occupations. Eduardo Mondlane's Frelimo had entered its second congress and everyone believed in the future still.

Doya worked at L'Hotel Bonhomie on the south coast of Moçambique as a chambermaid and part-time waitress before she married Letsamo Sergeo, a bricklayer, and moved up the coast to Gaza to live with her husband and her co-wives, Aveline and Maleika, in Maxixe. Letsamo was older than Doya by ten years, nearly thirty years to her nineteen. When she joined them the family had three sons, Kelsun, Ivan and Frederico, and a daughter, Aarti. Letsamo's kiln was on his stead and Letsamo journeyed frequently to Tofu and Bara to market his bricks. Maleika, Aveline and Doya looked after the land. At first Doya enjoyed working outside, according to the rhythm of the day, relieved not to be cleaning the same objects, making the same beds, sweeping the same floors. She threw herself into the tasks that filled the lives of her co-wives and their children, grinding soaked millet with all her energy. The small herd of cattle turned the fields. The work was rewarding, but the women soon agreed that they needed more than hard work to eke a livelihood off the land. Nightfall was total. They had fish and access to water, but the time required for the journey was almost two hours. When Letsamo was home the women made three trips each day, but when he returned to the Portuguese cotton plantation for the six mandatory months per year they needed far more vegetables and far more water without his bricks. Aveline, Maleika and Doya planted cassava, struggled with cashews and coconuts. Paw-paws, mangoes, bananas. They had enough to survive but none to save or sell. Maleika slipped and chipped a water pot and the women made the journey four times per day, taking all the children on leisurely walks, stopping in the cool of the forest each time. Everyone began talking about moving to Chinoi or Inhambane, about pearls covered by hurricanes and drought scorching beauty off landscapes. Doya missed the noise and excitement of the hotel, the foreigners with their strange ways and carefree habits. That year when Letsamo came home, Maleika, Aveline and Doya persuaded him to let Doya return to her old job at Bonhomie.

The work was difficult physical labour. Routine made her muscles ache. Doya was lucky to have work, all the more so work which paid secret tips tucked into pillowcases. Her father received a quarter of her wages, Letsamo half, with which he normally bought clothes, the remainder went on provisions for the stead. Doya kept her tips. Every second Friday she rode to Catembe with Mahmoed who sold his buzzard meat to passengers alighting the ferry. Doya travelled four hours up the coast on the

smoky bus from Catembe, taking provisions, groceries and other purchases for the stead. Kelsun, Ivan and sometimes Frederico met her at the bus stop half a kilometre from their stead to help carry the parcels and update her on the farm. She returned early on Monday morning to start working after lunch at Bonhomie. In the evenings she served dinner at the hotel or she went for long walks on the beach, talking to herself, reciting the lines she knew from films, from monologues and lyrics, to the audience of birds and shells, which Doya knew to be the keepers of ancient souls. With the exception of Thursdays and Fridays Doya was happy. On Thursdays she washed windows and polished the floors, working fourteen hours in a row. On Fridays she was always too exhausted to see straight. But Doya had her own room; aside from working, she lived her own life.

Jean-Pierre, the head-chef at Bonhomie, was pleased to see her backside back in his kitchen he informed her, slapping it, and Doya had smiled with relief to see her old friend again, not even complaining about the sting on her cheeks. He had an ease of spirit with which Doya could relax, although while working he insulted everyone around him constantly. Doya sometimes mimicked Jean-Pierre when he was in a very good mood and he would smile, embarrassed, and shrug his shoulders. He had studied to be a chef in Paris. He loved to tell her about the centre of the city and how many people there were, how smartly dressed, how polite. How rich everything was in the 11th Arrondissement, where he had had a 'pensioen'. "It's like an apartment, but better," he explained to her in a pub so dim her eyes seemed to him to be electric with light as she listened to his descriptions of women singing on street corners to the apartments above for love and for money.

"Two years I lived in the place. You should go and see one day. I'll come with you and show you around. People sit and talk in discussions for hours on the pavements at the bistros and cafes. The winters are so cold you feel sure you will freeze to death but then your body surprises you by adjusting, and..."

She told him she wanted to be an actress. Doya chortled to herself. She had often wondered if Jean-Pierre knew how difficult it was to adjust to the dry, freezing cold of an inland winter, with none of a coastal town's natural moderation. She was not prepared for the chill in her bones for four solid months of the year. She had thought of him; Jean-Pierre in Paris, facing the same physical challenges to his body, turning his coat against the wind and rubbing his arms warm. If only he knew how precious these careless words had been to her. But Jean-Pierre gave her so many words then. Everything was different. And even with immortal revolutions came the muggy sweat of summer.

He liked to take her to shows and dances occasionally if he had money. Mr Laubscher, the proprietor of Bonhomie, drove up to Lourenço Marques on Saturdays in his army jeep. Sometimes Jean-Pierre organised a lift for himself and Doya and they shopped on the markets and had drinks with his friends on the west-side. Once they went out to Moçambique Island and ambled astounded between the coral buildings. If Mr Laubscher returned to Bonhomie on Sunday morning, Jean-Pierre and she would go to a show or to midnight movies and then walk the hour to the highway crossing at Boane where Mr Laubscher picked them up, still deep in discussion, at 3:30am. They conquered the road through the dawn while Jean-Pierre teased Mr Laubscher that he was afraid of the holiday operators who knocked at the kitchen door at six thirty, wanting their breakfast early and threatening to take their customers someplace else if they did not get their way.

One evening a tour group of Norwegians packed the restaurant. None could speak or read a word of Portuguese or French. Doya had been hard pressed to work out their broken English and explain the meals. She tried to match their descriptions to the menu. Of course different meals were delivered from those ordered and although the tourists soon decided that they would eat the food she had served, Doya was surprised to see that Jean-Pierre was disheartened.

"What's the point of my culinary education with no one knowing what on earth we are serving?" he demanded. "It's bad enough," he continued with great composure, "It's bad enough with the tourists not being able to read the menu. Let alone the waitress!"

Since Doya had already memorised the menu and that had proved insufficient, Jean-Pierre concluded the only option was for him to teach Doya to read. Doya had not understood why he made such a fuss about it but Jean-Pierre was adamant, suddenly calm and matter-of-fact, that being able to read and write was very important for making choices. Doya could not think of any choices that would require her to be literate.

"You're not too old, we'll start tonight. Every evening, when I am finished here," Jean-Pierre replied, folding his arms in that way that meant, final.

French was the only language that Jean-Pierre read or wrote and so these were the squiggles the shapes of which he taught her; patiently he went over the alphabet until she recognised each letter she traced. Doya sat still as a secret shadow over them. Words were the one arena in which he was never rude about her intelligence, which was odd, because Doya knew less about written words than anything else she did for or with him. But instead of calling her the least competent, most idiotic of women in history, Jean-Pierre spoke about the power of words, of the whole story. His eyes lit up as he told her that words lived as butterflies, free to fly to all the crevices they chose. Jean-Pierre never allowed himself to get impatient with her. His restraint underscored the importance of his task. It was weeks before he started showing her how to put them together. Would they ever mean anything to her? "It's a code," he told her as she stared at the indecipherable forms. "It's a message system, that's all." Then, Lourenço Marques, the sound of bells ringing beneath the ocean, with only one cedilla to give away their underneathness.

A code. Twelve years after leaving Moçambique, learning to sew beneath the harsh ends of Mrs Bertha's peroxidised hair in her sewing room in Pretoria, that is what Doya relied on. A code. Doya watched the slip, loop and cross stitches. A secret code which would still denote turns in mood between fellow stragglers in a world to which they did not contribute. Mrs Bertha never smiled. She resembled someone running a race or strapped to the front of a train without knowing how fast it could go. There was only one rule: small stitches, neat and clean, flat as possible. The objective did not vary. Mrs Bertha's eyes never relaxed over the work she did, nor over the yards of remaining material. She drank cups of tea on saucers with biscuits as did Doya on these occasions. She worked silently, listening to a small radio on her table. Occasionally Mrs Bertha laughed at it; more often she hummed along to the tunes as they played. No matter how much she completed, Mrs Bertha tossed each item aside and went on with the next one immediately.

Doya had never liked the sewing room. She had not always been allowed to enter

it. The first evening she spent at the Berthas' house they showed her their home and the grounds. At the door to the sewing room Mrs Bertha had wrung her hands, darted up and swung the door open, revealing a mess of material over tables and a mannequin. She closed the door swiftly and turned to Doya.

"This – mine," Mrs Bertha said, pointing to the door and then at herself. "Mine, mine. You no come in here. Mine," she almost shouted, stabbing her finger into her own chest to ensure that Doya understood.

For the first ten years Doya was occupied entirely with the house. Groups of women had gathered at the house frequently with their children to sew, eat and organise. The production of things was very important to them. But once the children went to boarding school the groups had decreased and Mrs Bertha spent more time alone in her sewing room. Doya also had less work. One day Mrs Bertha called Doya in and showed Doya how to do the tacking on the curtains she replaced throughout the house. Then linen, outfits for the children. When Mrs Bertha saw Doya's consistently neat tacking and quick, dry hands she moved Doya to the collars and the cuffs. The hems grew longer, the stitches smaller and more frequent, repairs invisible along gorgeous flowing skirts. But no code appeared; only the iron rod of competition in the hats, brims, garters. Expansive silences stretched so that the sound of rioting scholars from the next suburb could not be heard; only little noises of birds and scampering field mice.

Chapter Four

Lesley woke at six o'clock to her alarm. She switched it off before it woke anyone else and pulled her arm back under the covers. The morning was still cold. She stretched, wiggled her toes, too comfortable and lazy to get up and hit the decks. She turned in to watch the nose of Devil's Peak from the bottom of her bed. It loomed over the back wall, pressing close and distant simultaneously. Some mornings it was indomitable, fired precisely against the sky. Others it looked squat, a molten soft-serve, storms pared it purple to the white sky. How could a mountain outcrop have so much character and diversity? What would it take to get to the top?

Lesley raced through the shower. She hummed quietly, enthused and alive, her tone deep and resonant. The speed of a cold morning put her into a good mood which usually saw her winging through her work.

"Sian, wake up! It's almost 6:30, wake up!" Technically they were not on speaking terms. Lesley only communicated with her sister out of necessity.

"Sian!"

With Sian in the shower, Lesley made breakfast. She lined four planks on drums across the hole in the kitchen floor. She balanced across the boards and threw the cupboards open, scanned their contents. Jungle Oats! She put a pot on the stove and prepared four cling-wrapped packages of sandwiches for her siblings and her father until the porridge began to bubble. She turned the heat down on the stove and went to check on her siblings. Everything was going like clockwork. Sian packed and Madon dressed, Tina was in the shower. "Jungle Oats for breakfast," Lesley called, stepping into the bathroom. She knocked on the shower door.

"Hello Teeny-Tiny! How are you today?"

"Fine, thank you!" Her childish voice sang through cascading water.

"Come and eat your breakfast, aren't you hu-u-ngry?"

"Yes Le-e-sley!"

6:52am. Their father's alarm went off at seven and the shower would be clear. Lesley checked over his outfit as she passed the ironing board where she had left it the evening before. Collar and shoulder joins, cuffs: perfectly pressed. Flat and smooth. She hated the idea of her father in trouble, on her or any other account. Yet he had explained in his patient tone, trembling nervously so that his moustache twitched like whiskers, that

his boss and his secretary had commented on the ironing of his clothes. The legs were always uneven at the back. The shoulders were lopsided.

“Would you please in future take greater care not to send me out looking like a scarecrow?!”

Lesley knew he joked to try to make the situation seem lighter, also that there was nothing light about the situation. Her father’s secretary was always impeccable in her skirt suits and subtonic blouses, polished high heels with geometric toes, her hair pouffed to her waist. Mr Shokols bordered on rotund. How could anyone tell her father off? Were they insane? Appraising her father? Lesley imagined their search over his back for a single crinkle, scrutinising his legs for a fraction of an angle’s worth of difference.

Once everyone was out the door and off to their respective days Lesley walked through the house. She opened all the windows and doors and assessed the extent and scope of her work in each room. As she moved through the rooms she threw dirty linen, clothing and loose carpets or rugs into the doorways to freshen and dry out the floors. Even in cold months this made the place smell and feel cleaner. She kept the house open for around four hours a day and although it seemed dangerous she loved the feeling of standing in the middle with all the windows open, air blowing from all sides of the house. When they moved into the house it was recently finished with neat fittings and a brand new bath, enamel white as snow. But by the first winter everything had changed. Taps pealed shrill to the turn. The carpets grew soggy. The paint discoloured around the bathroom at the back of the house as water oozed up the walls. It crept into their mother’s study and across to the passage towards the back door.

At her mother’s study, Lesley stopped. The door was closed but so was the door to her parents’ room. She had not heard her mother but sometimes her mother was silent. She placed her hand on the handle, pressed cautiously. It reached its click, she pushed forward, opened the door a crack. No one there, Lesley hopped across the mildew into the room and threw the curtains and the windows open. The loose mat over the carpet was wet. Lesley threw it out the middle window to hang it out to dry. She hung the damp mats up and threw the mats which were completely sodden into the bath to soak in soap and disinfectant.

She collated all dirty crockery into an ordered tower and carried it to the kitchen. Lesley had a system based on Tupperware following which she defeated time. If she organised her work properly then it did itself, more or less. Tupperware saved space by packing more into it. Precious as space was, Lesley was more interested in time for writing her stories, plonked on top of the washing table in the nook behind the lines where her parents had once promised her her own room. She could clear a full two hours before someone interrupted her.

That morning there was not a lot to do because she was up to date with the washing. She would have to repack the cupboards in the wake of the piggies but that would be her daily long chore in the second round. First glassware, soaked in piping hot soapy water. Lesley sorted the washing. Dark colours in the sink, whites in a bucket. She beat the clothes, rinsed the rugs and ran the bath again for the light colours while she hung the rugs out to dry. She returned to stamp on the clothes in the bath, singing, “I zicky zumba”.

Lesley left them to soak and returned to the kitchen. She cleared and wiped the surfaces, swept the floor-planks, wiped and rinsed the glassware so that it gleamed, still

hot, evaporating dry. She loaded all crockery into the sink, mopped the floor-planks and returned to pummel the washing – hard. It worked her calves and her thighs. All over the globe women stooped in this way over basins employed in keeping the world's dirt at bay. This was a dignity, it was more than just one of those things. Lesley moved into the house. In each room she folded, piled, replaced, dusted, swept and wiped. She hopped across to the next room. The floors dried out.

The first diagnosis was rising damp. The landlord examined the green blisters, shrugged his shoulders and insisted that all the houses in the whole city had problems with damp in the winter. It would dry up when the rain stopped.

“It rains in July in Newlands more than in a year in some countries!”

Their second winter in the house the damp rose right through the carpets. The children were revolted at the sodden yellow. They retched when they looked at it. The landlord brought the plumber who tinkered around the side of the house and pronounced it an easy problem. The walls required asphalt. Lesley expected that this would be clear but it was dark. Her face appeared with detail in the paste when she looked closely. Dark eyes and a stubby fringe appeared above her.

“Get away from there! You'll get yourself killed,” yelled the plumber. She jumped at his tone and almost slipped into the skip.

The thick coat went on and the problem disappeared for almost a year but the third winter it came back again. Far more water than before. Since then the only way to cross the passage was to jump in a zigzag like hopscotch across it. Their toes hated it. Once Lesley discussed with her father how to fix it for good and he grew irritated with her and asked her why, if she thought it that disgusting, did she stay? Dangerous, to ask a young child why she chose to stay. A complete sentence? No, a question. That year the smell was so bad that when he arrived the landlord went straight for his car-phone and called the demolition people. They brought chainsaws and pneumatic drills and blasted up the foundation concrete, crumbling and putrid. They called the architects and an engineer who also peered beneath the ground. An underground river ran beneath the width of their house straight down to the Liesbeek. They poured in bitumen and fresh cement. The house would need constant attention and repair, especially in wet winters.

Lesley packed away glasses, wiped and stacked crockery, soaked a final load of incidentals like the fruit-cum-post-bowl and then ashtrays. If she achieved this by ten she was doing brilliantly. Her daily chore followed. Every fifteen minutes Lesley interrupted this chore to wring out and hang up a load of washing. She bet herself an hour a day on these two jobs during which her mother was likely to rise if she was not already in her study. When her mother slept late she usually went out straight after she showered, while Lesley hung out the washing. This could leave up to two uninterrupted hours for Lesley to sit perfectly still and empty the images she heard before Tina came home from school.

What she needed most of all was a job. She had tried the daily Cape papers with her Matric results on a non-existent CV but she had no training and no skills beyond languages. Otherwise, Lesley's choices on the job market lay in the league of unskilled labour. She also needed better clothes. This she had not mentioned to anyone, only made a mental note to attempt some mending and stitching before she hit the streets again. Journalism was her dream job and she knew it was up to fate to provide her with someone who would recognise her innate talent and usher her into the editor's suite. Then she had

to impress the editor. The entrance turned out not to be a problem. Lesley zipped through the stiles with a visitor's disk and ducked straight into the elevator. Everyone looked so shifty she hardly stuck out. Finally she reached the floor of her dreams. People with pencils behind their ears, in shirt pockets, in their hair and beards. She stepped out onto the floor and the doors closed behind her. A computer man cabled a port. A stocky man with a round face looked directly up at her. Lesley almost asked him for directions when he dropped his face to his desk again. He evidently had not seen her. A woman with blonde curls and a furrowed brow tapped keenly on a keyboard. Another woman whose pencil held up her hair-bun, which impressed Lesley as ingenious, talked boldly into the telephone.

A journalist paced into the room. "It's a hit! PW's giving a speech in Pretoria tomorrow. I have got to get a flight and a car. Jesus, I love this job!" He walked to his desk and shuffled papers around, opened a drawer. "Where's my ID? Fuck. Fuck!"

"Mr Ivans?" His name was on his desk.

"Yes?"

Lesley meant to ask, "Where," "Where's the editor's office?" but in the transition from 'wh-' to 'air' she lost her breath and foreshortened the word.

"Who's the Editor?"

"Can't say, this is the first I've been in today," Mr Ivans slapped the table before him and convulsed laughing. "Come, I have to organise a ticket and a car. Let's see who occupies the royal chambers this day." Gallantly he opened his arm to escort her.

Serious? Genuine?

Mr Ivans crossed the room and opened a door, entered it and began speaking. Orating. He threw his arms from left to right and sank into a chair. He stared at Mr Weaver, a thin, muscular, slightly balding man who nodded, sat back and looked at Lesley in one move. Mr Ivans swung up and walked out of the room, all also in one move.

"Mr Weaver?"

"Yes?"

She had one move. "I'd like to apply for a job."

"Personnel Office. They hire, I fire. What do you do?"

"Anything."

"Presently?" Mr Weaver looked weary. "In what capacity are you presently qualified? Where do you work?"

"I work at home." Home! Relevance? "I write in the afternoons." Pretentious! "I want to be a reporter." Three bongs in a row. Lesley felt like she had run twenty laps.

"What are your qualifications?"

"Matric, last year."

"Personnel, two floors down, right three times. I don't even get a look at the new ones until they're sitting at a desk. Pity," he gave Lesley an open once-over.

The local papers would not have her either. Not for free, nor as a trainee, Lesley joked with herself, not even for a fee. One blonde woman with unevenly permed hair asked Lesley all kinds of questions. Lesley answered them, considering each carefully. She enjoyed the community papers. Too often she shelled out good cash for pretty women hanging out in daisy fields when she read a broadsheet. Even with the restrictions the smaller papers managed to deliver a free newspaper with interesting

stories door to door every week. Lesley did not admit her preference for these papers to the blonde editor. Everyone knew the dailies were up against the government as they carried national news whereas the community papers carried local stories about schools, bazaars, amateur drama troupes. The woman leaned over her desk at the end of the interview. "The only way into this industry without qualifications is to go out there, get into stories and build up a portfolio."

Her dream was to study at the university. Once, in an enthusiastic gaff, she asked her mother if she could go. The words came out square to hang beside her head in boxes of syllables; *a-tend-yeu-ni-ver-si-ty*. Lesley watched them, thinking how chunky they were, how bulky, each one a label for a quantity of knowledge of indeterminate length.

Her mother asked, in a curious accent, "And what would you like to read?"

Lesley could not quite see into her mother's eyes but the tone of the question was upbeat so she stepped forward. "Literature."

Her mistake was to ask in front of Gwendolyn. Gwendolyn had shrieked and slapped her knee, almost spilling her beer onto her cards. Real literature was shoved under her nose blinking neat small lines at her. "There's a vast difference between reading something at home and reading something at university. It actually takes brains, hard work. Do you ever think you'll do something like that? Write like this?"

Lesley stepped back from the washing and watched it flap neat, straight.

A Portapool occupied the middle of the cement courtyard in summer. Her parents took back the offer of her own room there on account of the pool and the midnight dips in summer. The neighbours' kids came round to make whirlpools, turning on the strength to test it, chortling, choking, floating into each other. Their splashing would disturb any alterations.

Lesley heard her mother leave. She had never worked a day in her life that Lesley could remember. There was talk of the jobs she had had. There were shorthand squiggles all over the house. There was also talk of the jobs that she would, one day, take on: her mother was always planning for a grand future for herself. This required many arguments, as much to determine the routes that were not to be followed to this grand future as to determine those which were likely to reveal the pot of gold that everyone wanted.

Lesley remembered her mother when Lesley was small, with long hair, an angel of competency, of life. She saw the way her father adored her mother, how he tried to please her.

She fetched her writing things from the cupboard and climbed onto the rickety table behind the lines. She pulled her feet up beneath her chin. Occasionally she allowed herself to flip back and read through her stories. None of her writing was any good. While the writing had at first been a stream of gold against a deep purple background it now appeared with blotches and scratches. In good literature the meaning flowed behind the words, between neat and even letters. No – beyond – beyond meant you still had to look through the whole word to see its meaning.

She liked soft sounds, very soft sounds. Tenacious, a good old chair waiting to be sunk into. Rambunctious, an ironing board whose notches she adjusted as she grew. But she did not object to harsher words, she could not choose. Lesley examined her leg, she picked absent-mindedly at an ingrown hair. She tried to track live stories before. She had read that Yeats would practise his poetry by finding a subject in the streets of Dublin

or Sligo and write a poem on him or her as an exercise of word play like a crossword puzzle. Lesley thought that was a great idea but she had found she could only watch on the sly. If she watched people openly they sometimes became hostile. Lesley reconciled herself to patience. The source of a story should not be prospected, it should gush out. Moreover, questions would obscure its velocity. True gushing would resist direction.

Lesley decided to look for a story. She found the money for bread and took no pen or paper. The cover story of buying bread gave her approximately ten minutes, the time required to get to the shop and back with no dawdling. She would observe and write as soon as she got home. She locked the front door and hurried up to Main Road. Lesley adjusted her bra-strap under her shoulder blade. Her breasts had grown. They bounced before her heavily. Her hips turned up and out as if smiling, her bellybutton the curious centre of her sway. She felt different. She was vital. She felt deeper, as if she were diving under the surface.

She stopped at the second-hand clothing shop. The shop was dim and crammed with clothes. Fabrics and patterns detailed fashion since the early 1920's. Sometimes the sheer blatancy of the items prompted whole scenes with individual characters. The places they knew could fill an encyclopaedia. The saleswoman leaned over the table at the front door towards Mr Isaacs from the chemist who stood inside the doorway with a bunch of flowers in one hand and a package in the other.

"Afternoon! Nice flowers!" Lesley greeted him.

"Afternoon!" Mr Isaacs nodded solemnly as Lesley walked past them toward the rails at the back of the shop.

"So, what happened?" The saleswoman leaned toward Mr Isaacs conspiratorially.

Lesley rifled through the shop and chose two cocktail dresses. She rustled into them in the changing room. The thick fabrics swirled from her waist. She stared at herself in the mirror, willing the personality of the person who first bought that dress to appear to her on the occasion for which she bought it.

"She tripped on the mat and gashed her knee. In the middle of the night. The cruciate ligaments in her knee are kaput. This is the prescription." Mr Isaacs paused to reorganise his package and flowers. Lesley heard the different papers crunch and slide against clothing and the table. "Apparently she was in an awful lot of pain."

"That's just horrible."

Lesley dressed haphazardly. The dresses were too sombre. She needed a robe with panache. She was on five minutes. She searched the racks with a keen eye.

"Cindi from the co-op heard her. She got her boyfriend to go in because she could hear Mrs de Wet calling but no one answered the door." He shivered. "They took her to the doctor."

The woman sucked her tongue. "How did her boyfriend get in?"

"Through the sliding door in her bedroom," replied Mr Isaacs, aghast. "It was unlocked. Can you credit it?"

The woman whistled low between her teeth. "It's a wonder, you know." She paused, "It's a shame to live alone. A person can get hurt in the night."

"Yes," Mr Isaacs agreed, his voice gravely, "I know. Alright, I'm moseying. See you later," he said.

"Give her our love!"

Lesley chose one further outfit of pink and orange taffeta and threw it over her

head. She turned in the dusty cloakroom. Between the colours and the décor she looked ill. At eight minutes she walked across to Bawa's Café and bought the loaf of bread. She turned the corner to find her mother's car was still out.

"Hello again," Mr Isaacs stepped out of Rita's front door as Lesley passed. "What perfect timing. I've just been with Rita. Why don't you pop in?"

"Is this who you were talking about in the shop just now?"

"Yes, it is."

Lesley had the bread. She was in her road. She would hear her mother's car and be home in less than five minutes. She nodded and Mr Isaacs turned back into the house to call, "A new visitor!"

Lesley closed the door behind Mr Isaacs and walked into the lounge, noting a farm-style split door at the end of the passage. On her left was a bathroom; Lesley looked into the first door on her right.

"Hello, Rita," she called.

"Hello!"

Rita lay propped against a multitude of pillows, her right knee raised below the bedclothes. The crochet blanket enveloping her whole bed tucked on an exact fold beneath her arm.

"Hi."

"How are you today?"

"Fine, just a little flat." They both smiled. Lesley relaxed, her eyes adjusting to the room.

"What happened?"

"I slipped on the mat." Lesley winced imagining the scene despite the rhyme.

Rita continued, "I pulled the cruciate ligaments in my knee."

"Excruciatingly painful?" It was a cheeky pun but Lesley knew it would raise a smile in the patient. She was right. Rita nodded and smiled.

"That's what Dr Freidman said. But he gave me an injection so I can't feel it. Now it's not painful at all." Rita cocked her head at Lesley in a half-laugh, half-grimace. "I can't move it, it makes my head swing so I have to sit down. It's the ligament that crosses under the knee, it carries the weight of the whole body."

"Sherbet, Herbert!"

"It could have been worse. I could have torn it. Dr Freidman showed me a huge contraption with bits and pieces on both sides and a belt. Poles. Here! Thank goodness it wasn't that serious." Rita wanted to talk. She had been with people since her rescue but she was surprised to find she was still hedging not to be alone. "Would you like some coffee, or tea?"

Lesley nodded.

"Help yourself, everything is in the kitchen. Put out some rusks for us, please!"

Rita's house was highly unusual for Observatory. Clean, empty, with very little decoration or personal detail. No pictures hung on the walls. There were no photographs, albums or books. The kitchen had a gravity. It felt like a centre. Lesley put the kettle on and opened the top door. She leaned on the bottom half. A roofed stoep surrounded the house, a lawn spread around flower and vegetable beds. This was the most vegetation that Lesley had ever seen in Observatory. She looked for a herb garden and found it in the corner flanked on the one side with lavender and on the other with

mint. The hedges were fleshy. A washing machine and a shed stood to the left of the door. To the right was an old wicker couch with cushions covered in guinea fowl. Lesley stepped outside and picked some daisies and flowers that she could not identify which she added to the tray that she took in to Rita.

Rita's house was dim after the bright sunshine in the garden. But for the garden it would have seemed bare. Lesley poured tea, passed a cup to Rita and sat down feeling strangely passive. Her teacup balanced on a saucer with a colourful geometric pattern. Lesley followed it quietly out of the corner of her eye. If only she were not such a stranger she would know what to do that Rita would feel more comfortable and at ease.

"These flowers are lovely," Lesley smelled Mr Isaac's bouquet. "They're from Mr Isaacs?"

"Yes, they are. Thanks for these," Rita traced a petal in the vase from the tea tray.

"It's a pleasure! I like your garden. I've never seen one like that in Observatory. How did you get it like that?"

"Like what?"

"So luscious, green. Full."

"Compost from the kitchen. Anyone can do it. I just turned it into the soil. This is the first year I'm planting in the vegetable beds, though."

"When did you move here?" Lesley remembered the house was up for sale the first time they pulled up the concrete but she had not noticed the sign come down.

"October '83."

"Five years ago?" Lesley gaped. How come the first time she had met Rita was the previous night?

"Well almost. The rubble took a year to clear and then I turned compost in for two years. Last year I got lazy and I only planted flowers. Five years, gardening and decorating. What will I do when it's finished? But I don't have to think about it until this knee is better."

"How long 'til you walk again?"

"A week or two. And I have crutches so I can walk as soon as I can get my head to stop swinging when I try to use my knee!"

Lesley smiled, respecting Rita for her attitude despite her circumstances. "The flower-beds are going to be gorgeous in full bloom," she said, giggling at the grandiosity of the sentence.

"I hope so," Rita agreed.

"Green thumbs!"

Rita nodded. "Must be. My family were farming people. It's – inherited?" She fumbled with the word.

"Genetic," Lesley suggested, then corrected herself. "Hereditary."

"Hereditary," Rita nodded.

"You lived on a farm?"

"Yes."

"Wow." A person who had actually lived on a farm, living in Observatory? That explained the thick garden all right. "What about inside?"

"What do you mean?"

"I mean, it looks great in here, but you need some pictures. Some materials."

"Ja, you are right," Rita replied, her left eyebrow rising as she thought. Lesley

leant forward but Rita shrugged. "I don't have any. I should get some."

"Next time."

"Ja," Rita agreed.

"So what do you do?"

"Not much. Just work on the house, it's enough to keep me busy. And you?"

"Not much either. I am the family vacuum cleaner."

"A housewife?"

"No, no, more like a house-keeper. You know: 'First is the worst, second is the best, third is the one with the hairy chest. Fourth is the King, fifth is the Queen, sixth is the royal washing machine.'"

"I see," Rita smiled. "Races?"

"Yeah, to school or in from the car, there are six people in our family. Two adults and four children."

"Don't you mean three adults and three children?"

Three adults? Lesley blushed. She, an adult?

"Do you always come last?"

"No," Lesley scowled, "I come in third or fourth after my brother and my baby sister. We all let her win."

Rita tried to apologise. Lesley was sheepish. "It's not the order, it's just a rhyme I know. If you can have a royal washing machine then you should be able to have a family vacuum cleaner and I sure am it!"

"Don't you have a job?"

"A paying job? Nope, I finished Matric last year, but I can't find any work." Lesley let her answer trail. She meant work that she wanted to do but with the unemployment rate in everyone's minds most people accepted that without questioning.

"Aren't you going to study?"

"No, not at this stage." She let her words hang open as if other stages were still on their way. "I have an exemption so I can, when I'm ready. I'm taking a year off and helping out at home. I want to be a writer. I'm building up a portfolio."

"I see," Rita replied. "That's a good idea."

"Thank you. Did you study?"

"No. Some of my friends went to secretarial college. Three even went to university at Stellenbosch. They studied company, uhm, social work. I did not see the importance, I wasn't interested in spending all my time in books," Rita gave an exaggerated shrug.

"I'd spend all my time in books!" Lesley broke in excitedly.

"Would you?"

"Yes! Gaining knowledge."

"I thought I would be a housewife forever."

"And now?"

"Well, I still am but there's only me and the house. I'm not sure what it's called if there's only you and a house to look after."

Lesley could see Rita was talking about something much more important than whether she had a name in the dictionary or not. "What do your family do now?"

"Now?" Rita started. She spilt tea into her saucer as she realised the conversation she had inadvertently begun.

"You said they used to farm?"

Rita put her tea down. How could she tell Lesley the truth? She pushed herself up against the pillows. Rita had never explained the story before. It was always told to or for her by other people who had discovered before her and knew the details in order already or passed them on to other people in her stead. "Well my brother is still farming in Malawi," Rita pulled this fact from the back of her subconscious. "His name is Wynand."

"Malawi! That's pretty far out."

"Ja. And my children..."

"You have children?"

"No, uhm, not anymore; no." Rita floundered. It sounded so strange.

Lesley's eyes narrowed. She knew better than to ask where Rita's husband was. Many single women lived in Observatory.

"I used to be married too, but I'm not anymore. I'm, ag, hoe sê jy dit nou weer? Widowed. I'm a widow." How were the words so brief, the effort in translation? It was laughable, almost amusing. Lesley watched Rita, her mouth a thin line. Rita was in too deep to lie. The facts in chronological order. "My husband died in 1982, my parents just after him and my sons in '83. In one year. There's only me now. And Wynand."

A whole family killed within a year? This kind of story caught tight in Lesley's stomach yet it was so common she knew she ought to be able to cope better. From Rita's accent, Lesley deduced farm murders, patricide? A car crash? Bomb victims? The possibilities flashed across her face while Rita watched Lesley battle the questions. How could she tell this story?

"My parents were in a car accident, four months after my husband, uh, Ryno, died. And my sons died in the army the year after." The words came out soft, almost whispers. Rita smiled, relieved.

"That's terrible." Lesley sat dead still. She had no clue as to what she should say.

"I know," Rita agreed, "it's terrible." Her words echoed Lesley's, trite and hollow. "It's so terrible," Rita pronounced loudly to acknowledge the verity of Lesley's response but the words came out mocking, mimicking. Embarrassed, knowing there was no right thing she could say, Rita started to smile at the corners of her mouth.

"But I've got to get over it now. It's been nearly five years already," she continued quickly, trying to get past a giggle which turned in her stomach, to retain the dignity of the story and all those who had perished in it. "Nearly five years!"

If Elisma only knew! Rita had not made it past the tickle of her internal quandary, she giggled guiltily at Lesley. She tried to keep her face straight but a gurgle like a fat burp from her stomach ascended her windpipe into her mouth and she giggled again and began to laugh, aloud, for a long, long time. Lesley watched Rita heave herself over her knee and clutch her thigh to stop her leg from shaking. Her back and head quivered helplessly.

Shock? Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder?

When Rita finally regained control of herself Lesley's patient and sincere face started her up again. Rita laughed back in stitches and peals against the pillows.

"I'm sorry, I know it's not funny. I don't know why I'm laughing," Rita smiled from ear to ear.

Lesley sipped her tea. She aimed to look relaxed. Instead she slurped her tea and

a loud sucking noise filled the room.

"And the rain in 1983. It stormed so badly just after the Memorial Service for my sons I thought the whole of Paarl would be washed away! It's just, you know, the whole thing was unnatural, the whole thing from beginning to end. Maybe this is unnatural too. Maybe I'm the one who is going to be unnatural now."

"I remember that storm. A big tree blew over outside here on the corner. We had no electricity for three days. The rivers on Table Mountain flew upwards in the winds. I watched from the classrooms at school. I was cross with god, because if it had rained the year before we wouldn't have had the fire on Table Mountain."

"You remember that fire?"

"Yes."

"That was the year of Ryno's death – my husband," Rita repeated for clarity, "his suicide."

"His suicide?"

"He took his bakkie, this same one I have now, and drove to Rooi Els. You know there on the beach where the bridge is?"

Lesley had never heard of a Rooi Els, only a Wit Els which was a five-day mountain hike, but she nodded anyway.

"They told me he died instantly. They only found him three days later. A bride and groom from Bloemfontein on a honeymoon walk saw him under the bridge. I always wondered how it could be to be the young bride in the situation," Rita's voice trailed off. She squinted, rubbed her head. "I at least would not want something like that to take place on my honeymoon."

"No," Lesley agreed. "Did he definitely kill himself? Was it definitely suicide?"

"He shot himself, through the head. They found our gun, Ryno's gun. I didn't use it. He tried to show me once but I don't have the spirit for it. There was an investigation."

Lesley swallowed. "I'm sorry. I didn't mean to pry."

Shaking her head, Rita replied, "No, don't worry. It's normal to ask questions."

"And your children?" Lesley poured more tea.

"My sons? They died in a limpet mine explosion."

Splashes delved into the cup, Lesley stared at the flow. "Together?"

"Yes, together."

"Together?" Lesley repeated.

"Yes, together."

"But I thought brothers weren't supposed to be in the same unit." The sentence stuck in her throat.

"Ja. They aren't."

"What happened?"

"I still don't know. They were on the border."

"What were their names?" she asked quietly.

"Rudi," Rita flexed her fingers, "Rudolph and Alain."

"How old were they?"

"Nineteen and twenty. Nearly two years apart. Rudi, the older one, was about to finish. Alain had only done seven months. I've been having nightmares about it," Rita admitted rashly.

Lesley nodded.

"That's actually what happened last night. I was so scared, I don't know, I jumped. That's how I landed on my leg."

"I'm so sorry," Lesley said. Then she repeated it. Rita nodded. "What are your plans?"

Her plans? Rita had no idea. Rita felt as if there were no weight attached to her life, not even that of her own head. "I'm also waiting to see what the answer to that one is," she laughed. "But you want to be a writer, don't you?"

"I think so."

"I thought writers had a passion they couldn't stop. Do you have a passion like that?"

"Yes."

"But then you are a writer. What would you like to write?"

Lesley's story seemed ridiculously naïve in comparison with Rita's true life. "It's still in seed formation, I'm not at liberty to declare," she said.

Rita looked puzzled. "Right. I meant like poetry or a film, or a novel."

Lesley giggled. "Oops! I see. Well in that case, I write short stories. I want to write a story about a changed world."

"What is that story?"

"Ag, nothing, yet. Not a tragedy."

"Oh," Rita shrugged.

"Something which will help people stop hating each other and fighting wars. About how the world is moving together toward harmony, how we should pass on love. It would be so easy if people just stopped fighting against the idea of equality. It would be a two-minute transition from hell to heaven."

"What do you mean?"

"If everyone switched simultaneously to the benefits of global harmony."

Rita shifted, her body suddenly aching from stiffness. The bedclothes felt heavy, as did her gown. She was aware of this feeling earlier, that these materials would cover her as solidly as sand. Beach sand itching between the eyebrows, wiped with the back of a hand too sandy itself even to retie a pigtail at the back of her head. Rita realised that she had become distracted. She was being rude. She focused on Lesley and apologised.

"Are you alright? Can I get you anything?"

"I wonder if you could do me a favour."

"What's that?"

"I don't want to sleep in here tonight. I thought it would be fine but as it gets later I feel a bit spooky."

Lesley jumped up, animated after their conversation. "Where would you rather sleep?"

"In the spare room. The couch in the lounge is a foldaway bed. Could you move it into there?"

"Absolutely no problem. Wait here."

They both laughed.

Lesley retrieved a sheet and some blankets from the cupboard and pushed the couch into the spare room. The view from this room was of the flower garden, not the brick-paving courtyard. There were no curtains. She made the bed her special way,

arranging the pillows around the armrests so Rita could sit up and do things. This was a much better arrangement than wallowing in a huge bed.

“Ready!” She helped Rita to the bathroom and to her new bed.

Her mother’s car was still out. Lesley ran up to Dominion Hardware for an extension cord for the telephone so that Rita could leave it beside her with Mr Isaacs’ telephone number tucked beneath the receiver. She ran home with the sun setting behind Devil’s Peak and throwing her shadow long and spindly before her, dancing across the middle of the pavement, over cars and telephone poles, walls, buildings, everywhere.

University of Cape Town

Chapter Five

Doya moved into the garden cottage. The ground floor had a kitchen which lead onto the lounge with a small fireplace. Next to the front door was a small bathroom. The wooden staircase led to the bedroom and a second bathroom. A thick jasmine hedge blocked the main house out of the ground floor windows. An old oak tree took up the whole loft window. The view from her garden was of the mountains.

Fifteen years and finally Doya lived in the picture of the photographs that had bought her into this story. She knew it was only a picture. A thick mist which hung low and the impotent sun behind it lent the landscape a watery mysticism. The sea was closer than in years but where, exactly? She had not left the street since arriving in Constantia. She took out her bag, her umbrella and her purse and put on her favourite shoes which were soft pink trainers.

Doya saved her wages in a Bob-T account. Mr Bertha deducted R10 per month for the expense of her personal items and paid the rest of her salary into her bank account. He brought her the deposit slip and her statement each month. He opened the account for Doya as his dependent in 1985 as well as one each for Anile and his two children. One morning Doya had entered the kitchen and put the kettle on as she usually did. She turned to find Mr Bertha watching her eerily from the kitchen table. Her salary lay in single notes before him. She noticed in time to calm the prickle in her spine. Five crisp R10 notes.

“Sit down, Doya.” Mr Bertha pulled out a chair for her. “I talk to you about wages.”

A raise? She had had three in ten years.

“Sit down, good. Listen. This is your money. Right? I keep in bank for you. I keep safe, you keep safe.”

A bank account. Doya fetched the wages stored under her bed. Ten sealed envelopes, one open. A full decade. Able in turn to buy several years. She could return a heroine with riches, not a runaway. Doya envisaged the glorious reunion, the raucous reception with her co-wives and her children. Even Letsamo would be happy to see her.

“This is my money.” Doya put her savings on the table beside the new notes.

Mr Bertha turned the neat envelopes over in his hand. Each had the dates and amounts of payment printed in small digits on the smooth side. He had stared at her, his

face a curious snatch of amusement, derision and wonder. Ten years, now almost sixteen. It was a lot of money but she could spend it all at once if she bought a car or moved into her own house.

A crescent pared off to her right. The sounds were quiet, not in a stifled mustiness, rather in a resting economy of insects breathing. Distant cars zoomed through a cock's call. The houses were silent aside from one from which Doya heard the sound either of a vacuum cleaner or a food mixer. She had an insatiable urge to turn up the path and ring the bell. Perhaps a Moçambiquan would answer. Given that she, Doya, walked free as a rainbow, other women might be close. She passed the house. The electric drone faded as she continued farther. Peace was deceptive. She wanted to dissolve all the walls, see into the homes and gardens. She wanted to meet people, chat with them about their days, their lives. To touch people as she talked, tell the stories she had known and seen. She wanted a sense of community and busyness. Silence concealed details. But the rich did everything in silence. They did not need noise to mark their journey. They were dedicated to their lack of trace, they always insisted on clean endings, clear slates. In those circles, just as any set, Doya watched ringleaders tip their hats at the followers and mingle with the floaters. Only those who were severely stressed sought the attention of large groups. Most wanted just a small part of the action; to wear their masks, drink and eat. Doya suspected that they needed to pretend that normal passions and animations were not noisy. That way noisy passions were quieted, such as the rising anger one might feel when one is caught out believing the best of human kind only to find and experience the worst.

When Doya left Moçambique her daughter, Waradwa, was almost three and her son, Passiaõ, was just a year. Crazy, but true: in her third year of marriage Doya was pregnant and filled with questions and fears particularly pertinent to a young mother. The days were dark and the nights splendid as she negotiated her way around her future, her body, her stomach. Letsamo's business was more stable. The work camps had closed and he was home all year. Machel, like herself a southerner, held the presidency of Frelimo following Eduardo Mondlane's assassination. The destabilisation from Dlakama and the rebels in the north and the tens of governments which used the country legally and illegally as a base concerned her. But the violence had not reached the south in as much earnest. She thought of giving up her job. She feared travelling on the coast but everyone was more concerned about the consequences of her giving up her job.

Doya took two months off work for the birth. Maleika was nursing Akoro and would nurse Doya's child when Doya returned to work. Jean-Pierre complained bitterly about women's collective right to holidays purely on account of their biological functions until the day Doya left, kissing him over her enormous stomach and all her baggage, to go home and bear her first child. At her father's house she would have gone up to the hospital but on the stead Barbara, a midwife, came up from the clinic. Doya gave birth to Waradwa amidst the noises of housework and smells of food preparation with Maleika and Aveline moving around her, helping her, helping Barbara.

The pain of childbirth did not nearly kill Doya. During the days Doya spent suckling her first born child she felt secretly to be on the best holiday of her life. She lay in bed for weeks, fed by Maleika and Aveline. When she returned to her position at Bonhomie the patterns of her life did not alter noticeably but she began to spend her spare money on small items for Waradwa. Two years later Doya gave birth to Passiaõ under

Barbara's careful hands. She was more confident the second time, she spent four months with Passiaõ before returning to Bonhomie. Doya wanted to live again on the farm. The family had accumulated several years' worth of provisions. Notwithstanding the encroaching drought the women piled materials, jars and vats high in Maleika's home. The Lusaka Accords were signed and a transitional government was forecast. She discussed her plans with Aveline and Maleika. She worked each two week period focused on saving for her children and the items she needed, on special treats for her co-wives. She took many extra shifts at the restaurant. She and Jean-Pierre went out less. They continued their literacy classes and kept their friendship burbling over stoves, sinks, buffets.

One Friday Doya left in the midday heat with more than a little lilt in her walk to meet Mahmoed. She was excited to get home and share the blankets she had found on sale at Lourenço Marques the previous weekend. She was particularly pleased with these blankets. They were thick, warm and very reasonable. Mahmoed dropped Doya at Catembe and she took the bus for the four humid, smoky hours of her journey up the coast, across the Limpopo plains, across the Limpopo river. Occasionally the bus could not cross the river as floods rose and washed the bridge away. On other occasions the bus broke down or burst a tyre beneath the cranking weight of the passengers and their goods and its own old age. The roads were straight. On many evenings Doya moved quickly through villages watching smoke bloom beneath the moon.

Vile de João Belo district, recently renamed Xaixai, Gaza. The bus pulled up at Maxixe. Passengers got out to smoke and stretch their legs while Doya climbed down the stairs with her parcels. The driver fetched the rest of her luggage from the roof. When Doya stepped into the street there were no children vying for her parcels or her kisses, when the bus pulled away the air was unnaturally still. She listened to crickets chirrup below the roar of the engine. What could have happened? Waiting was not worthwhile. She gathered up her parcels and began walking, growing more anxious with each step at which still no one appeared to help her, welcome her.

When she entered her home Letsamo was seated comfortably at the table in an old army suit which Doya had not seen him wear before. Aveline and Maleika sat beside the fire. Doya smiled with relief and put down her parcels. She kissed them but they barely moved to respond to her greeting.

"Where are the children?" Doya asked.

"They are asleep," Letsamo replied. "I have news to discuss with you of which Maleika and Aveline already have an inkling. The children are in bed early to allow us to speak without interruption. Sit; let us discuss together."

His words seemed friendly. His tone held a note which was not so innocent. Aveline and Maleika sat down at the table with Letsamo. Doya followed suit.

"Er-hem," Letsamo cleared his throat. "I am going to marry again," he began. "Phamidzai, a young girl from Beira. Her family come from across the border but she has lived in Moçambique all her life. She is shy, strong and clever. Her father named a good price," Letsamo nodded, coldly reassuring. "Now, we have the cow and her calf," Letsamo leant toward Doya, focused and serious.

Doya gasped. Aveline and Maleika nodded slowly. He had paid with the oxen? For a new wife?

Which was to say, Letsamo continued, withdrawing from her, that Doya would

not be taking the time to come and help at the stead as he had heard the three women plan behind his back, as if he would not know. There would be no alteration to their current situation.

Maleika and Aveline kept their heads trained straight on Letsamo.

“And,” Letsamo continued, “and, there will be no more discussion of the progress on this farm that does not come from me, myself. I am the Regulo. I know how to farm it.”

Later Maleika and Aveline explained the crazy things which had happened in the district over the previous two weeks. The shopkeeper did not open the store for a week. A school-girl was gang-raped and murdered. Soldiers had returned to their district with more pressure than before the Lusaka Accords. Letsamo was in with them, someone had given him that old uniform and he wore it day in, day out. He even slept in it! He went out drinking with them through the night and came home in a bad temper. He sometimes became very hard without warning or provocation, as he had that evening. He could turn calculating. He relaxed only if they went along with him. Otherwise he was easily angered and he swiped at them. He could topple them.

Both Maleika and Aveline kept their eyes down while they told Doya this. They spoke quickly, quietly.

The lush green route back through the elephant area to Ponte reminded Doya in its abundance that life is bountiful but she entered her room with a heavy heart. Missing her children each day was like a fire within her, eating her insides. Doya felt torn, split, missing fundamental parts of her self. She was irritable. She did not waitress in the evenings. The customers made her sick. Sometimes they made her so sick she just started crying, she explained to Jean-Pierre. Jean-Pierre was furious with her. He told her to get out of his sight. Juanita and her husband were saving for a car so Juanita picked up Doya's shifts. “Fortunately!” Jean-Pierre raved red. “Or there would have been hell to pay!”

After that Doya stopped attending her reading classes with Jean-Pierre. Nor did she go to Lourenço Marques or for walks along the beachfront, with or without him. She was wretched. Each weekend she went home bearing things; each weekend she worked all day, cooking, washing, weeding. Phamidzai arrived. A quick-witted teenager, her humour was soon a valued part of their lives. With Letsamo organising the labour and without oxen, life became more arduous. Where the women had been in the habit of saving her the jobs she loved to do Letsamo now left her a stretch of field to weed alone, with not even her children for company. The only time Doya spent with the family was after the evening meal when she sat at the fire with Maleika, Aveline and Phamidzai.

Letsamo ignored Doya. He treated her more as a distant relative than his wife. Doya paid little attention to the warnings her co-wives gave her. She did not anticipate that when they said “toppled” they meant thrown to the ground, overpowered. She thought she could run away, but that was silly, when she landed Doya was winded so when Letsamo pushed himself into her she thought she would die of a heart attack. Her terrified eyes watched the beams shunt beneath the thatch, saw her arms thump ineffectively against Letsamo's back to alert him that she could not breathe, her chest was convex inside her, she had to sit up and her lungs burst into her breasts. Doya choked in air, crying.

Soon Letsamo walked away. Doya crouched round, shivering, hiccuping. She

clutched her knees. A thudding headache had burst beneath her eyes as soon as she raised her head from the floor. She moaned, cradling herself, trying to sit, her body recoiled already from her brain, she seemed to crawl out of her own eyeshot. And obviously the pains were jabbing through her as she shuddered. Her precious body was bruised. Doya lay very still. Is that what was subduing the other women in the house? Is that what they were living through? What did Letsamo think he was doing? Were they not all giving everything that they could already, with love and dedication? Why did he feel that he had a right to take his release from them when they were all suffering from the pressures, not just him?

Maleika entered with hot water which she set below the window. Doya poured water over the sweat and tears. She washed her body, soaping and relieving, revealing belief in the warmth. Her skin shone in healthy cleanliness, a betrayal of the pain beneath the surface. Was this the routine her life had now adopted, same as sweeping the leaves on the terrace outside Bonhomie each morning? Would her body always clear away the evidence as a blank slate? Now that Letsamo had done this once, there was no way of ensuring he did not do it again.

For the rest of her life? Every year for fifty years, maybe more?

Something about the rustling in those leaves reminded Doya as she dried herself of the strange man at Bonhomie who had once offered her work in Johannesburg, four, was it five years previously? She had not yet been a mother. She had noticed him beneath an umbrella on the far side of the veranda as she began sweeping it. He was reading a book and he did not acknowledge her presence. Doya set about raking the sand, leaves and dust into ordered piles. As she stood in the middle of the piles gazing at their geometry the man asked in a low voice and slow Portuguese whether she would think of coming to work for him in Johannesburg.

"You gave me a fright!" Doya waited for him to apologise which he did not. "Work for you in Johannesburg?" Johannesburg was very far away. Doya could not imagine travelling that distance. Besides which she had no papers.

"No, not for me," he pointed at himself and shook his head as if there had been a mistake which had originated with him. He put on an honest face. Doya noticed a twitch smudge below his jaw as he reached into his jacket pocket and pulled out a packet of photographs. "In a big house. See?" He shoved it toward her. "Big garden; nice animals, horses. You be very happy, huh? Big cash," the man laughed naughtily, as if this were something Doya were not supposed to be offered. He rubbed his fingers against his thumb. "Forty rands per month."

Of course that was a huge amount of money. In two months, she could make more than in a year at Bonhomie.

"These women are so happy," he almost sang.

It was true. All the women in the photographs beamed up at the camera, their uniforms bright and smooth. Some wore a matching turban and pair of slippers. The houses were each the size of Bonhomie. She might have a separate cottage all to herself. She would have free time. These people had enough money to make a worker's life bearable. He would organise all the paperwork and fetch her himself. He would personally bring her back to that very veranda if she did not like the work.

Doya had returned the pictures coolly. "I am married. My husband will not allow it."

drowned in labour with exact repetitions within sight of the beach, the water so inviting. The telephone was in the entrance lobby and she did not normally pass it in a day. Four days passed before Doya realised with surprised foreboding that she had not yet made the call. In the second week the memory of Letsamo atop her grew more insistent.

"You are right, Jean-Pierre. It is better to be close to the city than to stay in the rural lands." Doya addressed him after the breakfast shift. They no longer spoke by moonlight.

Jean-Pierre only grunted at her and stared out of the window. He did not wave to offer her a seat at his overcrowded invoice table. Try as Doya did to make conversation with him Jean-Pierre did not quit his view from that window. Doya left after she heard her voice catch in her throat, desperate. She was surprised at Jean-Pierre, also at herself. Late the following night she called from the entrance lobby. She identified herself as Doya from Bonhomie, Ponte de Ouro.

"Oh yes, sure. How are you?" Mr Nel switched to Portuguese from English.

"I want to come to Johannesburg, now."

Mr Nel described a location close to Ponte de Malangane and the make and colour of his car. Doya agreed to wear a pink short sleeved dress and sandals. Even two days after their conversation it still had not sunk in. Who would her employers be? What work would she have to do? She might still find a job in the theatre.

On the morning of her planned departure Doya rose and made her bed. She went to set the coffee on but not the toast, Doya merely piled bread beside the toaster. She had approximately twenty minutes before someone noticed and came to find her, half an hour if that someone put the toast in thinking she would be back to take it out at any second. Jean-Pierre yelled at her to bring him his coffee. Calmly Doya poured him a cup from the urn and took it to his table. Calmly she removed three cold, half-drunk cups to the scullery and went back to her room. She threw clothes, trinkets and two dolls haphazardly into a plastic bag and left breathless through the back garden, unnoticed by anyone besides a small lizard which scampered out of her way, flicking its tongue sharply in irritation, and watched with disdain as she hurried on.

The long dark car waited beneath a mango tree, a humming bird swung above it. Instead of Mr Nel, however, the fattest man Doya had ever seen greeted her.

"Doya?"

"Yes. Who are you?"

"I'm as old as my teeth and a little bit older."

"Where's Mr Nel?"

"Waiting in Boane. He had to fetch someone from Lourenço Marques."

Doya ran round the car and got into the passenger seat. The fat man did not look like an ideal partner. Sure enough when Doya closed her door he growled at her and revved the engine loudly to squeal down the fast-lightening road. The questions Doya wanted to ask seemed pitifully insignificant in comparison with this huge man and his slapping jaws; she kept quiet. The scenery appeared as strange as if she had never seen it in her entire life. Doya had done the wrong thing. She wanted to go back to Bonhomie with the staff she had known for years. They would know she had gone by now. Would they guess what she had done? She had left no clue or address. Mr Nel's telephone number was in her right shoe. At the Boane junction the fat man took such a sharp turn to the right that Doya almost slammed her head against her window. He laughed at her

and she knew that the choices she had made were irrevocable, final, even terminal. She would not be able to step back from this picture.

The man motioned to her packet. "What's in the bag? The Cullinan Diamond?"

Doya kept quiet which made him laugh.

"Ja, sure it's the Cullinan Diamond and you're a diamond smuggler, aren't you? I'm taxiing a diamond smuggler over the border, aren't I? I ought to investigate what's in that bag, isn't it?" So saying, the fat man made as if to hit her on the head. Doya shielded her face while he grabbed her packet and turned it into her lap.

"Eh," he grunted and veered right again at ninety degrees so that the contents scattered everywhere around the car. "Now good God look what you have done."

Doya gazed horrified at her possessions beyond her reach, the toys upturned and indecent behind her, her uniform at her feet, way down at her feet.

"No diamonds? Too bad." The man spat out of the corner of his mouth. His spit smattered all over the window screen in front of Doya. He stared at the road. "Now you sit tight; and no funny wriggling businesses either, you understand? I want to get to the border with no fuss or fancy."

The sea, the powerful waves at Ponte. Doya stopped walking, put her hands on the small of her back and stretched. Where was the ocean? Trees obscured the mountains. She needed a map. She was lost too when she walked in from the gambling place on her way to Pretoria and that had taken two, maybe three whole days. Perhaps more. Doya continued walking. On that journey Doya walked through day and night without ever knowing her destination. It was the most splendid land she had ever seen. Mountains rose and fell, waterfalls shimmered against their façades. She wandered through bundu and brush for nights and days, following streams and noises and seeing nothing fabricated. The faces of the old people directed her, they held her in their knowledge. She rested when the animals watered.

Even as a middle-aged woman she was horrified that she had fallen asleep in that car, so stupidly handing over the reins of her life to the fat driver. But what difference would it have made? He had control of the vehicle. They travelled south. She had begun to get thirsty. To conserve moisture she sucked her cheeks in against her teeth and breathed lightly through her nostrils. The man had a stash of beers below his seat which he swallowed in three heavy glugs apiece. Occasionally he offered one to Doya but she knew it was a ploy and refused. By midmorning she was ravenous and her eyes were heavy from the quiet hot drowsiness inside the car. She rested her cheek on the headrest and slapped lightly at a spider on her leg but found her hand caught in a stronger grip. Doya screamed and sprang up but that fat man only threw her hand up onto her jaw so that she hit herself. He laughed and said, "Don't worry, we're too close now and I'm too lazy."

He ignored her once the road opened up. The silent heat in the car made Doya drowsy and she drifted off despite his earlier attempted assault. She woke regularly for the first hour but slept straight through the next. When she woke her excitement popped immediately and prominently to the foremost of her mind. Had they passed the border? Was she in South Africa? Was she free?

Doya raised her eyelashes fractionally. She tried to focus on the landscape. Unfamiliar, yet the same as she had always known. She stirred no other muscle in her

body. Her back ached against the strain of being folded over. The fat man checked his watch twice and the speedometer constantly. He was sweating and agitated. It was hot.

"Where are we?" she had asked.

"Close."

"Johannesburg?"

"Good little sleep?"

"Where is the border? Are we in South Africa?"

"Heh?" He laughed. "We're close to Jo'ey's. We're on the way."

The front of the car seemed immeasurably cramped and confined. Doya tried to stretch. She needed fresh air and a drink. The fat man remained absorbed in his thoughts. She too had slipped away. Her dreams of her freedom almost won erased the cramps in her muscles.

"Is that it? Is that Johannesburg?" Buildings rose against horizon.

"Sure," the fat man laughed so she knew they were nowhere near Johannesburg.

"Where are we?"

They entered the gate. "A turn on the tables!" His enthusiasm watered down the side of his face. "Refreshments. I want a drink, don't you?"

The fat nameless man parked and extracted a wad of money from his chest pocket. He counted it from the back. Nodding to himself he replaced the money and turned to her. Gambling had not been part of the original plan but Doya did not see what choice she had. She had never been inside a casino, she had only heard of them until that day. She followed him around the games and back to the next-door bar where his friend the smart man sat, and the blonde woman. Everyone noticed the fat man. He moved so slowly. The colour black was not black, Doya noticed. It was deep midnight blue. Quiet carpets, brass and golden mirrors made them seem welcome and awkward simultaneously. The place must have had hundreds of cleaners, Doya thought, with all that brass. The blonde woman. Doya was certain her photograph was on the television news with the shallow graves. Doya remembered her deep blue eyes. The fat man?

Doya left the casino. She took a walk for some fresh air and to listen to birds calling. The fat man had become drunk. He would not be leaving for a while. She had not run away from her life to dawdle in a casino or try to win at another person's game with cues she could not predict. Doya walked with no clue of her location. She did not predict the savannah and the forest, the mountain ranges furnishing her journey. She was the first to cross the path, to see the animals and witness the scenery change from safe low savannah to thick forest, the mountains covered in gold. In the day she walked steadily. The heat of the day spurred her. She picked fruit as she found it. Without fire she had no way of protecting herself at night. Doya rested at dusk to wake with the cold to continue. She arrived eventually at a road which she followed until she accepted a lift in the back of a truck full of oranges. The driver dropped her at a petrol station in Witbank with money to make her call and a little extra. She had not been through any border posts. She had no papers, no South African money. Nothing other than Mr Nel's telephone number. Doya drank some flat Coke she found in the toilet of the petrol station before she 'phoned. She did not know if she should drink it but it was down her throat before she had made a decision. The cold sweetness had settled her stomach and she had burped, filling herself out a little. She was hungry.

"Doya!" Mr Nel exclaimed. He put on a stern voice. "What took you so long?"

"I do not want to speak now. I am tired from travelling."

"Where are you? Someone will come and fetch you."

"Only you. Otherwise I'll go to the papers." She had not meant it of course. How could she verify her story? But she used the advantage once she had taken it. She waited on the wall for him to fetch her.

Mr Nel stepped out of the car. "So, you made it finally!"

"It is a long way," Doya offered. "Where were you? Why didn't you come?"

"Yes. Welcome to the big city!" Mr Nel did not acknowledge her question. Instead he unlocked and opened her door, glancing behind Doya as she stepped up to the car.

"He's not here," Doya told him. She knew he was looking for the fat man.

"Oh? Why not?" He closed the door and walked back to his side before she could answer.

"I don't know where he is. I also left him." Mr Nel's eyes were nervous when Doya spoke. She could see from his hesitancy that he could not follow her words but he nodded and agreed with what she said. They arrived at Mr Nel's premises and he escorted her to a large chair in a huge office. The atmosphere at his desk, stifled through tinted windows, made her self-conscious. Doya waited for him to speak, he for her. She smiled out of need, he with authority. The air grew prickly as they watched one another. A young uniformed woman entered and placed a tray of steaming stew, bread, fruit and a Coke before Doya. She stepped away without turning her back on either of them. Mr Nel watched entranced until the woman stood still.

"Please, go ahead and eat," Mr Nel paced up to Doya and pointed at the meal.

"I am not hungry," Doya lied.

"And now, what?" He said it like he was killing a mosquito.

"You told me about a job?"

The stars had just begun to light up the sky when Doya arrived at the Berthas. Mrs Bertha took the papers Mr Nel handed her and proceeded with Doya into the house. It was the last Doya saw of Mr Nel. She sat down at the dining room table with Mrs Bertha beneath a low light. The room was large. It adjoined the kitchen. Mrs Bertha stared openly at her.

Mr Bertha came into the kitchen. He sat down and pulled the papers toward himself. Mrs Bertha adjusted herself to read over his elbow. They both looked up at her and down at the papers several times. Doya stared at the table. Her face was flat and unwrinkled beneath her exhaustion. She remained as composed as she could. That first interview was the last test she had had to face. If she bought just one night of undisturbed sleep she would be able to go on.

"Portuguese?!"

The Berthas turned to each other and then to her with open mouths and surprised eyes.

Doya nodded.

"No," they waved and sliced their hands through air, "English?"

Doya shook her head. She had the rudimentaries from Bonhomie but she could barely hold a conversation beyond ingredients for the menu, telling the time and giving directions to the beach. Was this going to be a problem?

"Vegetables? Fruit?" Doya stammered.

The Berthas were still open-mouthed statues before her. Doya almost mentioned French but as she did not actually speak French she held her tongue. Mrs Bertha slapped her hand on the table, covered her smile and reached out to touch Doya's arm. Something about that was unexpected and Doya flinched yet the fact of the contact was more important to Doya than the flinch which it evoked. Mrs Bertha and her husband laughed with delight. Mrs Bertha left her hand on Doya's arm and Doya felt welcome suddenly between those two adults whose happiness was tangible and somehow included her. She breathed beneath the tight clasp of those bony fingers and smiled, too, with them. She was intact. She was acceptable.

Everything had worked out for the best.

The mountains were closer than Doya deemed necessary. Doya retraced her steps, recognising the roads to her own street.

The Berthas had shown her their house, gesticulating and explaining purpose to her in monosyllables. They tried to master the situation. She was relieved. She followed their words closely. It was not difficult to understand what they said. The upstairs floor contained a study, four bedrooms, of which the Berthas' master bedroom with its own bathroom was the largest and the remaining three were carpeted but empty. The Berthas were still childless. Doya surveyed the thick curtains. She was thankful for having listened to Mrs Laubscher's stories as the older woman shook heavy cloths beneath the soapy water and hung them immediately above the sink to drip dry before she took them out to the washing lines.

At the top of the stairs was a second bathroom. The lounge, kitchen and dining room, a second study, a small shower and toilet were downstairs, as well as the sewing room where Mrs Bertha had gone crazy over the fact of it being her room.

The Berthas looked at her expectantly.

Their house was large but still in the league of the work of one person. "No problem," Doya nodded, a question in her tone over her words. They smiled. "No problem," she repeated.

They took her to her room. Mrs Bertha opened the back door and Doya heard only the rush of wind through trees and ferns. The Bertha's property was deep. They crossed the small cement courtyard. Mrs Bertha opened the door and handed Doya the key as it swung creakily open to reveal her small room. Several shaggy mats covered the cement floor. The windows were high up the wall. Her bed was raised on bricks and soft cushions made it seem even taller. Would she get used to sleeping on such a high bed? She wanted to get into it immediately to try. Three uniforms hung in the cupboard with two pairs of house shoes beneath them and the caps she never wore on the shelves. Her own bathroom ran hot and cold water. The rooms were spotless and the spaciousness offered by the cleanliness made Doya deliriously happy. She might even have laughed if a barking dog had not bounded into the room. Mrs Bertha shouted, "Down, Boy! Dingaan! Down! Out! Out!"

Whilst dancing a strange dance with the dog Mrs Bertha shouted to Doya, "Don't worry about Dingaan! He takes a day or two but once he knows you are one of us, you are one of us! He's a little excitable, you know, playing? Happy, fun, fun?"

Doya did not understand Mrs Bertha's reassurances. The dog was at least up to her thighs with thick, healthy fur. He bared his teeth in a growl at Doya. His jaw was

large, his teeth strong. She watched the woman's eyes as Mrs Bertha tried to control the lunging animal. They danced between smiling and frowning to beseeching her husband to help her.

"Dingaan!"

The dog whimpered and ran to a tall man who had appeared in the doorway. "And this is Anile," Mrs Bertha patted down her front and smoothed down her life. She did not want to admit her relief. "Doya, Anile. Anile, Doya."

Anile's smile entered his eyes. They shook hands. He lived alongside Doya, in the other half of the same building. He looked after the grounds.

Doya turned into her road and into her property. She crossed the lawn and let herself into her cottage, locked the door and lay down on the couch. Anile always returned from his holiday when the children went back to school. In 1986, without warning, he did not arrive. What had happened? What kept him away? Doya hoped that he would catch up with her but he never had. She suspected that he would have told her if he had planned to stay away. But why should she suspect such a thing? She had chosen secrecy.

Chapter Six

An hour? Two and a quarter?

Three and four-thirds? Lesley's mother was in Sybrand Park for a Trivial Pursuits marathon and would probably not be home before supper. Tina was at Zeenat's house and would be back at four at the earliest. One hundred and forty three press conferences were being held by the End Conscription Campaign that day throughout the Western Cape. The closest press conferences to Lesley were in Claremont, at UCT and at UWC. Events of this nature were newsworthy but accredited journalists crawled through them, waiting for the cops and the speeches. Open Books on the Salt River side of Observatory had burnt down the previous night. Lesley folded a page into eighths. She grabbed a pencil and the cash for bread.

From what she knew it was arson. The thought chilled her. Observatory was vulnerable to cop searches but it had been safe from arbitrary violence until that April when Community House was bombed. Had violence become so much a part of her everyday reality? Lesley walked down Lower Main Road and turned up at Scott. She cut across to Polo. A large crowd had gathered in front of the building chanting slogans, banners aloft. From a distance Lesley could see the building was burnt out. The roofless remains dried behind the police cordons. Smoke stains licked the walls around the windows. Some pains still had glass. Lesley pushed into the crowd. The debris on the tarmac was wet and covered in soot which was slippery beneath her feet. The fire had occurred at night. No one was hurt. Lesley tried to get up closer but the street was full of people. Determination fuelled voices, everyone sang in key. Lesley pushed in to the middle amongst the people.

"Hey," she recognised a couple of people. "What happened?"

"Naught, nobody knows."

"Third force." A synonym for violence inspired by the far right.

A surge moved through the people and carried Lesley up the street, singing and marching with the crowd. She intended to cut back to Scott but when the crowd turned into Main it met the tail end of a CCAWUSA march and the bannered beginning of a combined ECC and Black Sash march heading up Main Road from Rondebosch. The Open Books March was sandwiched between the two groups. Lesley toyitoyi'd along. Toyi-toying was becoming a way of getting to town. It took around an hour, which was

faster than walking. The Eastern Cape was used to strike action because of the big car plants but the Western Cape was becoming more militant. The Living Wage strike began in May that year. Workers, especially in the textile and clothing industry and students at tertiary level or secondary, marched to Parliament in central town petitioning for social change, for open education, open hospitals. The protesters were also revolutionary mothers, fathers, teachers, children and students, who marched for the right simply to eat picnics on the beach as one nation. Since the blue-card system education strikes began as well there had been three protests, strikes or marches per week in the Western Cape, many of them in central Cape Town, down these streets. When she was with these people Lesley felt change could come.

The inner city spread over three kilometres down the southern suburbs, the Gateway suburbs, the first suburbs up Africa from the south. The heat beat down on their heads. At Golden Arrow the bus depot received its due petitioning. Their voices reached faces pressed gawking but dispassionate against windows. The crowd realised when the faces cast their eyes deep up Main Road that the march bore down on them. A roar rose and they continued on.

They passed old District Six and the premises of *South*. The heavy metal doors of the newspaper offices were drawn against the sympathisers. *South* was constantly being banned, censored and taken off the shelves. The journalists and staffers were in the crowd, photographers snapped off round after round. Even if nothing could be done with the stories in South Africa, the CCAWUSA memorial service, End Conscription Campaign press conferences, marches and the Open Books fire might make the news overseas, especially in the three day run-up to the fifth birthday of the United Democratic Movement. With indistinct faces, behind speakers and moving landscapes, everyone present represented themselves for the foreign audiences whose sanctions supported them. Of course the marchers knew their role. They laughed at PW Botha and others who insisted that the poorest people were the worst affected. As if Botha's craziness were not the catalyst for their taking to the streets in the first place and for the poverty in the country.

Water was passed from person to person in plastic bottles, one glug apiece. The crowd was directed away from Plein and continued up to the Gardens but other protesters were already there so no one could progress. In Adderley Street a policeman warned the crowd through a loudhailer to disperse or face action. No one moved in the sixty seconds available for escape. Action was what everyone needed. More people packed in and called on Botha to heed their demands. The marchers knew he would never face them. They enjoyed taunting him. The beginning was up to the marchers, as was the middle, but the end was always signalled by the short temper of the minister, Vlok. His whistle pierced through. The crowds surged notwithstanding the police bearing down with whips and sjamboks. The police opened fire, mellow yellows rolled into the crowd, vans unleashed his blaring minions. That was the license for which everyone had been waiting. People ripped bars from windows and entrances, smashed shop windows, threw goods to others who charged at full speed across the Golden Acre to the taxis or the trains, sometimes making it with affirmative shopping still intact.

If Lesley were arrested, the consequences would be grave. The middle of the crowd was safest unless they fired teargas but no one was safe then. Pandemonium broke out as buckshot tore into the back of the crowd, forcing people deeper into the Gardens or

up Wale Street. People ran as bodies began to be pierced against the razor wire behind St George's Cathedral. Legs, thighs and hips scrabbled and dove for safety. Lesley linked into one human wall and toyitoyi'd in the line, crossing and swapping as she could. She heard shoes hitting tarmac, whistles and shouts, loud groans and grunting. From within the crowd it was possible to distinguish each particular sound and its origin, to whistle in return.

Above them workers leant out office windows and watched from balconies. It seemed to Lesley from their passive stance that they were above those clouds of tear-gas which set the marchers' eyes streaming as she, too, pulled her shirt over her head to mask her face. She clung to the arm of the person alongside who in turn clung to the next arm and the next. They ran with straight backs, checking below their shirts for people fallen on the ground in time to pull them up before the crowd pushed past forever.

The crowd disappeared into the streets. Ambulances arrived screechingly late for some of the wounded whom the police had already picked up and thrown into the backs of vans. Lesley broke off from the chain. She ran up Church Street to Green Market Square. It was empty. The traders had grown tired of the looting of their belongings. Lesley almost went down to the toilets built under the market but she knew she would not resist washing her face. Her eyes needed at least another ten minutes to clear. She rested beneath a tree at the top of the Square to let them stream. The fray went on two blocks away. While she sat quietly soldiers arrived and went into the toilets. They banged on the doors. The woman who worked there ran up to ground floor screaming. Lesley did not move. Nobody saw her beneath the tree.

When her eyes had finally stopped streaming Lesley wandered with a dizzy head to the Sun Gallery to hitch-hike from Foschini's but police barricades were already up outside Third Class. The Gardens would probably still be crawling with cops. Lesley cut back to Long Street instead. As she walked she passed a window display of breads shaped like animals. A Confectionery. Confectionery? It must have been new. She would have remembered a confectionery. Lesley stepped into the shop. Once she got home she would not want to go out again. French loaves bent out of baskets. Wholesome loaves were decorated with pumpkin seeds and onions. There were loaves of rye, brown, white.

"Hello," greeted the saleswoman. "Can I help you?"

"Government wholewheat, please," Lesley replied.

"Ah, so normal!" She had a foreign accent, possibly Portuguese. "What about something a little different?" She indicated to croissants, plain and cheese, bread rolls, bagels. "Or something sweet, huh?" The woman pointed behind Lesley. Lesley followed her gesture to an entire wall of pastries and cakes. Cream, chocolate, Madeira, fruit, vegetable; Greek milk tart, kataifi, sponges. Pastries with centres of glazed fruit. A sweet diversion! Israeli cheesecake, a triangular chocolate log with cheese cake centre. Baklava, empanada, apple strudel, Florentines, meringues, cinnamon twirls, lemon torte. Despite all her years spent reading Lesley recognised only some of these names.

"I didn't even know there were this many people in Cape Town," Lesley said.

"Vegetarian?"

"Vegetarian cakes!" That would save on eggs, milk, margarine. The woman turned to a trough of rice paper delicacies and coconut ice. Nut bakes, sesame snaps, nougat rings. Biscuits sweet and savoury. There were no two identical trays on the

shelves. A series of smartly dressed men bought packaged bagels and croissants from an express till. Their noses wrinkled as they smelled the packets, already breathing the coffee they would drink with their lunch. Lesley settled on a creamy white loaf.

"Perfect with tomatoes! You don't even need cheese," the saleswoman winked.

"Well that's good because we don't have any cheese," Lesley calculated the contents of the fridge as she pocketed her change. "That's less than a government loaf!"

Lesley ducked down Queen Victoria on her way up to Mill. With luck she would be home in under half an hour. Without she could just beat two hours the top way because of the extra ups and downs. But it was safer. Gunfire sounded as she passed the top of the Gardens. Razor wire cut through at the Planetarium all the way to Gardens Commercial. The birds called confusedly. Lesley stood just past Michaelis, thumb out and hair loose in the breeze, her shirt flapping around the top of her skirt. Hitch-hiking was dangerous, but so were the trains and the taxis, at least hitching was free, quick and generally saw her deposited in exactly the place she intended going. She could not say the same for either other mode of transport. A beige beetle with an NP number plate chugged over. Durban Poison. The driver leant across and opened the door which balanced precarious and loose on a pin in the top socket.

Lesley caught the door. "Obs?"

"I'm going to Sybrand Park but I'll drop you in Obs, sure. Haven't been that way for ages."

"Wrench Road?"

"Sure," the woman nodded. Lesley swung into the seat and closed the door.

"Nolenora," the woman introduced herself.

"Lesley."

The car roared and they zoomed from the city up De Waal Drive.

Nolenora wore a wide-brimmed straw hat haphazardly decorated in wild and ostentatious flowers. The back of her car was full of artworks, paints, canvasses and brushes packed in cardboard boxes. Her smile was wide as the Grand Canyon as she bounced lightly on the driver's seat, practically balancing on the steering wheel. From the top of De Waal Drive they could see over Cape Town. Sporadic fires burned plumes of purple smoke over the Flats. The smog above it was deep orange. When they passed the top of Woodstock Nolenora began driving wholeheartedly in her rear-view mirror.

"Jesus, this whole place looks like Armageddon to me," she said.

"The Cape Doctor will come up soon, clear it all away for us."

"Yeah, we need blank slates like we need bicycles," Nolenora remarked wryly.

"Sure," Lesley smiled.

Nolenora whistled low and clucked her tongue. "So are you going to the party?" She changed into neutral. They coasted off the highway past Walmer Estate.

"What party?"

"The potato party."

"No. When?"

"Next week Tuesday, Cambridge Street. D'you think I was talking about the Freedom Concert in Harare?"

"Nooit! What?"

"Ja, early October. Sting's coming, Tracy Chapman, and Bruce Springsteen."

"I don't believe it! Big name stars on our borders?!"

"Yeah, Dire Straits, Whitney Houston, the Eurythmics, Jackson Browne. Amnesty's bringing them out, it's for the "Human Rights Now!" tour. You know they had a party for Mandela in London on the eleventh of June?"

"No?"

"Yes, for his seventieth birthday. It was at Wembley Stadium. Ten hours of artists played for his birthday release. They broadcast it in over sixty countries. Not here, obviously. Over a billion people watched worldwide."

"Imagine, the whole world partying for Mandela's birthday. I wonder if he knows?"

"He knows. I am sure he knows! He must know. More or less the whole show is touring the world, that's why they're going to be in Zim. NUSAS UCT has the tickets. Six hundred bucks, including transport, camping and the concert."

Nolenora took the Nurses' Home turn-off and zoomed over Main, down Rochester and across to the bottom of Arnold.

"Yeah, sounds irey. I'll try to make a mission."

"Hey, you know about the Cultural Week concert at UCT at the end of September too?"

"No?"

"Ja," Nolenora teased Lesley. "Big Gumba!" She turned into Station Road and pulled up outside the community centre to get straight back onto the Black River Parkway.

"Sheesh, party time in Cape Town!" Lesley held the door carefully as she stepped out. "Thanks for the lift!"

Nolenora laughed at the irony. "See you Tuesday!"

"Yeah sure, Tuesday."

The curtaining was due in a month. Thick gold fabric. Rita could not use her sewing machine because of the foot pedal. She draped the material over her neck and took up her crutches. The pins dangled over her fingertips as she hustled the material to her room. Rita was a recent convert to yellow. She had always been a blue and pink person but she had accumulated quite a few shades of yellow without even trying. The floorboards were Oregon pine beneath linoleum and paint. She chose terracotta tiles with deep amber hues for the kitchen and bathroom floors and found herself drawn to mustards and buttercup for cushion covers, curtains and walls. She also chose red for table cloths and kitchen curtains, towels. Both colours gave the house a warm roundness especially pleasing against wood.

Rita went to the toilet, balanced her sewing box and her radio over her crutches and had just settled in to start sewing when knocks sounded on the door.

"Hello?"

Lesley. Swinging back onto her crutches Rita made her way across her room and over the passage. Was this the fourth time in ten minutes? Dr Freidman had mentioned hiring extra hands to help. Instead Rita had promised to phone if she needed anything. Bustle intimidated her. Loud noises and people who knew better than she how to look after her own body scared her. Yet Rita had to admit as she wiped sweat from her forehead and felt liquid drip down her inner arms to her elbows that she was exerting herself more than she normally did.

"I'm on my way!" she called, pausing to catch her breath.

Rita sounded irritated. Lesley almost slipped back out of the gate. Behind her back she held a packet of ginger nuts with her thumb print in the top of each biscuit. She had wrapped the biscuits in a packet from the chemist with a white ribbon over the seal. She waited as Rita's uneven step sounded down the passage. The door swung open.

"Hi Rita!" Lesley grinned at the frustration on Rita's face. "How are you?"

"Fine, fine. Not too bad," Rita managed a smile.

"Ta-dah!" From behind her back Lesley produced her parcel. "Ginger nuts! They're still warm."

This was ordinarily Rita's worst nightmare. As she declined Lesley's offer the disappointment on Lesley's face stopped her. "Come in, I'm in the kitchen, let's have some tea."

"Are you sure?"

"Company is all that will keep me sane, most probably," Rita replied. "Sorry if I'm a bit rude. I'm just misluk with these!"

"Hey. No problem."

"I'm going to be so strong when this knee is better," Rita turned back to Lesley at the bathroom door. "Feels like more exercise than I've had in my life!"

Lesley giggled. It certainly looked like more exercise than she had done in her life or at least since she had been forced to do Physical Training at school. Punitive Torture, Punctilious Terror, it depended on the weather. She remembered hurtling around the school field in the pouring rain with hockey socks up to her belly button while their teacher chain-smoked from the sidelines. Lesley snorted thinking of the huffing, heaving woman who was in charge of their physicalities.

"That's about right," Rita responded.

"Pardon?"

"I feel like a total idiot." Rita dropped her crutches against the wall and put the kettle on.

"No," Lesley said. "No, I was just thinking about something."

"Something funnier than," Rita looked down at her bum and up at Lesley, "my bewerige boude?"

"Yes, much funnier – er, no offence," Lesley giggled. "But seriously, our PT teacher actually used to stand on the side of the field chain-smoking while simultaneously screaming at us to run faster. Can you imagine?"

Rita smiled. "Ja, dit is 'n bietjie snaaks."

"A bit? I don't understand it!" Lesley exclaimed.

"I need another pair of arms and legs. Try going somewhere with a glass of water on these things," joked Rita as she opened Lesley's parcel and arranged the ginger nuts on a plate. "Tuisgebakte peperkoek. It's years since I thought of this!"

"Retreads!" Lesley nodded. "I think they've got some at Grand Bazaars."

"Can you order them over the phone? I can't really walk to buy my own new legs."

"You might need to be there for the fitting. Maybe you phone in your measurements and they post the limbs."

"Then they will get here in time for Christmas!" Rita poured two cups of tea and bit into a biscuit. "Very special," Rita nodded at Lesley. "Did you really bake these yourself?"

"Uh–huh, out of a recipe book I found in the lounge."

The only sounds were those of contented mastication and breathing. Lesley felt relaxed so that she dropped her head but not her eyelids. Alert, awake.

"How's your garden?"

"It's dry. I can't seem to balance and hold the hose."

"Shall I water it for you?"

"Now?"

Lesley nodded.

"It's better to water at night or the plants burn but I don't see a problem now. The grass will actually dry before sunset, which is good."

"Really?" Lesley quizzed Rita, who nodded. The hose was in the shed. Lesley secured it to the outside tap. The nozzle opened a fine spray.

"Look, a rainbow!" She fanned the spray as Rita sat down on the bench. Clods of parched soil crumpled beneath her feet as Lesley leaned in to reach the deeper recesses, her hair ticklish on her cheek, the smells making her sneeze. No wind moved against Lesley's skin, yet as she progressed the plants seemed to wave and expand to her, to pucker out and fold open with the water as if to make of their expansion a gift to her. Soon Lesley was ankle-deep in mud, wilder in the luscious waving than ever. Twice she circled the garden, deluging the roots. Bubbles percolated on the surface and drained away in concentric circles as a tree stump tells only time and not what it has witnessed in the duration.

"Isn't it funny the way baby leaves are shaped like hearts?"

"Hearts? Really? I hadn't noticed that."

Lesley fetched a baby heart.

"And there I was, waiting for the flowers!"

After that Lesley stole out of the house before the ironing to water Rita's garden. She went round to the back of the house and Rita made tea. If Rita were sleeping when Lesley arrived Lesley began without her, her jersey on the table outside Rita's bedroom. Once or twice she left without waking Rita. Lesley understood that Rita did not want to need her, she only wanted to fill the spaces. The garden swelled in response; the buds turned to shoots, some to baby flowers.

"They think they've gone straight to spring!"

The curtaining for Rita's new room arrived by motorcycle. Rita opened the golden fabric over the chairs in the lounge. It was already cut. She pinned at the kitchen table, straight as an Easter cock. She was tacking when a knock at the door surprised her. She looked at the clock. Seven in the evening. Lesley watered the garden at least three times a week but this was late for her. Rita walked heel to toe, heel to toe to the front door. Sometimes Mr Isaacs visited with a big bunch of flowers. He chatted so charmingly about the weather and the country that Rita felt more like an adult each time he left. And Cindi brought aromatherapy oils to massage Rita's knee and feet. But it was late for either of them, too. The police?

"Who's there?"

"Daniel!"

Rita opened the door. Daniel stood surrounded by vegetables.

"Did you forget about the vege co-op?"

"Yes!" Rita blocked her mouth with her hand. He had brought them each time since her accident. "Are these mine?"

"Yes, I went to Epping this morning. We had a swift shift reshuffle." He started with them into her kitchen.

"Ag, thank you, Daniel."

"It's a pleasure, Rita. Your turn is at the end of November and I'll come with you so don't worry, okay?" He squeezed her shoulder gently.

"Okay," Rita replied, packing the vegetables away.

"What are you sewing?"

"Curtains for my room," she explained.

Daniel unrolled a purple suede backgammon set and retrieved the counters from the centre.

"Do you feel like a game of backgammon?"

"Backgammon? I've never played before."

"Really? It's a national pastime down here. We play round championships in the bath in winter!"

Lesley slipped into the shower to get ready for the potato party. The Freedom Concert in Harare was a catchy idea. If she covered the concert she might sell a story, maybe two. How would she get to Harare?

Potato parties were a type of informal feeding scheme which had sprung up in the suburb. Digs members baked tray after tray of potatoes and the guests brought sauces. The digs could prepare a pot of vegetable soup or curry instead of potatoes and guests brought bread.

She noticed several ruddy splotches as she soaped her arm. There were others on her legs. They were neither swollen nor itchy. If Lesley had not seen them she would not have known about them. She tried to clean them off. She remembered reading a magazine query from a person with patchy pigment on her knees and the only remedy given for her plea, which was skin peroxide. Lesley had laughed until she cried at the thought of a person with blotchy knees sticking out below her shorts. And skin peroxide? Oh please, she had thought, tell me another. As she dried herself she wondered. Pale pink and purple stains. Were they from the carpets? Dry wind? Were they contagious? When she examined her face Lesley found yellow heads and black heads on her forehead and her lips. She squished a few and gave up. She was only making them worse. She dressed in three skirts, two shirts, leather sandals and a baby blue cardigan. She spun round. The layers flared as would a ball gown and no blotches showed.

Lesley took a small block of margarine and several cloves of garlic and left without saying anything to anyone. They would notice neither the absence of her nor these items unless she alerted them herself. Once she watched a burglary on television which took place while all the residents of the house were watching TV in the TV den. She felt like the thieves who stole out of the door and closed it behind the backs of the neatly oblivious family, behind the canned laughter. Sidestepping her punishment was dangerous but Lesley doubted anyone would find out. She angled down the stoep stairs and into the street.

Lesley was distinctly out of favour. The Confectionery bread had turned out to cost more than double the price of a government loaf when her mother weighed it on the scale left by her aunt when she emigrated. It was half the weight. A long discussion had ensued as to the reason that Lesley had been in a confectionery in town in the first place; henceforth Sian had been given the responsibility of buying bread on her way home from school and Lesley had been practically but not explicitly grounded to her room after cleaning and cooking. She was not supposed to be present during mealtimes.

It was not a good time to be asking to go to Harare let alone for the six hundred rand she needed to get there but as far as Lesley could see there was no other way. R600 was an incomprehensible amount of money to earn, save or borrow and the housework was legitimate work. She could not keep up with the housework and go out to work. The Freedom Concert was a good story, the kind of story she wanted to write. Surely her parents would agree?

The night was getting dark. It was almost spring but the evenings would still be cold for a while. Lesley walked in the middle of the road, her eyes peeled to the pavements, watching out for lurkers in the shadows and behind car bumpers. As she crossed the line illegally over the tracks instead of under the subway, Lesley wondered about the compromise between truth and falsehood. What was lost if the means of exchange was not truth?

Observatory seemed smooth towards the west, the direction in which she walked. The buildings were protected by laws and renovated in similar ways with space for greenery, ponds, even frogs. Several large trees loomed before the house with white walls and blue window frames and shutters. Their shadows traversed the whitewash gently. Candles in paper packets showed faces gathered three or four to a conversation on the front veranda. Lesley found two tables bedecked with booze, glasses and lemon mint water in the kitchen, but no potatoes or sauces.

"We made a bonfire," a waif with long hair pointed through the window.

Fifty people moved around the back garden, chatting in small groups. Two square metres of coal browned slow, silver potatoes strewn along the edges. Normally these parties were jovial affairs with loud discussions and raucous jokes and sauces, crockery plonked wherever a convenient place occurred. Lesley noticed as she put down her garlic and margarine that dinner plates were separate from salad and side plates, red and green serviettes from yellow. Cutlery lay in neat piles. Instead of the usual hanna-hanna the tones were hushed. Everyone kept dropping conversations and moving not spontaneously with but around each other. Hair was pinned too perfectly back. Shirts lay too calm and flat over breasts which were usually splayed and gaping. The smiles were clipped and quick. The children were niggly. Not even magic from Duncan the Dragon with his multicoloured Mohican was enough to keep their attention.

Lesley lambasted two potatoes in taramasalata, cheese, hummus, garlic butter. Black pepper. Every morsel she pushed into her mouth was completely delicious. The potato squished through her fingers. She licked it off while listening to the conversations waft around her.

"You always think at the level of the individual rather than the broader social network," a young voice accused.

"So, she's in Norway; I'm staying in her room for three months."

"Marx's understanding of cultural alienation is about the individual as much as the collective community," someone whispered stressfully.

"But do we even know that Mandela is alive?"

"Hey, Lesley!"

"Hey, Kelar!"

"How's it? Want some beer?"

"Shot," Lesley took a swig from his bottle.

"Cool. Craig and Renate are here. Come and say hello." Kelar led her to the side garden where his friends were stopping pipes on their haunches against the wall. Kelar, Craig and Renate were roughly the same age as Lesley. They also came from the inner city but not from Cape Town. Kelar was from Durban and Renate from Port Elizabeth, Craig from Jo'burg. They were always smoking pipes wherever they went no matter the time of day or scene of crime.

"Hey guys, how are you?" Lesley dropped to her haunches in the circle.

"No, we're irey," Craig replied. "No bothers here. Scored some TK for a section – so we are cooking!"

"Is it?"

"Jah, it is. Want a toke?"

Lesley did not usually smoke pipes. She wretched on them, same as on a hubbly. She drew a hot lungful of smoke, managing not to choke. She smiled broadly and held the smoke in so it rocketed into her brain.

"Beautiful," Kelar took the pipe and held her arm. Lesley was thinking exactly the same thing as she stared back into his eyes. She stamped the ground as the ganja ploughed through her system, a tingling numbness in its wake.

"Shuow! Powerful."

Yeah, yeah. Lesley took another hit.

"So are you guys still staying in Robins Road?" She passed the pipe to Renate.

"No, we're down in Arnold," drawled Renate as she exhaled. The smoke floated in staccato wisps from her mouth. "The landlord at Robins Road kicked us out. They sold the place. How's that? Only just moved in and they sell it." She dragged again. Her long dark curls sparkled in the moonlight. "But like our new place is kiff, Lesley, you should come over and check it out."

"Cool."

"All we need to be really rocking is to get Kellar's kombi going."

"Shit, Kellar? Is your kombi off the road?"

"Yip."

"How come?"

"Electrics failed. In a storm. About a month ago."

"Nasty."

"Yeah. Then I got fired from my job."

"Ah, don't get started on that again," Craig shouted. "Look, why'd you mention that car? Jeeziz you stupid bitch, you're so fucking thoughtful, hey. Really intelligent."

"Craig!" Kellar laughed, "Take it easy. It's okay. I'm only telling a story. No need to get hyper." He turned back to Lesley. "So yeah, I've just been at home reading for the past month."

"Reading for a month?"

"Yeah, well. Kind of."

"How come you got fired?"

"Yahay!" Craig stared at Lesley.

"My fucking boss," Kellar began. Lesley thought he was really striking, his wide eyes danced before her. He dropped his hands against his thighs. "Don't ask me!" He laughed. "But it's cool. I had a bit of cash saved and you know I realised I had not read a book in two years. Me," Kellar pointed at himself, "I mean, as if that were plausible!"

The next pipe progressed via Renate to Kellar. Craig leaned back on his haunches. "This one is white," he paused and hissed, "baby."

Lesley didn't smoke white pipes. She wasn't exactly sure why. She had friends who swore by them, blindly. She stepped out of the circle. Everyone looked up at her. It was not often you were offered a white pipe.

"Sore throat," Lesley said.

"Should have mentioned it before the last one," Craig snapped.

"Jis Craig, what the hell's wrong with you?" Renate took the pipe from Kellar. "The woman says she doesn't want hers and you get mad? Would you like me to call the whole party to join us? Shall I fetch them and line them," Renate dragged decorously on the pipe and stared in a cross-eyed smile at her boyfriend, "up in a row to take turns?" On this Renate began to laugh uproariously, as if it were the most hilarious joke she had ever heard. She coughed out all the remaining smoke from her lungs and giggled despite choking. Craig slapped his knee and doubled over. "Ja, roll up! Roll up! White pipe!"

"Tssh, not so loud," Kellar giggled.

Craig and Renate started to cuddle after Craig took another hit. They cooed to each other.

"So where were you off to?" Kellar stumped the neck and edged closer to Lesley. She put out her arm and he tucked himself into it. "Okay! That's more like it."

"Nowhere, really," she replied.

"Yeah, what's happening there?"

"Nothing. Just a drink, or so."

"Sounds great." Kellar's face rested in her neck, Lesley felt his lips against her. If she moved he would be kissing her.

"And you guys?"

"We're going to rock the party!" In one move Craig leapt up with his fist in the air and curled down again. "Alright!" He finished.

"The party in Harare?" Lesley relaxed into Kellar's body. They cuddled in, goofed, happy, dreaming, dreaming.

"Harare? Really?"

"Yeah, I'm going. D'you guys hear about it?" Lesley said. "I mean, there's going to be an international concert! Don't know if I'll make it though. Six hundred bucks."

"What concert again?"

"It's for Mandela's birthday. For Freedom Rights." She said the word with capital letters. They could barely hear her. "Bruce Springsteen, Tracy Chapman, I don't know, some other bands are going to Harare in October. I'd dig to get there."

"Shuow, cool."

Kellar's chin in Lesley's neck started to make her claustrophobic. "Any case, I'm going to get a to drink." She disentangled herself. "Anyone want anything?"

Chapter Eight

During Doya's first year with the Berthas, Mrs Bertha taught her the house. Doya learned to use all the electric appliances from the freezer to the vacuum cleaner to the small steam iron. Working at the Berthas was similar to working at Bonhomie except Doya was also responsible for all the washing and ironing. English lessons, where Mrs Bertha pointed at objects and repeated words blankly at Doya, were part of her bestowal.

"Stove," Mrs Bertha waved over the stove.

"Stove," Doya replied.

"O-ven," Mrs Bertha pointed in the middle.

"Oven." If Doya had not had the benefit of the tourists at Bonhomie she would have assumed that English was always this wound down, stressed twang. Once Mrs Bertha was satisfied that Doya understood how to keep things running in the house she began with the recipes. Soups, puddings, cakes and snacks, canapés, sausage rolls. Doya spent half a year with Mrs Bertha explaining the names of foods crudely to her in the kitchen. Doya did not know that she was in training for when there was a family and large dinner parties continued to require the accustomed standard of preparation. Nor did she realise that Mrs Bertha would continue to arrive in the kitchen with her progressively sideways slant to teach her something new three or four times per year, to order Doya to do this and that like this or that. Doya thought they were communicating. The atmosphere directed to the needs of the running of a house felt similar to life on the stead. It felt safe to Doya, familiar, something with which she could be comfortable.

As she mastered the house Mrs Bertha addressed Doya as little as possible and seldom faced her directly. Doya worried that she had offended Mrs Bertha in some way. She became quieter, trying to please her. Each month the Berthas gave her a parcel of toiletries, writing paper, stamps and occasionally an item of clothing or linen. Doya had a radio, which did not really alleviate her feelings of isolation. The babble of voices confused her ears, hurt them. She switched it off as swiftly as she switched it on. All the personal details of the Bertha's lives became her own. Whereas Doya had been used to cleaning for holidaymakers she now cleaned for the mundane, boring parts of their lives. Anile accompanied Mr Bertha to the nursery or the hardware store but Mrs Bertha never once offered to take Doya anywhere, not even to the post office. Doya became more and more alone until neither Mr nor Mrs Bertha seemed to recognise her. It was years before

Doya had been able to see how much of a slave she had become.

While Mrs Bertha spent most of her time at home, Mr Bertha went out to work. Doya saw him every morning. He was a stable man, Doya imagined that he must do everything the way he ate his breakfast. Slowly, methodically, with a faint grin. He was already half dressed for work when he came for his breakfast half an hour after Doya's day started. He ate at the table. Afterwards Mr Bertha rose and washed his plate in the sink beside Doya as she rinsed the last dinner mugs and sweet trays. He greeted her for the first time as she stepped back to stir porridge or fry bacon for Mrs Bertha who came down later.

"Mawning!" He walked sideways away from her. Sometimes he made her nervous like that.

"Mawning!" Doya did not move at all.

She prepared his lunch and he returned, tying his tie around his neck, to fetch it. Doya hated watching him do this. He pushed his tie higher and higher, almost to his chin. She tried not to be facing the door when he entered the second time, to leave his lunch on the table and get to the lounge or the laundry before he returned, but sometimes she was forced to endure this sight, perhaps as she handed him the food.

He arrived home almost exactly as Doya closed the back door behind her in the evenings. His car rolled into the driveway and idled. The door opened. Footsteps as Doya slipped across the courtyard, so vast in those four seconds, to set Anile's food inside his door with the previous day's newspaper folded beside it. The garage door slid open and the car swung in while Doya walked quietly round the front, exposed, to her own room; and of course Mr Bertha could not see her as she could only hear his movements. But Doya did not want Mr Bertha even to hear her movements. Crossing the same space with him felt dangerous, forbidden. Since Mrs Bertha and he had grown silent on her, each sound had become precious and valuable. Evidence. And evidence was not what she wanted to be.

As the door closed behind Doya she breathed evenly. Safe! Why did she not want to see him? Because she was off duty and did not want to be asked to do any little things? Because she could not face the way he looked at her sideways as if his eyes worked out the side of his head? Because sometimes the light played tricks with his face and he would flash before her as a series of faces, causing Doya to forget momentarily who he was, who she was, and what she was doing there?

And then it would take her some time to remember, shivering, cold on her bed.

Sometimes Anile invited Doya to sit with him outside his rooms which faced over the garden and they ate together, chewing food between their teeth, quietly swallowing every mouthful. Anile told Doya stories about his family. Although she did not understand him Anile knew she received him completely. They had no language in common but they had mutual respect and each desired to make the life of the other easier in the circumstances. They invented a sign language, a system which was more or less international, and Anile drew his maps, his action strips. His soft tones revealed two wives, three daughters, two sons. They were less than a day away on the trains, in KwaNdebele. Doya explained about dancing the majika, about walking along the quay at Catembe and drinking a beer at an outdoor kiosk. She told him of the promenade at Vila de João Bela, where Portuguese soldiers played music and danced with village and foreign women alike. When Anile discovered that Doya carried no passport or papers

other than those prepared by Mr Nel's secretary he became genuinely perplexed and anxious. He insisted she could not leave the premises without Mr or Mrs Bertha. She could not risk getting fired. Anyone without a special document like the booklet he showed her was in deep danger. They were trapped in the middle of a war zone. Anile drew it roughly before her. The government would not let anyone out of the country legally. Many people fled instead illegally from all regions to the north.

From Anile's descriptions Doya realised that she had picked precisely the worst time in the country's history to arrive in South Africa. The tone in the country was remarkably deadly. The theatre had been vibrant and organic but it was all but suspended. Writers, actors, producers and editors were in hiding or in exile. Occasionally whisperings came of the fate of some performance, of the purges, the clear-outs not reported in the main news which usually told of systemic murder of black people too shocking in truth to contemplate. South Africans fought for equality, for the right to be full citizens of the country. They wanted liberation for all the other workers who were trapped in small cages as she was, going over the same blocks each and every day to support the oppressors' dreams.

Doya had seen this before. A revolt and the struggle against exploitation for true independence. Everyone became involved and set his or her dreams aside in order to establish the freedom in which to achieve them. There seemed no end to soldiers and civilians warring over the line of sovereignty for power and money. How on earth had she managed to co-ordinate her arrival at such a moment? She should have known: Doya remembered the stories from rebels hiding in Lourenço Marques about the racist government in South Africa. She had merely substituted one death for another. Should she leave again, run back to Ponte de Ouro? Maxixe? Anile shrugged his shoulders. It was a risky choice, one for which only she could be responsible.

Sometimes Anile read Doya the news. First he read the article to himself while Doya tried to absorb his facial expressions. He held the paper carefully so the thick ink did not print in reverse onto his fingertips. Doya was also careful with the paper. Bundled up and folded it seemed innocent enough but it leaked and smudged everywhere, not especially on people, a clean sheet would do just as well. She sometimes opened the newspaper in the morning and looked at the pictures, the stories, the letters. She tried to recognise the shapes as she had with Jean-Pierre to see if the letters would jump behind the paper, ignite into action. Occasionally Doya almost saw the movement but by the time she caught the line and focused on it the whole page froze flat, stagnant. She could not find the traces.

When Anile had finished reading he translated to her. Doya nodded when she understood. The stories were about miners who had begun to fight each other for equal access to small beds in which they and sometimes members of their families lived. Anile indicated narrow slots. Doya scarcely believed him. Would more beds be built for the workers? Well, that was a separate question answered later in the paper. Anile rustled the pages. It had to do with profit, not space. With whether or not the owners could afford the bricks, labour and land. Running the mines and the manufacturing plants had a price tag of far more significance to the owners than the sleep requirements of the miners.

Occasional items about Moçambique tracked the government of transition which faced enormous challenges, post Independence. Hundreds died from the crippling drought. The civil war intensified. Machel commissioned his nationalist enterprises and

prisoners built the country. Doya wondered what her fellow Moçambiquans would think of that. At first, as before, the war was all in the north near Zimbabwe and Malawi, nowhere near Lourenço Marques, which was renamed Maputo. But the stories became more terrifying. There were bombings and murders in Maputo. The drought turned into a famine and Anile came to look at those newspapers as if they were a special breed of dog that might devour him. What of the Moçambique of legend, the centre of trade and religion? How many people died? Was her family safe? Sometimes Anile had so much ink left on his hands that he had to wash them. Doya heard his lathering, water gushing, soft patting.

The house filled with objects which Doya maintained. When the first pregnancy was discovered the Berthas prepared two rooms. In Doya's seventh year with the Berthas their son Matai was born. The house filled with friends and family and Doya was so busy keeping up with them that she stopped thinking about anything else. She was too exhausted. The following year Mrs Bertha was pregnant again, this time she had a girl, Rachel. Doya saw Mrs Bertha even less than before. The Berthas went away for weekends. If Anile also went away Doya was completely alone. Doya had little to do with the children. At least for those first few years Mrs Bertha clutched them possessively to her body. Two children; a boy and a girl. Two children; each day, she thought of them. Of everyone, of everything she had left behind. Even if Mrs Bertha was upstairs in the nursery with them it still felt as if Doya were completely alone in that large house with all its rooms. Mrs Bertha fed the little ones the porridge Doya cooked, even while Doya finished the dishes and prepared Anile's and her own breakfast, but she rarely spoke to Doya. After breakfast Doya went into the house to the cleaning and even if she saw them eating or playing in the garden together, they were in another world, somehow utterly removed from her life, only visible through a thick shroud.

A great tiredness descended over Doya. Grit stuck in her eyes, heaviness occupied her muscles. At night she seldom slept, breathing easiest after dark with only herself to hear from behind her desperation. She ate her dinner at four in the morning and her lunch at five. Sometimes she prayed for Waradwa, Passiaõ. Jean-Pierre. Not often. Not for long. She stayed awake for all that time, planning and plotting, trying to get herself to leave. She knew she could exercise choice over the contents of her day. She wanted to be pacified by reality rather than to analyse it so shrewdly for potential. She had to leave, return to her life in Moçambique and find everyone. Doya retrieved her wages from beneath the mattress on her bed and stacked the notes into one pile. She had to go home.

But how?

She had years of practice retrieving dirt from the most obscure circumstances and leaving baths shining with a quick buff so her attention was not distracted by the somnolent daze to which she grew acclimatised. If anything, her work encouraged her thoughtlessness. The only partner for her mind was the house she tidied but the better Doya cleaned the more it gleamed, the worse it hurt her eyes. She could not look at everything so acutely full of light and stasis, all trapped into nothing. During the brightest part of the day Doya ensured that she was in the study, darkened to protect the books from rays. She had an hour off in the mid-afternoon. Doya closed herself in her room and drew the curtains. She left her meal on the table for later and snoozed. When

she rose she took the washing in off the lines. With her eyes pouring, she filled the basket with crisply crumpled things. Light gave her a fever, she could not bear the glare from the walls. It made her giddy and her eyes stream, her ears would start to buzz and hum. It was so loud to her senses, that light. It bloated her. Doya felt heaviest, distended. It pierced her soul, cut into her; left her peeled back, unstructured beneath its strength. The world seemed bleached to ash as the air crumbled everything back to burnt skeletal frame.

Was the sun cleaning the earth?

Soft soapstone figures were supposed to harden on contact with the air, not to soften. Doya folded clothes which did not need ironing, carried them blindly to their cupboards and started with the ironing. Linen first, she remembered how the sheets folded warmly over her arm when Mrs Laubscher finished pressing them. The neat lines took shape. Her eyes dried and Doya stretched them wide, watching the clothing swing toward her with potential occupation, valence. Her ears popped open. Clothes hung on trees for sale, using the breeze for a rail.

Doya grew tired of the long hours that she had gained by pushing into night. They only required filling. She went to bed early and woke one morning before her alarm. She had a few minutes to organise her thoughts before arriving at the kitchen sink. She ran a bath and sat beside the pouring noise to wash her face. Suddenly, Anile was there in her bathroom in his bathrobe, shivering.

“Anile!” Doya stifled a scream. He was apologetic but quite firm. He had been taking his shower when the water suddenly went cold, sending a jet of freezing water down his back. They shared a geyser. Doya switched off the tap and Anile retreated to complete his ablutions. Doya snuggled sleepy and comfortable into the dawn. Anile’s shower gurgled down the pipes. Each morning was still the same, variation did not occur, but still she felt it worthwhile to open her eyes for the intimacies that each new dawn came to represent.

Chapter Nine

Even in August Lesley continued watering Rita's garden. There was almost no rain in Cape Town during that winter of 1989. The city sweltered beneath a dusty smog onto which the horizon was thrown at dawn and dusk. Gusting winds which almost relieved the inferno blew dust and detritus into eyes, up noses, down mouths. Spring felt like summer. Rita balanced heavily on the crutches, taking care to walk heel-to-toe on both feet. She had an appointment with George and Dr Freidman together at Claremont.

"Hello, Rita!" The front door and the gate were open. Cindi waved as she walked round to open the passenger door for her. Rita's cheeks were flushed and warm from embarrassment more than heat but Cindi, holding the door open in the wind, did not see.

"How are you?"

"Ja, okay, a little prickly."

"Try to focus on your favourite colour," Cindi closed the door and ran round, hopped into the driver's seat and began navigating her way through the narrow streets to Main Road. Rita giggled for a couple of minutes at the unwitting irony of Cindi's comment.

"That's good! Try to stay focused on the future, on the positive, on positive energy in your leg, in your mind, in your life," continued Cindi in her soothing voice. "Come on then," she laughed at Rita's raucous chuckle. "It's easy! Try again!"

"Let's have a look," Dr Freidman suggested. Rita unwound the bandage. She sat on the bed at Dr Freidman's surgery, George and Cindi at the desk. Her knee looked no better and no worse. The colours had not changed much, their tone deepened. Nothing had moved. Rita shook her head. Old egg on a stovetop. The colours sickened her, so dingy.

Dr Freidman tapped his nose. He made her walk while he followed with his hands on her hips. "Even gait. Take it slowly."

"What's a gait?"

"Your step, your manner of walking. Well, the swelling's down, eh, George?"

"Ja, much better," George replied. "Lie down quickly, Rita?" He adjusted the bed behind her head. "Try to relax, I want to do some tapping. Don't worry, it won't hurt."

He lifted her leg, tucked it up, tucked it down, twisted it left and right.

"Much, much better," he said. "How's this?"

Rita cried out as something pulled inside her knee.

"Sorry, Rita, sorry. Just checking a few things out."

Rita waited patiently for the two doctors to form their conclusion. Neither reminded her of anyone she knew and she had no way of predicting what either would ever say or do. She relaxed, almost curious, while they discussed the options. Usually the conclusion lay in the authority of Dr Freidman as the elder but sometimes the physiotherapist made the doctor shake his head and roll his eyes with his specialist knowledge of muscles and keen determination.

"Pragmatism," Dr Freidman sighed, as if it were a tax for which he and Rita paid with their listening ears.

"Youth," Rita replied.

"I think you can leave the crutches, or take a single crutch. Walk short distances. You must keep your leg completely straight. The ligament can not take any twisting."

"Can I drive?"

"Short distances should be fine, no problem."

The only time Rita truly relaxed was in the bath. She ogled at her chipmunk self which squished into the fat tap tips as she leant over them to turn them on. Rita bunched the soft crêpe into her hands. The colours of her leg appeared in fragments. The same nervous pride as when her homesickness earned her being taken home early from parties; her mother simultaneously disapproving and pleased took milk and biscuits to her room and turned back the covers on her bed.

Rita seldom considered her mother. Even now she remembered the relief of the bathroom more than that of her mother's attention. Release the unease trapped within her, soak for ages. Sunlight on the wild jasmine hedge squashed light green beams onto the pouring water and threw refractions onto the corners of the room. The prisms shimmered deep into the mirror within her shadow on the tiles. Aquamarine shifted across the bath and caught the cool hues, glittered over the ceiling and walls. Branches shifted against the window in the breeze. Dappled flecks stretched the beams along the tiles, easily on her eyes, a mosaic of white and shadows. Grey, green and blue. Rita watched them reassemble, spellbound.

In bathrooms the mottled movements along the walls calmed her nerves. This wild divided part of her lived happily here. She switched off the taps and climbed into the water. She sat against the back to let her leg dangle in the relief of no weight, of lessness. As a young girl Rita slid up and down the bath blowing bubbles under the water, almost drowning from laughter if she accidentally farted. She washed to the lines of water falling and soapsuds sucking and sliding. She would wait in there forever were it not for the bottom of the bath, the grainy enamel which made her back clammy, the strange vump sound it made if she pulled against it. She washed to the tune of birds calling.

The geyser quieted, Rita's cue for the second dose of hot water. It depended how long she waited beforehand how fat those bubbles would be. Only when Rita could no longer stand the sweat trickling on her head would she sink beneath the water. She floated inert until then, her hair strewn beside her. Rita piled it behind her head but strands still floated down to her waist. Had she cut her hair since she lived in Observatory? She was white as a sheet. Crystal clarity, not getting the water dirty. This

was an old superstition. Rita pushed herself left, right. She was not getting very dirty doing this much of nothing and the sweat of recovery almost over. Obviously, as a schoolgirl it had been more of a challenge. If she could be an all-rounder and still stay clean... She melted into the heat to be rinsed again. Her skin grew bumpier. If she could go to the sea, put her legs out on sand in their skin in the heat not the moisture of a bathroom...

Who would ever see her naked again?

Ryno never woke on those occasions when she dreamed of ways in which she could please him. Once they had the boys there was no need. She knew that pleasure was unrelated to procreation, the one an accident and the other serious work. Her mother even warned her that sex was distasteful and Rita could hardly disguise her surprise when in her early marriage flames flew within her muscles so that once she sliced her thumb while thinking about her and Ryno's bodies moving against each other. There were some months when the farm did not take all of his attention but mostly they kept different hours. Ryno slept heavily, sinking into the pillows so she felt in another world from him. Sometimes he turned to her in the early morning and stared at her as if he were transfixed, fetched her to fit her to him, tuck himself into her curves; sometimes Ryno called her riveting. But if she ever responded, if Rita tried to kiss him or reach him in any way Ryno grew angry and turned abruptly from her. She learnt to lie flaccid beside him. The less energy she used the longer, her breasts sprawled and stretched beneath his arms, Ryno held her.

What was distasteful was the waiting in between those times. Months and months, and afterwards Ryno's turning away, somehow deeply ashamed. He always came home a day later. In the beginning Rita tried to atone for his guilt with him, to kiss him with more passion than ever before, to prove that this was a pact made with God which God Himself blessed. She soon learned that at best this backfired and Ryno transferred his shame to her so that she skulked about her own bedroom in long nightgowns and poured no salts into her baths, guilty for her outbursts, for her swollen lips, her cheeks burnt red. At worst Ryno was violent. He pushed her into the kitchen table or the living room wall. After that happened twice Rita stopped trying to carry it for him. She gave in. She was not stupid. She did not want to get hurt.

Sweat burst through her face, across her neck.

These small attentions were her replacement treats, perfectly acceptable, she discussed the products with her friends. Perhaps her friends used similar routines to hers. Were any satisfied with what they had received? But no one talked about sex unless the subject was child-birth, the conception dates so pertinent, or an operation, cancerous or uterine. Rita did not know how many women lay alone in deep hot baths, waiting as she was or had or did for the moisture to bead down her face into her collarbones, emboldening the skin as it petrolled down to the line where flesh met water.

Rita watched her profile in the tiles. Her eyes were distinct unless she peered into them specifically. Then they meshed with the other shapes and evaded her questions. Rita slid slowly, her hair plastered to her scalp trapped in air-bubbles. Nothing compared with the thrill of relaxing her neck and the crown muscles beneath her hair, the slow release of the air bubbles. Rita tilted her head to the left, the crescendo of bubbles burst up around her ear. They dislodged themselves, loosened in the water, floated up against her scalp in between her hairs and burst in small hiccups, which Rita sometimes heard on

the surface. Carefully she tilted her head to the right for the second crescendo, as they passed over her crown she leant backwards. The smaller ones wound their lazy way through the water, moving her hair slowly, affecting her head gently. She waited a twisted crocodile, with her eyes, nose and mouth above the water.

Rita loosened the last bubbles with her fingers and rested her toes of her left foot on the rim of the bath. She eased herself back up the tub. Water streamed down her face. She wiped her face, reached back for the shampoo and noticed out of the corner of her eye that her shadow appeared to be waving to her. It pulled her arm to the corner of the ceiling and jerked away when she turned to look at it.

This was a new one. Rita waved to watch it waving back. Her shadow tucked across the wall instead of waving. It elongated over the ceiling as if to scratch her enlarged head. It was like Michelangelo's work, *The Creation of Adam*. Her fingers did not reach. Rita froze with her hand above her until the weight of her shoulder pressed down heavily. She raised her leg, her arm, giggly. What she must look like, a creakily-limbed doll being mad in a doll bath. Rita splashed her fists into the water. The shadows from out and in converged, combined, ebbed together above the taps.

Can you come with me?

The words flashed across her mind, weightless yet terrifying.

She fell back beneath the water. She was scared to look in the shadows, but she had to, to find herself again. She had been looking for herself and nature, nothing else. Could she always lose herself for fear of finding them instead? She finished bathing and sat on the rim to comb the knots out of her hair. Her shadow loomed out from behind the toilet seat and reassembled itself into the nugget with the ceiling fragments. It tucked its knees under its chin and watched Rita.

"This is not too banal; you've still got some teeth, don't you?"

"Ja."

"But what next?"

Janus.

"Why Janus?"

Because – he would know. He would know what happened with Ryno. And he would be able to tell her where to find the boys. If anyone could it would be Janus.

The last time Rita saw Janus she bumped into him at the grocery. She did not want to tell him she was leaving but she did want to say goodbye to somebody. She had felt suddenly daring, like dancing. She had been almost free. She persuaded Janus to go for coffee with her at the Spur. The waiter ushered them into a booth she had occupied with different people for different reasons since the Spur opened two decades or more earlier. In the old days it had been her and Ryno, Janus and Mientjie, Clint and Martha. They drank beers and talked. Ryno was so gorgeous that Rita could not bear to be apart from him even for a minute. When he looked into her eyes and drummed his key pointedly on the table and nodded his head to the tune of his love for her, for according to him that was the cause of the nodding, Rita felt more complete than she ever had. She had a prize man, she was following her destiny. Perfectly.

Janus lit a cigarette and Rita found herself wanting one although she was never a smoker. It looked careless, appealing. The waiter brought their coffee.

"So, how have you been? Really? And how is everything on the farm?" Rita

blabbered all her words out.

“Ja, well, you know. With all the rain we were a bit hemmed in but since the sun we’ve dried out a bit. And you? Did you go under?”

Rita smiled. “Yes, it was drastic.”

He seemed so honest. She remembered him at her wedding, at his. Between them they had barely aged a day. And she nearly had told him, she had had to swallow her words back knowing that when the pressure of the prayers for her safety got too much he might admit that he knew where she had gone to, that she had sworn him to secrecy. And then she would find them trailing back to her, trailing her back to them. No, it would not have been wise. It was not worth it. It was difficult enough to slip through the social fabric as it was.

Still, Rita thought she saw something like understanding in Janus’s eyes. He knew that she spoke to him beyond their conversation.

She fetched her writing paper from her bedroom and settled herself in the entrance hall at the rectangular table with elephant legs. She put the empty fruit bowl and three letters for the wrong address on the floor. Pen poised, her nib almost to paper, Rita froze. If she included her address at the top of the letter she would give herself away. If she did not he would not be able to answer her letter. She would have to use a different address. But whose? And what reason could she give? She didn’t want to tell her whole life story just for the sake of one letter. One potential letter, one letter which might never come.

Chapter Ten

Matai and Rachel both attended a weekly boarding school from their tenth birthdays. This brought frantic weekends spent washing clothes and linen and a quiet uselessness during the week, especially in the top floor of the house where only dust disturbed the serenity.

Doya came in from the house from smoothing perfectly sheer beds to find Mrs Bertha wearing a gourmet chef's hat in the kitchen and beating eggs fanatically.

"It's supposed to look like this hat."

The picture was of a soufflé. Fortunately Doya still had quite a few French recipes tucked into her brain.

"I do it?" She took the dish from the incredulous Mrs Bertha. "You have the spoon with no middle?" Doya drew the hole she needed into the wooden spoon. Mrs Bertha looked alarmed. "No problem," Doya placated her. Carefully Doya prepared the meal. She beat the eggs the way Jean-Pierre taught her, washed and cleaned up while the soufflé cooked. Twenty three and a half minutes later Doya pulled the soufflé from the oven, perfectly crisped.

Mrs Bertha shrieked, stared disbelieving but delighted at Doya. She opened the recipe book to Crème Brûlée.

"You – make – this?"

Twelve perfectly piquant crème brûlées later, Doya could tell by the look in Mrs Bertha's eyes that she had acquired a new status. Doya tapped the icing powder lightly over the deserts. Mrs Bertha took the tray curtly but Doya could see she was pleased. She left the recipe book for Doya to see which other dishes she remembered. The following week one of Mrs Bertha's friends invited Doya to cook boeuf tartare at their house in Johannesburg. Mrs Bertha made a big deal of this. She took Doya's measurements and brought Doya a white shirt and red and pink checked skirt for the occasion.

After that Doya was always preparing canapés and bonbons. She prepared the recipes according to her memories with Jean-Pierre. The flight in his whip, the care of his fold. The precise thinness of sliced sautéed vegetables, how to fry fish so that it tasted baked. At night the Berthas circumnavigated the giant city of Johannesburg for kilometres as Doya watched from between the crêpes, the canarde en orange, towards the

dinner parties for eight or ten people in large rooms with music playing quietly. Doya only knew the route from the journey she had made with Mr Nel and she had been tired. All she had taken in were highways, lawns, leafy trees. Lots of trees. She began to put it all together, to see how the blocks rolled back to fit into units of criss-cross and tucked-away avenues. The roads were so wide there must have been many cars at other times of the day. In the west, high walls and roofs peaked out behind garage doors. To the east the city was leafier, the trees older, the houses grandiose with diverse architecture.

The women at these parties did not appear to know each other. The men did most of the speaking, one at a time like a play or a film with a script to be heard and remembered. Doya did not mind going along at first but she soon started to see that her enthusiasm only gained her entrance behind a blender or a beater in the kitchens, not into company. And when the other said the one was paying her, but she did not...

Doya shook her head to herself in sympathy with her naivety. Supporting these people's after hours had turned out to be chaos. Against the backdrop of her memories shot whistles and a truck engine which pulled up outside the house. Doya heard more whistles and the truck started up again. The garbage men! Doya ran through the garden to the front of the house as the truck pulled off into the street.

"Hello!" Doya shouted after them. "Hello! Hello!!"

One man heard and turned to see her waving her hands above her head in the middle of the street. He signalled. The truck squealed to a stop and reversed straight back to her.

"Yes, Lady?"

"Hello."

"Are you okay?"

"Yes, thank you. I miss you each day," Doya said, choosing her words slowly. The men hanging on the side of the truck cheered. Doya continued unabashed, "I have tonnes of rubbish."

"Rubbish? Is that all? You gave us a fright," he jumped down, smiling comfortingly. "You won't believe how many people we rescue like that in these streets."

"What?"

"No, only kidding there, Lady. Just a joke, aha."

Doya laughed. This young man was so smart and cheerful what else could she do? The rest of the men dismounted the garbage truck and gathered around Doya as the cheerful man approached, crossed to the left of boundary wall of her property where he opened a door painted a tinge of a shade paler yellow than the rest of the wall. He peered in, closed it and turned back to Doya. Doya was amazed. She had never noticed this door.

"But you haven't got any rubbish."

Doya walked up to it. She opened it, stepped through it and back. "Aiysh," she said, "I did not know about this yellow door."

"You must use the yellow door. How can we collect your garbage if you don't leave it out for collection? Hey?" The young man confronted her in a friendly tone.

"It's inside, I bring it for you."

He darted before her. "That's okay, sorry, Lady. I didn't mean. No problem, Lady. I'll fetch it."

He followed her to the kitchen and swung the three bags behind his back in one hand. As the last bag crunched under the blades he asked, "Well then, that the lot?"

"There are some things," Doya showed him the crates and cardboard boxes piled outside the kitchen door.

"Well if you aren't sitting on a house! Whht! Whht-Whweew!" He whistled loudly. "The men will sort this out, no problem."

The garbage collectors demolished the entire pile in five minutes. They flattened crates and boxes alike to lie in rows and tied the bundle to the top of the roof.

"Is that everything, then?"

Doya was so upset to see him leaving with the truck and the other men that she could not even look at him.

"What, have you got more in the roof?"

"There is one thing."

"What's that?"

"Could you give me a ride?"

"A ride? Where?"

"Anywhere. The bus stop? I want a map."

"A map?"

"For the city," Doya shrugged her shoulders. She was aching to get out of the place, dying to move. "Here, anywhere!"

"Are you ready like that?" The driver leant out of the window to her.

"Yes, I think so," Doya patted her keys.

"What about your shoes?"

Why bother with shoes if she were not walking? "Will you bring me back?"

"Sure, Lady, we'll bring you back whenever you want." Doya could tell by the look in his eyes that he knew his offer might get him into trouble if she turned out to be a nuisance. She smiled broadly as she walked up to the truck. The men cheered as Doya entered the carriage behind the young man. "Probably getting hungry for their tea," he shouted above the roar of the engine as it started up.

He held out his hand to shake hers. "My name is Paluka, Paluka the Destroyer." He showed her the tattoo on his arm. "But you can call me William," he continued, "or Will. Most people call me Will. Some folks call me Bill – but Bill – well, I'm not saying I mind or anything but I don't like it. If I must be honest then I'll say, no, I don't actually like Bill. But it's up to you, Lady. The choice is yours as they say! And this is Siegfried, the driver of the vehicle. Thank you, Driver!"

"Delighted to have you on board," Siegfried smiled over Paluka at Doya.

"What about you? What's your name?" Paluka asked.

"Doya, Doya Mokavanga."

"Mmm, Doya Mokavanga," he said thoughtfully. "Mokavanga; of the sun; that's an easy one. But Doya is an unusual name. I don't think I've ever," he leaned to Siegfried, "have you ever heard of the name Doya?" Siegfried shook his head. "Me neither. Welcome, Doya," Paluka continued. "We'll show you the sites, as it were. It's a pity about the vehicle, hey, she's not exactly a Lamborghini, but she'll take you from A to B, so we like her, hey Siegfried?" Siegfried nodded his head and smiled skewly at Doya. They stopped at different houses. The men jumped off the back and Siegfried pressed a button that turned the blades into the rubbish.

"It's not so bad here," Paluka explained. "Mostly just cardboard, containers, tins. The rest they just chuck in the compost. It's better like that," he said, tipping his head thoughtfully. "You should smell some of the rubbish in the city! Whew!" He puckered his nose up and pinched it. "That's bad. This is not rubbish like that, no. This is white people's junk. Of course," Paluka stroked his chin, casually leaning against the back of the seat, his legs limp before him, "they have space. It's easier, then."

Doya felt herself relaxing. A big grin spread over her face.

"Oh, is that a bit of a private joke?" Paluka teased her.

Doya's smile stretched further over her cheeks. Paluka laughed and she laughed with him until they both doubled over and Siegfried said, "Come on now, mind yourselves!" Doya bubbled like champagne. She chortled until she cried. Each wave began a split second before she knew, only seconds after the last. She rode in the cabin with this larger-than-life Paluka and Siegfried. The front seat of a garbage van was higher than all the houses and gardens. The houses were diverse, made of wood, marble and brick. Forest separated most of the properties and lined the long stately drives which lead to the houses quiet and cool beneath the plump vegetation. She saw animals, horses, chickens and dogs – "Got to watch those ones, sharpest teeth" – Paluka winked.

At some houses a woman greeted Siegfried and Paluka. Sometimes they felt her gaze and looked up at her, shielding their eyes from the oblique sunlight with their hands. Doya watched as these women turned their heads up from the truck to catch their eye. These women really did look as happy as the women she had seen in the photographs. Maybe she had got it all wrong, maybe it was just she who had had a bad deal. One or two women frowned and stared pensively while she rode away.

"Are you looking for someone?"

"No, nobody. Everybody! I would love to talk to a Moçambiquan. Saudades," Doya replied. "I miss home."

They drove along the seaside road in the early afternoon. Doya stared past Paluka and Sieg over the ocean. She watched the blue unmoving depths as if she flew immediately above them. They arrived at a junkyard where two young girls dressed in identical dresses sat on the front stairs. The men unloaded the boxes and crates.

"Hello, girls!" Paluka called to the children as he started down the short alley.

"Hello, Paluka," they giggled shyly.

Paluka returned with a middle aged man with gold teeth and a heavy paunch who handed Doya money in notes. What was going on? Doya counted it. R60! For boxes? How much is too much?

"This is too much!"

"Ah no, Doya, it's right. Enjoy yourself!"

Paluka, Siegfried, Doya and the rest of the men stopped on the coast for the ten remaining minutes of the men's lunch break. They shared tea from flasks and sandwiches of mince and chicken. While they chatted Doya had her back to the sea. She gathered the power of the moving tides through the fleshy backs of her arms.

Chapter Eleven

Rita grew stronger each day but at night she was weak and exhausted by her attempts at motion and the sensation of pain lurked in her leg. If she should move to turn over or to sit up she was reminded of the indignity of her life. Despite all that she had done to start anew her leg was a sprightly mix of colours. Would she ever use her leg properly again? Images of her nightmare gathered up against her. Confronted with old truths and memories she felt the strain. Making firm resolutions and following through with them was difficult. To war against those demons and win was almost impossible. Rita slipped often to the other side of her mind. Why her? She was the only one who grappled with the iniquities. A mania shot through her body, but where could she channel that energy? It had to pass out of her head and mist above her pillow as she thought of the different choices she could have made, could still make. Rita tried to distract herself with other memories of herself. She had to go all the way back to before Ryno, to her parents and her teachers in Paarl and the safe but colourful existences of which she had long ago been part. Rita totalled more than thirty years stolen from her life if she continued thinking only of positive things. Fully two-thirds of her life was disqualified. They were unfathomable, inexcusable, insurmountable.

She began doing her exercises twice over in the evenings so that she fell asleep straight afterwards. The film would flicker and whirl slowly to a halt. The machine shut down. Blankness, the relief. This was where she went to sleep. Otherwise Rita focused on the future, on what could still be rather than what she had anticipated or thought about. Would new people arrive? Would she spend the rest of her life alone? Rita talked herself into performing as she pulled and pushed her creaky knee. If she only had one more chance to make a life for herself, she would use it. She would make sure she gave it all she had. At least she had avoided a fracture and she still had the easy use of her limbs. She imagined herself waking, walking in fields in which she had never before been. Flying off to mysterious destinations. France, Siam. Ryno had promised her a life of holidays in exotic lands eating strange foods of which she had never heard. He said he wanted to see her face in as many places as there were picture cards. They would travel by ship, take aeroplanes. None of that came true, but – a small thought grew in the corner of Rita's mind – that left her the whole world to discover. The Alps, the pyramids, the Grand Canyon. Ryno would not be in the pictures she took. That no longer scared

her. The idea overtook her entire brain and soon locked Rita into a stupor. She still had dreams and forty years, if she was lucky. She could still travel. Forty years was only five less than her forty-five year lifetime. She could still learn to ski.

Rita felt intensely relieved, almost to the point of laughing out loud. She was changing. She already was someone new. She felt more like herself than she ever had. When next Lesley came to visit Rita was still over the moon.

"How's your knee?" Lesley called from the garden.

"It's fine, it's mending nicely. I'll be completely back on my feet in a week. Guess what I've been thinking about?"

"What?"

"Travelling."

"Travelling!"

"Ja. The furthest I've ever been from Paarl is Namaqualand. I'm a real South African," Rita joked.

"See the world..." Lesley began.

"In your own country," Rita finished for her.

They both laughed.

"Where will you go?"

"I don't know where to begin. Italy?"

"Canada? Australia?"

"America?"

"South America!"

"Have you ever travelled anywhere?"

"Nope. There's going to be a Freedom Concert in Harare next month. I'm trying to figure a way to get to that," Lesley admitted.

"I hadn't thought of Zimbabwe. A Freedom Concert!"

"It's R600 for the trip and the ticket. Plus I need a passport."

"A passport! Of course. Come, why don't we go one day and get them?"

"I don't know." Lesley's reticence slurred her voice.

"Why not?"

"R600 did not include the passport. Make that R650. And I don't know where my birth certificate is so~"

"Surely you can find that?" Rita was surprised at Lesley's sudden change in tone.

"I don't know. I'm in trouble again."

"What's wrong?"

"I bought the wrong loaf of bread."

"What?" Someone was obviously taking the situation too seriously. "Did you ask?"

"No."

"You should at least ask and see what they say. I am going to get travel brochures."

Lesley knew she should ask before she knew for certain what the answer would be.

"Mom, I wanted to ask you something. It's two things, actually." Hurried words, gaily spoken. Lesley tried to reassure her mother. No stress here, only fun.

Her mother took a long drag of her cigarette, exhaled the smoke and eyed Lesley closely.

“Okay.”

Her mother approved. “Two concerts, actually.” The fewer words she used, the greater the sincerity of her appeal.

“Hmmm.”

“The first is in September at the university.”

“Mmm.”

“Bright Blue are playing, and Amawethu and Bayete. Please can I go?”

There was no response other than her mother’s relaxed and spacious deep breath.

Next.

“The second is in Harare, in October. It’s a freedom concert for Mandela’s seventieth birthday. In early October.” She had to use the right words, but none with emphasis. Lesley held her breath. Not one tiny reaction. She listed the acts. “It’s only six hundred for transport and the ticket, unless I find a lift in a car which is cheaper. If I can find my birth certificate, you know, for the visa.” Lesley added this last sentence lightly in case her mother knew where it was and told her, lightly otherwise to return to her own volition any pressure on her mother’s life associated with this request.

Her mother balked. “The university? It sounds dangerous. I’m not sure I’d be happy about that. I’ll talk to your father. We’ll see.” Her mother closed her eyes.

“Thank you, Mom. And Mom?”

“Yes?”

Still no audible irritation. She could do it. Lesley could just muster the courage.

“You know about the six hundred rand?”

“Yes?”

“Do you think we can think about that? I mean, I was thinking about how to earn it and I realised I’m spending my time, you know, doing things here and stuff and so I thought maybe, you and Dad could let me have an early Christmas present and also my birthday present for this year, which, you know, is still coming to me, and for my 19th next year, and that’s how I can pay for it. What do you say?”

Those were huge presents to be asking for. Her mother stared ahead. Had Lesley overdone it? She would have to explain the maths about the cleaning.

“Because then it’s like, presents for Christmas and my birthday plus a little bit for each month I’ve been doing stuff around here. How much depends on what size presents you want to give me,” she ventured. This was a good kind of joke, clever and witty enough to merit a response of its own accord. Lesley waited. She walked a tightrope.

Her mother stared out of the window. Either she was thinking deeply about Lesley’s request or she had blanked out. Wherever she had gone she would be mad if she were disturbed. Better to sit still and think quietly for a minute. The flowers on the lounge suite all seemed to burst out of their petals at her, which Lesley took to be a good omen. Better to wait and think of stories, of the concerts she would attend, the people and places she had never seen, until her mother refocused and dismissed her.

Several days passed before Rita remembered to take the next steps. To write her letter, to conclude the promises which were so important to her after the accident. To travel. As the pain diminished so did Rita’s urgency to protect herself. Rita found

herself inclined to continue as if nothing had changed. The boys had not shown themselves. Maybe that was their last show. Maybe they had killed themselves that night. Simply self-destructed, like they used to tell her when they were little and one of their toys disappeared.

"Mama, it self-destructed," they would insist, gazing innocently at her as if this were something that happened all the time, their hands behind their backs.

On a grey and rainy morning Rita dodged the taxis and pedestrians to Claremont. The roads shone beneath traffic lights and flickering indicators. Her windscreen wipers revealed placards placed intermittently down Main Road. She could not read them from the bakkie. She parked in Claremont and read one, her hand shielding her face from spitting rain. Local government elections took place in October. That was news to her.

Rita turned into The Link shopping mall. The travel agency was busy. All the desks were occupied. Rita followed rivers across jungles on a map of the world painted over a wall. She read the place names. She collected several brochures over which to pour late at night in pursuit of a holiday destination. That would keep her occupied!

The travel agent was a friendly young woman who seemed to understand the entire planet.

"You should buy a global ticket with eleven stops," she advised Rita when she saw the brochures in Rita's hands. "You can choose how long you want to spend in a place. It's like a global kontiki tour."

"Yes," Rita agreed.

"Will you be travelling on a South African passport?"

"Yes."

"For a South African passport we sometimes need two weeks for visas. Some countries are a bit picky. So let us know ahead of time."

Picky?

Rita bought the newspapers, curious about the elections. *The Cape Times*, *The Argus*, *Die Burger*, *Die Beeld*, *The Weekly Mail*, *South*. She drove home, ran a deep bath and went to bed to read them. The brochures remained on the lounge table. Rita opened *Die Burger* first, then *Die Beeld* and the English papers. An education crisis rocked the Western Province. Parts of the city were in a state of emergency. Observatory was a candidate for the dusk-to-dawn curfew.

Rita read deep into the night and fetched the papers in the following day. In the years since she had paid attention much had changed. The official opposition to the long-standing Nats was no longer English liberal but Afrikaans conservative, all proposing neo-Nazi force. Pat McKenzie was in Labour in the House of Representatives. Jan van Eck stood as an Independent and Wynand Malan had his New Democratic Movement.

The famous Afrikaans splinter groups flew off the governing volk, itching and worrying the state. The police had enlarged powers of force. They were completely beyond reproach. The more the country required change the more force they used. Her country was a heaving pit of evil with no regard for the value of life or quality of experience. Rita feared the purists. They were mercenary in the execution of their principles as in all aspects of their life. She was always taught to be soft and quiet in comparison. She remembered their discussions of the number of people they had killed while she poured coffee late at night after a dance or braai. They were hardly

god-fearingly humble.

Paradoxically Botha had extended a limited vote to black and coloured people and visited with heads of state in Mozambique and Zaire to attend talks. What on earth for? Resolution 435? Twelve soldiers killed at Calmeque. These depictions did not attest to the qualities she was promised in her church services; love, mercy. Symbiosis. It did not matter whether one loved or hated, starved or grew obese on the smell of fat burning, everyone had been degraded, humankind had been diminished, broken. She could not bear it. Living in that atmosphere was polluting to the soul. No matter how much she loved her sons in their short lifetimes, she could not save them from being eaten by the same machine which asked of her her grace.

At least she had not had a daughter.

University of Cape Town

Chapter Twelve

Lesley pulled herself out of bed. Everyone was still sleeping when she got into the shower. The splotches shone out at her, bruises, roses. Pox? Not itchy, just spreading out across the veins beneath the surface of the skin. The closest she could get to a fresh environment was Rita's garden. The splotches could do with some sun. When her family had all left to their respective days, aside from her mother who was still sleeping, Lesley took off down the street to Rita's. She would be back on the inside of half an hour. Cleaning up and disappearing, staying out of sight and out of trouble, trying to keep her request for money to travel to Zimbabwe as clean as possible. It was a double game, to be invisible and yet always happy. If she was going to get to the Freedom Concert then she would have to do well enough to deserve a prize. Lesley tried to keep calm, keep a clear head. There was always the potential that she could crack it.

"Hello Rita? It's me!" Lesley called as she made for the hose-pipe.

"Hi Lesley." Lesley saw Rita waving in the reflection of the open window.

"I'm watering the garden," she waved back.

"Now?" Rita got up and opened the back door. Lesley stripped down to her bikini top and a pair of shorts. The water was cold, but she dried quickly in the sun. She watered the garden and showered simultaneously, dancing and skipping in the spray.

"Having fun?" Rita called as Lesley returned her attention to the watering of plants to dry out. Lesley giggled. With water in her eyelashes she was soft, young, full of energy.

"You've been scarce!"

"Yeah, sorry Rita."

"Have you got your birth certificate?"

"Uh," Lesley began, "I can't find it."

"Did you ask your parents about the concert?"

"Not exactly."

"The travel agent said we need at least two weeks for a travelling visa."

"For Zimbabwe?"

"She said they need two weeks."

The next day drizzled all day. There was no need to water Rita's garden. That Saturday morning Madon had an early rugby match. Lesley prepared breakfast for her

father and him and cleaned the house after they left. Later she slipped out to Rita's house.

"Come for a walk to the Community Centre?"

"There's a community centre?"

"Yes, just down Nuttall Road at the cop shop. They're having a book sale."

"There's a cop shop?" Rita felt guilty for using the phrase but it popped out before she had time to change it. She pulled a helpless face. "Ja, let me put my shoes on."

On sale were the remnant contents of Open Books. Lesley explained how the bookstore had burnt down and she had marched to town but bought the wrong bread there, which had led to an argument about her political activities and her whereabouts, with no one keeping tabs on her. Books in various stages of incineration were stacked on tablecloths on the lawn and trestle tables. Lesley and Rita browsed through the burnt pages. Several texts were not burnt but warped from the fire extinguishers, their pages clumped together. They were yet illegible. Words from earlier or later in the story transferred onto new pages.

"How did this happen?" Rita asked aghast.

"We still don't know."

"Arson, it was fucking arson, I'm telling you," a young man with blonde ringlets lurched toward them. He was sweating and he smelled of beer. Lesley could see how distressed he was beneath the alcohol.

"An accident with an arsonist," he laughed and shook his head. "An arshole arsoned my shop! Nought, I'm not telling," he continued. "I don't know for sure. So I can't say, can I?" He laughed. "I can only keep my suspicions close to my chest and know in future when to kick my own butt out of a scenario, before, or else," he faltered.

"Hey, broer," Lesley said. "Shit. This is the swakkest move to pull."

They walked home via the haberdashery in Dominion Furnishers to buy curtain-bias. Rita pulled out the sewing machine and set it up on the kitchen table.

"You use a sewing machine?" Lesley asked.

"Ja, sure," Rita nodded.

"Can I do my mending on it?"

"Ja, sure."

Lesley's mother was reading in the lounge with Tina and Sian who were playing cards.

"Mom?" Lesley spoke quietly. After a few minutes she tried again. "Mom? Can I talk to you?"

"What is it?" Irritation registered.

"Um; just, you know the concerts I asked about last time?"

Silence.

"I wondered if maybe you'd had a chance to speak to Dad about them?"

"Oh yes. I have had a chance to speak to your father about you and your concerts."

It was Lesley's turn for silence. If she spoke it would be pre-emptive and thus unfair. Her mother might change her mind accordingly.

"The short answer is that you can go to hell. If you're old enough to go camping

up Africa you're old enough to pay for it. Instead of going to a concert or two you can get a job and earn a living. You're old enough to pay rent, not to freeload off us like this. You have no concept of the value of money or the expenses in life."

"Mom!"

"Have you ever paid for anything in this house?"

The only cash available to Lesley appeared in the form of sporadic pocket money from her parents. A roll of deodorant was her own expense, the ones she wanted an impossibility.

"No," Lesley replied, for that was the truth. "I haven't."

Her sisters ignored everything.

"You're very happy to take, aren't you? Deplete me, tell me what's missing. Why don't you ever tell me what you have to give me? Why don't you ever thank me for what is here? How's that for a change? All this complaining isn't exactly making our lives easier, is it?"

"Mom, I'm sorry, I thought I do help. I clean, I iron every day~"

"Is that all you think this is? A money-making scheme? A permanent holiday, that's what you have. Neither the Basic Conditions Act nor the Wage Act cover domestic work, so how you do your sums! From today you owe me R250 per month, board and lodging. I don't need you to go downscaling everything here."

The Basic Conditions Act hardly applied to anyone. Lesley waited as her mother ranted. Her mother seemed to grow in size.

"Leave the cleaning, if you think it's so definitively helpful. I could employ anybody for a lot less than it costs to maintain you. A lot less. Some people would be grateful for the benefit of your work here. They'd do it for a bed or food, without these demands to boot! Your father and I agreed that I'll advertise your job, as you call it, if you can call it that, and I'll charge you for your room to pay for a maid."

It was all true. Not many people would refuse her job. The new Labour Relations Bill had been promulgated with all six of the offensive clauses. The ouster clause was wide.

"And as a lodger you will stick to our rule. You are a paying client, do you understand me? You'll have clean clothes and meals. Your bed will be made. But you will pay for these privileges. Maybe then you will recognise them as privileges."

"But who will look after Tina and Madon in the afternoons?"

"I will."

"What if you go out playing games and drinking with your friends?"

"Shut up!" Her mother advanced across the room and slammed a book over Lesley's head. "Fuck off! Your siblings are sitting right here," she pointed to them, "right here while you call me names! Ungrateful bitch! Have you no shame? I've spent my whole life raising you, do you hear me; my whole life and this is how you repay me!"

She dragged Lesley by the hair into the street. Her lips were thin and sucked in around the edges as she asserted, calm with contempt, "Get out and don't come back until you have learnt some manners and you can pay your rent like every other adult in the world!"

A full South Easter howled up a gale which threw these words past Lesley's head. Lesley did not cry. She watched her mother's eyes. The consequences of tears were more than dire. Lesley never had the guts to find out what the neighbours made of all

this or whether anyone even heard these arguments. They must have been able to hear the evening tirades with her father. Few people in the street were at home in the afternoons when most of the insane tantrums with Lesley took place but sometimes, as today, it happened on the weekends. No one brought it up. She did not ask why they did not help. They understood as well as she that this was her fate. Lesley secretly promised herself and the world that if she lived in the same street as a person who screamed at others like that, she would choose those precise minutes in the day to pop in for a cup of flour for a sauce which would make the whole meal. Anyone who popped in each time Lesley was screamed at would have a lot of flour. Lesley accidentally imagined all the pots an interfering neighbour might accumulate blocking up whole kitchens and dining rooms, the poor person baking night and day to keep up with the deluge. Soon a delivery service would be dispatched to fetch a load of flour each evening or morning and deliver said quantities; she started laughing.

"Well, she laughs." Her mother stood and straightened her back. "Is everything a joke to you?" She turned back into the house, locked the door and drew all the curtains in the street-facing windows.

The house was completely closed up. Lesley trod around her block through gusting winds and haphazard pressures. With no money she could not wait for later in a restaurant. She was too shocked and miserable to constitute company so she could not pop in anywhere innocuously for tea. Lesley returned home and sat outside the front wall on the street where there was a smidgen of shelter from the wind. Her peripheral vision blurred. Her eyes were trained tight against the dusty wind. Water collected in the corner of her eyes. Not being able to see clearly caused her headache to fade. The wind seemed to clear her brain even as her hair stung her cheeks. Lesley tucked her head onto her knees and waited.

Several hours ticked past, the sun wan on her crown. Few cars came past and no pedestrians whom she knew. Once Lesley was bust talking in class and the teacher sent her to wait outside for the headmistress's rounds. Embarrassed and shy, Lesley was making up excuses as to why she was sitting outside her house instead of inside it in that wind. Lesley pretended to be tanning her legs on the pavement. She tried to tell herself a story. All she saw was her mother standing above her, disdain pouring from her eyes. When dusk fell Lesley tiptoed inside the front garden and sat against the wall in full view of the curtained windows. There was little danger of their being drawn open. She had the advantage on anyone entering the garden and no one could see her from the street. She waited for her father to come home. He would never take her side over her mother's but his presence would cover hers while she could get to her room.

Going to work had seemed remote to Lesley but it seemed a logical step now that she had to take it. Her mother was right. Lesley was lazy; it was cheeky to think that she could earn money and a life out of staying at home and writing. She should have accepted long ago that life would not work out like that in practice. If she had she would already be working and none of this would have happened. Really, when Lesley considered it, her mother was doing her a favour in motivating her to go out and pursue her destiny. Life was expanding. She would go to the movies, eat popcorn through the whole film. Maybe she could move into a place with her own bedroom, with other young people like herself and obligations only to her own life. Where would she live?

Right. A job. New clothes, smart clothes for work, new shoes, organisation and a

timetable. She had her Matric and a good testimonial. She would prepare a CV and copy her certificate and testimonial. A job. A chance to make a life for herself, to earn some cash.

When Lesley left Rita had made herself some tea and cleared the kitchen table to write to Janus. She knew it would be difficult and time consuming. She had tried many times to formulate her letter in her mind. Deciding what to do with the issues was difficult. Rita began her first draft by making enquiries about Janus and Mientjie and their sons. She made several observations about the country and the politics of the day. She hoped they were protected from the wildness which swept over everyone. She remarked on the dry weather, the drought which she knew would take so much out of farming.

The letter seemed stilted and overworked but Rita had not expected her first attempt to see the postal services. The second time she omitted all social pleasantries and focused only on her questions. This letter seemed to make her points more plainly. She was a mother who wanted to know what had happened to her children. She needed to bury their bones. She had decided to close that part of her life properly so that she could go open into the next stage. He had a responsibility to help her if it were at all in his power. She added a paragraph explaining her need to keep her communication with him a secret and hoped that he would observe her wishes.

The next morning the second draft seemed demanding, hysterical, even manipulative. Janus should not have to act in secrecy and Rita was not bitter. Why was she hiding? Asking him to hide? Asking him to be responsible? What stopped her from driving to Paarl and visiting him? In less than one hour she could be drinking tea in his entrance hall. The whole business was a stupid waste of time.

She bathed and sat outside in her chair beneath the stoep roof. She reread all she had written and began again with the aim of keeping to the topic of their families. As Rita remembered more and more of the common ground she shared with her old friend she wrote without thinking. Who had they all become? Where were they all? She reread the letter anticipating a feeling of accomplishment but saw that her third attempt was sickeningly sweet. It made her seem guilty, as if she tried to make up for something. Her boys' lives represented such a small proportion of her genuine enquiries mixed in with all the other lively details that Rita feared Janus might forget her questions in their regard and respond only to her other questions and observations. If he wrote at all, on which she could not count.

She began again and continued for the rest of the day. Rita turned the tone over and over. She kept expecting Lesley to arrive with her mending or to water the garden and when Lesley had not arrived by dinner Rita watered it herself. As the sun set she wrote a list of columns across her page with different headings of her life, his life, the country, the future, Paarl, or their past. She filled several pages and chose a flow of topics carefully. She focused on nothing but getting her thoughts and ideas across with a new tone, devoid of pressure. The more she thought of Janus and the jacaranda and frangipani trees in bloom as they chatted over the years, the more deeply intrigued by his story Rita became. Janus loved to tell her jokes, especially long jokes with very weak punch lines. He thought those were hilarious. If he was very drunk or very happy Janus would hand her a glass of wine, lead her by her elbow to a chair and sit down alongside

her. "I'm going to tell you a joke. Come on," he would say. "It's a long one."

University of Cape Town

Chapter Thirteen

Doya awoke to a feeling of movement. Purpose was tangible in her calf muscles, also in her chest. Destiny called her to do new things, things that she had ensured she still could do. From the silence of the birds and the colour of the sky she estimated that the morning was approaching its coldest part. She pretended to be asleep. There was no reason for which she should rise that early. Despite her pretence, Doya was awake. She could not fake inertia when the movement was this intense. Doya swung her legs over the bed and sat, a young child woken first in her house, confusedly watching her toes wave over the ground.

She made a flask of tea and packed a light breakfast. If she set out promptly she would catch the sunrise over the ocean. Her dream was to walk across the entire bay and to sleep on the sand bundled in the rhythm of the ocean beneath the night sky. She would be safe; surely a need experienced with such strength was impervious to malevolent forces? She would wait for people to test that theory. Doya exited the yellow door as the full moon passed out of the sky. The stars and the city lights hovered in an orange halo above the city. She peered back at the house, the dark red roof with its one window winking through the trees. The house was closed up, secretly tucked into tight floors of corners. She would not have chosen it. There were no circles anywhere at all.

The ocean was a mere two roads away. The journey was almost two hours but it was easy, initially downhill with no uphill until the very end and no zigzags. The first part of the walk her head was as high as the low close mountains. Her chest tightened, Doya adjusted her breathing and her posture. She expanded her shoulders to their proper stature, her neck straightened. Soon Doya found her walking rhythm, enjoying the beginnings of her balance. The sway of her body from foot to foot seemed to cause her entire walking stride. Although Doya would be tired at her midway rest this balance would will her onwards, and the view was so spectacular that it alone could have encouraged her to continue.

Doya had already made the journey once. Paluka sketched the quickest route when he had dropped the map off for her. He did not believe her explanation that she wanted to walk, that she liked to walk. How could she explain to such a young person the need to put herself into motion, to feel her muscles ache from new uses, the privilege of walking out of her own choice? Paluka was a good man. Hopefully he would visit

again. Doya passed the trading store where she had found fruit and fresh rolls on her previous expedition. She recalled the horses tethered to the trees in front of the shop, grazing slowly. Walking beside the tall animals with legs the same height as her whole body, their eyes so soft, reminded Doya of the complexity of life, of the capacity of movement, of the horses to step backwards and squash her. She wanted to see the sunrise. Her calves urged her to stretch them further. Through, past the view. The swaying shoots of the reeds at Lakeside blew kilometres wide, Doya watched for their end on the horizon. Putting herself to use for her own purposes, walking for all the stasis her legs had known, moving beyond, she was emergent, she communicated with the world through the wordless melodies which filled her mind. She conversed with nature which endured more than anything civilised and oversaw eternity. It fed her with calm, with a sense of belonging to an order of life beyond living.

For once Doya knew she was fulfilling her true destiny, living in and absolutely absorbed by the present. She was awake now even if the dream had been long. The years that had been sucked out of her life would be replenished. The fact that she had given them up was why she still had these left. History returned to her along its path, she was back on the circumference of its wing. The sea would remind her of something even bigger, of her connection to something more permanent than this exposed existence, of life in another paradigm. She dipped down and crossed the railway line at the lakes, watching the happy collusion of the reeds with the cosmos.

The last stretch to the beach reminded Doya of Maputo. She paced slowly down the roads. The thin streets were cobbled at times. The houses resembled colourful squares with intricate triangles and rectangles. Attractive architecture.

Doya could already smell the salt water and faintly hear the sea. The noise grew louder. She approached the back streets and increased her pace. From the parking lot Doya saw that the tide was high. The heaviest waves pounded right up to the shore. There must have been a storm far out to sea. Not a breath of wind stirred on the beach but waves gathered for metres, seconds at a time and energy shuddered and released all along the horizon with no choice but to continue, without faltering. There was no way to pinpoint the beginning or the middle, or to explain the reason for which the water kept on pummelling forward. The waves crashed in straight lines of white across the beach, roaring in absolute synthesis.

Doya sat down on a bench. This would not provide her with the serenity she had envisaged. She poured her tea and sat back to watch the sky, quite stunned at this unexpected view. Grey; turquoise; navy, she blew on the tea beside the immeasurable power of the sea. Line after line, for the sole purpose of motion. Like history, like her life, like every other life of which Doya had ever heard, the power was moved by its own force with no sense to its strides. The relentless motion churning noisily before her told her story so that her mind was completely absorbed in its song. For the first time that Doya could remember she was calm. Everything which made her brain noisy was displaced. She could give it all up. The source of the power for continuation did spring from this place and it did, exactly, not stop.

She breathed her connection to it, emergent, emergence, state of emergency. She had made a mistake but somehow it led her up the right path irrespectively. In terms of Anile's descriptions of the workers who rose up against the government to take up their equal rights and due value as citizens, it had made sense. The sight of that vast source of

human life and capacity for struggle was just like this unruly ocean. Not even fifty spring tides had passed with late moons overseeing the realm. Only the briefest relocation, that was all that had happened to her; the smallest blip on the star of all that she had witnessed.

She watched the movements in the ocean. Peaks and troughs, the energy was entrancing. One lone surfer attempted the enormous waves. Occasionally he cut the skyline and disappeared before the wave moved beyond his grasp. Doya could barely see the rise of his shape. He was merely floating on the currents. If she got in and floated on its current, where would it take her? You can get straight to Cape Town from Maputo Bay if you swim along the coast and the sharks or the fishing boats do not get you. This was an old child's fancy. The shark attacks made other people nervous but not Doya. She had swum for hours up and down the bay at Vila de João Bela as a teenager. Could she do it in reverse?

The first line of orange cut the horizon and threw the mountain faces into relief. So there it was! It did rise in its normal place after all! She had not had twenty minutes to spare. Doya stood on the bench to see more of the sun than had risen but she could not. She picked up her flask and walked along the beach, cold sand beneath her bare feet. Mountains rose either side of the deep stretching plains behind her. She was cradled, contained and wild. The sun rose against the vista, vitality to keep her enthusiasm alive. How long before it opened up the whole sky? The colours fell only on, only for, her. They energised her. Picking her thoughts carefully over the sand dunes, Doya imagined how she would make it.

"Hello!" She called out to the heat the rays brought. "Hello! I'm here, here!"

She did not enter the sea. It was enough just to be next to the eruption of energy.

The full fireball hit the sky. Perhaps it was this unexpected concertina that kept her so alive, perhaps it was the blood pounding in her veins that made her suddenly believe that all other days she had previously lived had been a bad dream, that she was half her age, playing before dawn in front of the hotel below the town. With energy in her feet, Doya sang and danced to the steps she had invented in her childhood to the tunes of prayers, the delight of the shoreline breakers for her audience.

It seemed the sea danced back with small curling kisses at her feet.

She carved her name into the sand. Doya Mokavanga. Her name had sounded like a gong, sometimes like a siren, sometimes like the wind. Now it looked like an introduction.

Almost a year after she realised the truth of her role in the French feasts Doya spent Christmas alone. Anile left and would not return, although she did not know it. The Berthas went crocodile hunting at a game park. Each morning the newspaper arched the wall and landed at the front staircase. Doya took them all to her room where she skimmed through them to see if anything caught her attention. One evening she traced over the headlines absent-mindedly. The pen was unwieldy and her letters thick and large but from the minute Doya picked up the pen she felt more capable, more in charge. She copied a headline in the margin. She copied a paragraph, the following morning an entire article, then a few paragraphs of different articles. Doya hardly noticed the Berthas return or their three weeks worth of washing and ironing. What difference did it make to her life if they were home or away?

Anile did not return even after the term started and the Bertha children went back

to school. No one mentioned him. She began to study the newspaper with far more ferocity. Doya feared for his safety and for hers. She was utterly self-reliant if she meant to keep up with what was going on around her. She practised the old exercises which she remembered Jean-Pierre teaching her. Lines and lines of cursive. A code; Doya wrote out the words, enunciating them slowly even though she did not know their intended pronunciation. It did not matter, the sounds carried her. Doya filled a new writing pad and a third. It was reassuring to find her writing unaltered. The words remained in their own shapes, or her renditions of them, unlike everything else she did. The food she cooked was eaten so she had to cook it again; the rooms were sullied so she could re-instil a sense of order in them. But the words she wrote remained, they grew in number. The shapes, so separate and geometrical, patterned the movement from the elbow to the chin; quick, pointed. She noticed the letters in the newspaper were comprised of dots, dots which sometimes splashed ungainly into the wide borders. Doya joined them to see if any meaning could alight beneath that trail. But nothing happened, nothing that she could trust. And that was when the television became important.

Doya did not like the small television set that the Berthas had given her some years before. She did not often use it. Mr Bertha experimented all over her room for almost a week to adjust the picture, reminding her in his stance that the place in which she had lived for over a decade was his property, his space. In sheer frustration with printed words Doya switched it on. Complete chance? The same words she copied from headlines or first paragraphs flashed on the screen, footage behind them explained the purpose.

As soon as she entered her room in the evenings Doya took up her task. An English news broadcast went out either at six or at eight o'clock. If the news was on early she watched and transcribed as many words as she could garner. If the news was late she started with the paper and compared her understandings to the bulletin shown later. The lives of the mineworkers were disrupted nightly. Gunfire flared across the mines, illuminating wire not barbed but razored. The moving footage distracted Doya occasionally from her studies so that she sat still to watch. Doya could not discern the reason for the violence, only that it cost lives each day. During the rest of her evenings she copied the newspaper. She scrutinised the articles in the two bulletins for patterns. Some words were used every night. Mines. Rand. Terrorists. Short sentences, long sentences, short again. She could at least begin to determine fact from opinion; she could identify a code.

Long after she switched out her light those words swam around in her mind. She recited them to herself. Sabotage. Guerrilla. Mine. Engrossed in her work Doya hardly noticed the Berthas. The Berthas seldom acknowledged her. Mrs Bertha either treated Doya as if she did not exist or with trepidation, as if Doya were a large machine with a complicated wiring system. But Doya caught Mrs Bertha staring at her, arrested by Doya's incoherent mumbling. Doya was embarrassed, cross with herself. Caught out talking to herself. Doya tried to pacify Mrs Bertha, silently she sent out messages to calm her. Mr Bertha arrived for his breakfast and instead of eating in the kitchen, he glaringly set his food on the tray which Doya fetched from his room later in the morning once the crust of porridge was set and gaping on the rim of the bowl.

Doya began to feel afraid. She could not trust her mind to cope unless she was alone. Her remoteness began to bring her solace instead of confusion, hatred. What if

she wrote to Jean-Pierre at Bonhomie? People had written to Bonhomie in the old days, she sometimes took the letters to the Laubschers. Was it possible that they would still be there? Even if she mastered the words, it made no sense to write to anyone at home in English. No one knew how to read it.

Jean-Pierre's face wrinkled in her mind's eye. What was it he had told her? She might need this skill for important decisions? That was a joke. The discipline and quiet in those memories reminded her of her younger self and the joy of recognising a cedilla pushed her through the articles. Line after line for always. Like the waves which peaked before her, moving c's. Her picture widened. A worker state emerged after elite rule. The state so opposed this emergency that open news showed police shooting marchers and demonstrators in all the major cities. No matter how many people died, waves of people withstood total onslaught, faced the bullets and the brutalities. Doya watched the progress as the trade unions bargained and the workers protested. More workers arrived. The liberation movements had a plan. Moving bodies filled the streets regardless of the bullets each night. Lusaka, Gambia, Malawi and even Moçambique were involved but the South African government fought them all. One night Doya was watching a report on hostel violence when a dull version of Mr Bertha seated at a desk with five other men blanched behind the flickering screen. Doya was so surprised she almost shouted out. She peered closer. Was it he, or someone else? The fuzziness confused her. But no, that was definitely Mr Bertha. What was he doing there? How was he involved in this? Doya sat back. He was a reasonable man. Surely they were nearing a solution, or at least discussing one. But the camera showed a panorama of sporadic fire across the mine complex. Men in balaclavas ran shouting gruffly to each other.

Was Mr Bertha also profiting from the shelved miners? Were her wages paid by their labour?

Perhaps Doya was supposed to do her part: but what could she do – strike outside the house with a placard? Lock them inside the house? And then what? Run away, run away from the police? Run directly into the Berthas bedroom...

Her first grey hairs poked up the following morning. Doya went into the main house and hunted for the newspaper to find the matching article for the broadcast the previous night. She read the piece over the porridge and dishes before Mr Bertha arrived, unusually languid, to fetch his breakfast. Doya became obsessed. She hunted for the paper every morning and went through it before any other task. She forced herself to exercise restraint and patience if she were held up in the house at six o'clock on an English night and missed the early news. She used the opportunity instead to discipline her concentration on the words in the paper. Doya noticed different dots, yellow, blue and red dots, which journeyed in a row through the margins. She had never noticed these colour dots before. Little dots, crawling away. Was this what happened to them when they escaped their columns and lost their black pigment?

A code of dissolving letters, of letters which tried to free themselves in multifacetedness, Doya noticed small triangular perforations on each page which she was sure also had not been there even two months previously. Waiting for the dots to jump out into an unconfined space, free? Would anyone rescue her? The state of emergency seemed to be in disarray. The death toll rose. Nothing had touched or polluted the Berthas' way. Their home was still as a picture. Various new security systems had been installed over the years with buttons in every room that were not to be touched. No dent

had been made in the Bertha's confidence to continue without, for example, allowing her some basic freedoms of movement and dignity. Was she supposed to free herself? Could she wait that long? To be free? Was freedom not a question of one giant wave which would sweep all of the civilised remnants of life away? With favourable conditions not even a dash to the mountains would help. Even the animals would be washed out past the gold fields to the dry brush and forests. Called to a new destiny.

Was she responsible for her own urgency? Her own emergency?

That was when Doya cracked the code. They used the wrong labels. What Doya called an urgency they named an emergency, and what Doya called an emergency they named an urgency. They called insurrection unrest whereas her understanding of unrest belonged to workers who slept in shifts. Their meaning was an inverse representation of reality. Their unrest was the fear that twirled within them every night.

Doya began to have murderous thoughts, thoughts which pushed with a power so true that they had to have profound repercussions on the future. The Berthas kept a gun somewhere in the house and she began to look for it, wondering whether it was here or there. No one would know it was she. As Doya replaced the objects she had disturbed she found her fingers rifling through other piles and a cabinet drawer. Suddenly she had searched an entire room. Doya would find herself in the middle of the room, her heart pumping and her ears thudding, watching possible hiding places shiver and shudder. Confusing her into thinking that she may have overlooked a gun – a gun! – in any one of them. She calmed herself, stood tall. She would not let them do that to her. It was obviously too soon. The gun was in some other room; she would come across it when the time was right.

At night Doya kept a running inventory of all the places in the house where the Berthas might hide their gun. And of course it occurred to her that they had no need to keep it in one place, they might move it in case she tried to use it against them. Did they? Had they caught on to her? She grew wary and began to watch them out of the corners of her eyes, too. She knew this was a bad omen. She should not become like them in their fear. But Doya could not stop herself. It was too scary to see her murderous plans reflected in the Berthas' faces. The accusation of rifling through their clothing for a weapon would buckle her. Doya grew gaunt. She could not look at them.

The picture finally stopped her, multilayered. The picture not of the dead tethered blonde or the fat man but of an aeroplane, photographed across a stretch of orange earth. Samora Machel. Murder the President of a country? Doya knew that it was murder. What difference would it make if she killed the Berthas? It would cost her the one thing she had left: her life. The racists stopped at nothing.

She tried to calm down. Anile might return. The Berthas might magically offer to drive her back to Moçambique in the bakkie. She remembered the path she walked through the bush. But by then it was too late. Full-scale fear had already returned. Doya was always checking backwards to see this or that, never trusting anyone. One morning after having worked and slept in the Bertha's home for fourteen years she awoke to the realisation that she needed a little more rest. Her head, not sore but heavy, would not be raised from the bed on her first, second or third attempt. The children were not around. There was only that infernal sewing to fill the days. The early birds distracted her.

But Doya had forgotten that if she overslept and Mr Bertha did not receive his

breakfast promptly, which had happened twice before, Mrs Bertha appeared immediately at her bedside to prod, examine and tap her. Mrs Bertha did not knock at the door. She entered and walked straight in. Her face was close before Doya's, her eyes wide. Doya had no power to humour Mrs Bertha. She remained completely silent while Mrs Bertha felt Doya's temperature and rummaged through the bed for Doya's arm to take her pulse. Doya pulled the pillow over her head, turned around beneath it.

"Mine," Doya insisted into the hollow. "Mine!" Seized by an insane fury she sat up. "Mine," she shouted at Mrs Bertha and stabbed her fingers into her chest. "Mine."

"What, mine, Doya?"

How could she speak to Doya using the same innocent tone of concern as for her children?

"Your what? What's wrong?" The panic rose in Mrs Bertha's voice. Her voice was sharp. It had a scrape in it like she had swallowed a blade. It had irritated Doya for years.

Mrs Bertha ran out crying, "Dahling – Daaahling!" Maybe it would all have been different if Mrs Bertha had waited patiently to see when Doya pulled the covers off to the morning, a little calmer for a few minutes' gentle recuperation. Mrs Bertha might even have fetched a cup of tea for Doya or her own husband's breakfast. If Mrs Bertha had treated Doya in that moment in any way as one akin to an equal, as a woman approaching the prime of her life with absolutely no expectations other than systematic service, Doya still believed that other choices could have been taken.

The doctor, a tall hairy man with a small glass of transparent medicine, arrived. He preferred to double himself over than to sit at her side. As a giraffe eats leaves he diagnosed her. Malaria. He left painkillers and other pills she neither recognised nor took. He left. Malaria. Doya knew that was not it. Vain question whether a beast stole her heart, the fact was that a force colder than the winters of the North stole it. In that state of unfeeling someone entered and removed her heart without her realising, leaving Doya weighted to her bed or the floor. She felt sure the Berthas would fire her. Instead they hired Flora and Mrs Bertha brought Doya food with the nutritional content of a space rocket and tended to Doya's needs as if nursing Doya were something Mrs Bertha had meant to do all her life and it had got confused, their roles had been swapped and Doya had been serving Mrs Bertha by mistake all this time. As Mrs Bertha entered the room she opened the window and commented on the weather. She ran Doya a bath, adding salts which she showed Doya. She brought clean pyjamas and towels.

"Doya'kie," "Dolla," Mrs Bertha called her strange names. Terms of endearment? Pet names? "We miss you."

Murderers! Abominations of the human race! Doya never once replied. Speech was impossible. Doya could not afford to let out her thinking. She would have said all this if she had cleared her throat just to say good morning. She watched Mrs Bertha's back move around the room. What was she doing? Did she not realise that she took her life into her hands?

The doctor returned occasionally. He hardly touched her body if he could help it. He looked into her eyes as if he could tell what was wrong with her merely by doing so. He stepped back, closed his arms around himself and said, "Just rest. We'll see when you begin to get stronger."

Flora remade Doya's bed while Doya sat in the chair. Occasionally the young

woman tried to speak to Doya. The gap between her teeth made Doya smile and she did not object to the child's murmuring. Doya did not think of leaving, only of getting to the other side. To walk away empty-handed with her head cowed and her hands knotted? The independence for which Doya had fought twice before returned as a concept to her. She wrapped herself in its protective bubble. She left her room for short garden walks in the rain when the sky was a wrack of bright lights and deep sounds. She stared as it travelled. Where did those forces go? Were their energies ever spent or were they timeless; millions of immortal revolutions spread out over the world?

At last Doya swam in the waves. The sun blistered hot on her skin. She dove again and again against the power of the water. She surfaced in the same place each time. A middle place where sea burns with the flame of waves turning. She knew the challenge. Eventually the waves weakened. They dredged power from the seabed, mustering what strength they could to slap and slide haphazardly over her. She fought them down further. When the water was completely quieted Doya sat on the shore to breathe and dry out. She walked back to the station and caught a train to Steenberg. The heat peeled down her face. She was sweating.

Paluka waited in a car with his legs on the dashboard.

"Well hello! How's the favourite lady?"

"Good, Paluka. What about you?"

"Good to see you, we were about to take off. I knew you would be close! You know you asked if I knew of any other Moçambiquans in Cape Town?"

"Yes."

"So, I asked some people who asked some other people. We found them."

"Really?" Friends?

"I visited them yesterday. There's a salon and everything."

Women braiding hair and telling the news and views, preening each other's bodies?

There was a party in her honour the following Friday night. Paluka had been instructed to find out her favourite Moçambiquan dishes.

"Muito obrigado, Paluka," Doya hugged and kissed him on the cheek, almost crying from the faith in mercy.

"De nadir," Paluka replied. "The Moçambiquans taught me that, yesterday. Cool, hey?"

Chapter Fourteen

Three days later Rita was no further with her letter than her first attempt. Her head spun from thinking. In the mid-afternoon someone knocked on her door. "I'm out the back! Round the side!" She was glad of a distraction. All her pens and papers were spread across the table. Rita hustled the pages into a big pile and fumbled with her pens.

"Guess what?" Lesley called out as she ran through the garden. "I've got a job!"

"Really?!"

"Yes. At a restaurant in town. Brilliant, hey?"

"Which restaurant?"

"Le Midi-Cuisinier. Have you been there?"

"No, I don't think so."

"It's close to the newspaper houses. Three blocks to the station so I can travel by train. What a mission! Feels like I walked the whole town flat this morning, asking in all the restaurants and hotels. I was planning to go to Claremont if I didn't find anything but I did, thank god. Still, after all my fears of going to get a job, four hours was not a long time."

"So?" Rita quizzed, "What's it like?"

"It's great. Upstairs is all soft jazz and larny cutlery, long-stem glasses and everything. Downstairs is a Mediterranean Buffet which is where I'll waitress. Like, my own shop floor! The owners are Randy and Joy, and Randy's mother works in the downstairs kitchen too. She's a real Italian so we have to call her, 'Mamma,'" Lesley giggled. "If I get too busy she'll help me. I can't believe it!"

"Ag, brilliant. When do you start?"

"Tomorrow."

"Tomorrow?"

"Yip, they said they were looking for the right waitress and now they've found me they can open. And I really need the cash because I am going to save for Harare myself, you know? So I thought, yeah, I might as well start right away."

"So you talked to your parents?"

"Uh-huh."

"And?"

Lesley shook her head. "You don't want to know. Anyhow, it's not important."

What's important is that I am going to get there."

Rita poured tea for them both. "Now all you need is a passport."

"Oh ja."

"Ja nee! Why don't you get some photo's taken at the chemist? I'll pick the forms up for us and take them in. And don't worry about the money," Rita shushed Lesley's protestations. "After all the help that you have given me at least allow me this one favour."

"Wow, that's incredible," Lesley said. "Okay, thanks Rita." Lesley squirmed in her chair. "Actually, I was going to ask you another favour."

"What's that?"

"Remember that mending I was going to bring round to yours?"

"Ja."

"I haven't done it yet. Can I borrow a shirt or a top until I have time do it?"

"Ja, certainly." Rita smiled. "What do you want to wear?"

"Something with sleeves. Smart but not hot."

"Come, let's see."

With a perfect off-white blouse in her hands, Lesley arrived at home to find her mother hunched over the phone handset, listening intently to the speaker. Her mother seemed absent and sad, taken up in the details she heard. None of Lesley's siblings were home. Lesley went straight for the shower, blithely disregarding any splotchy weirdness on her body. She tried on her outfit for her first day of work. She turned left and right in the bathroom, smart and tall. She looked believably in control. She changed and ambled through to the lounge. Her mother was watching television. Lesley sat down.

"Hi, Mom?"

Silence. A different kind of silence, a watery silence. Lesley almost lost her nerve.

"I have a job."

The silence of swallowing through silent tears.

"Yes, waitressing at a Mediterranean place in town; Le Midi-Cuisinier. Do you know it?"

Her mother shook her head.

"I start tomorrow, eight in the morning."

Her mother raised her left eyebrow fractionally.

"And Mom? I might be able to pay my own way to the Freedom Concert, I might be able to save up in time!"

The next morning Lesley dressed with her siblings and left with them to drop Tina at school and catch a train, she to town and Sian and Madon deeper into the suburbs. Lesley waited on the opposite side of the tracks to Sian and Madon. Her train came in just after theirs. She climbed in and held onto the hanging space into Cape Town. She hurried up to work. Randy nodded at her. She went downstairs, put on an apron and smoothed Rita's shirt beneath it. Her arms were a little shaky but she steadied them to pour hot water into a gravy dish for her first task of the day: curling butter. She warmed the tongs, held the butter gently, pressed into the block. A little too hard, Lesley scraped a flat pipe off the top of the brick instead of a curl. A lighter touch revealed a shorter pipe-like butter-curl. Somewhere in between?

"Oh my god!" Mamma approached the table. "You half massacred this butter!"

Where's the water?"

Lesley passed it to her. She rolled cutlery and folded serviettes until midday, placed hot plates for different dishes on three large tables. A fourth table for breads and condiments to the left or the right? The left. It was art, design: interior décor. Setting tables, stacking glasses, packing the fridge, her work even leaned toward languid until people began descending the staircase in an avalanche, immediately sat down at the tables. Simultaneously they all wanted drinks. None had longer than forty-five minutes; several helped themselves to the buffet and began eating before Lesley could greet them or take their orders. Had there been forty waitresses they may have kept up. As it was there were no more clean glasses, nor ratatouille or rice. Lesley zoomed to the kitchen with her hands full of dirty glasses. She dumped the glasses beside the sink and went for the pots of food to fill the bowls.

"Please can you clean me some glasses?"

"I'm busy."

Lesley swirled water into the glasses and grabbed a tray, put the glasses on it. Grabbed the dishes, took them out, ran back.

"Don't run! Never show panic or speed!"

The glasses were still wet. Lesley dried them quickly. The furry towel scratched over the clean glass and she rinsed them again and dried them with her apron instead. It was sheer pandemonium. At the precise moment Lesley thought she would crack for sure, two women arrived and started washing dishes. They did not reply to her greeting, they spoke to nobody. No one else greeted them. When Lesley thought that she was done she still was not. She had to strip the tables and mop the floor. One of the silent women would wash the tablecloths that evening and bring them back the next day. Finally Lesley mounted the stairs, tired and upset. She watched an oil stain on her skirt flip on top of her knee as she ascended each step. The upstairs restaurant was empty bar one couple finishing a bottle of wine.

"Now, I know you've never done this before, but you must never run in a restaurant? Do you realise how dangerous that is? And every waitress knows that her hair should never hang loose." Joy handed Lesley the tip jar. "I hope you realise that I'm not just going on for the sake of it. These things are important," she opined.

"No, I realise," Lesley said as she tipped the money into her hands. R60! Amazing! Incredible! Lesley held the notes and change in her hands. R60 in one day. Why, that had seemed until that very minute of her life like a complete dream. But suddenly Lesley had cash in her hands. She had money. She was rich!

George examined Rita's leg. Her ligaments and muscles loved his hands. The colouring was normal, the swelling almost completely reduced. Stretch marks showed where muscle had disappeared. Her leg was thin and flabby. By contrast her left leg had acquired new proportions of fullness which Rita quite admired.

"You haven't turned it?"

"No."

"Have you used it?"

"Yes, quite a lot."

"You need lots of exercise," George clapped his hands and smiled into Rita's eyes as if he could tell that she secretly had not done as many as she claimed. "Keep up your

exercises. Short walks, one or two hundred metres and back. Rest and walk again. Then go for three hundred, four hundred and so on. You've got to train the ligaments to strengthen them. The aim is to build you back up to walking two or three kilometres a day in your normal life."

Two or three kilometres in one day! Changing direction was only half the mending done; learning to walk in a new direction would take some stamina development. Rita overcame the strange nervousness in her gut and on the first morning she estimated warm enough she left at ten for Muizenberg Beach with her costume, towel and small picnic of bread and wine. At Newlands policemen closed the roads for over two hours as they scoured bins and drains for bombs. Traffic blocked up from Wynberg past the President's residence to town. The police and the army also searched through cars, their thick chests self-important. Ridiculous, to block a whole suburb without warning but what else could be expected? Rita turned off at Claremont and drove down the Black River Parkway. She reached Lakeside at midday. The wind tilted trees. Rita continued on to Noordhoek beach which she found empty, also windy. She paced one hundred metres to the beach with her costume and towel. She was hot, sticky and tired of driving. The wind blew harder. She paced another hundred to the rocks and climbed up to a sheltered ridge. She sat for half an hour watching sand transform the landscape as it flew across the beach. How high was she? How far could she go? She was much further than she ever had anticipated. The wind did not abate. Rita shielded her face with her towel and walked back. Sand waves burst onto her trousers, roved over her thighs, covered her feet. Was she walking on cloud or earth?

"Heerlikheid," Rita said. "Waar kry 'n mens 'n stil plek in die wêreld?" A family waited in the car while their dogs ran wild on the beach.

"Llandudno strand, Tannie," a child replied. "Daar was geen wind toe ons daar was nie. Ons kon nie eers ons kite van die vloer afkry nie."

Rita took off for Llandudno. She followed the signs and arrived not at Llandudno Beach but Sandy Bay. A slight breeze blew threateningly through the bakkie cabin.

"Middag!" Rita greeted an old man who walked through the parking lot. "Where is Llandudno Beach?"

"Back down this road, take the left fork and keep on the road," the old man replied.

"How far is that?"

"Just around the corner."

"And this beach is Sandy Bay?" Rita read the sign.

"Yes."

"Is it windy?"

"It's picking up," he nodded. "You could have an hour, maybe half."

Rita set off on the path of wooden slats and rocks towards the umbrellas which dotted the beach. The path turned to bundu. She was supposed to be walking, she had another kilometre to do that day. She walked slowly, turning the twenty-minute stroll into a half-hour wander. Her path was of sand, the brush dense. At times gnarled branches shaded over her path to make a cool, dark tunnel. At times the path was open and the sun beat hard down on her head. Wind did not reach inside it, only birds and crickets.

Rita arrived at the end of the tunnel and saw the pristine beach, the deepest blue

ocean and the waves white as snow. The most beautiful rocks dropped into the sea, their tops so flat you could set a dining table on them. Rita approached across rock pools with anemones. The wind gusted viciously, grainy. Soon umbrellas bounded across the sand. Rita watched people run to catch, close and carry them, the colours clicking beside them. She peered in amazement and shielded her eyes from the sun for clarity. Not a single person had a stitch of clothing on. They were all completely naked. She turned away, but who would see her looking? That was what she needed to do: lie naked in sand, bake in the heat of the sun. Beach-goers began traipsing up the path toward her and Rita turned home, promising herself to come back very soon.

The following day Rita's leg was too sore to move, even to the beach for naked people. Fortunately, Cindi arrived with her oils.

"Wow! You've been doing a lot of walking."

Rita groaned.

"Would you like to come and see a film with us sometime?"

"What are you going to see?"

"Animation? Psychic Adventure? There's a French film festival running at the Labia, in town, and the annual Monte Carlo Film Festival at Ster Kinekor." Cindi passed Rita the brochures.

La Boum 2. Tant Qu'il Aura Les Femmes. A Bout de Souffle. When the Wind Blows, animation. *Belly of an Architect*, middle aged couple set up exhibition in Rome. *Wolf at the Door*, Gauguin biography. *Julia and Julia*, Italian woman lives life on two levels, one with her lover, the second with her dead husband. *The Assault; Wings of Desire. The Berlin Affair. Nobody's Fool. A Certain Desire, Gady, the Lightship, Square Dance, Dangerous Moves, A Man in Love, The Whales of August. The Sacrifice.*

On her birthday Rita treated herself to a large breakfast of mushrooms, tomato omelette with spinach and cheese on toast, fruit salad. Her leg was almost completely recovered. She stood with her weight distributed on both legs. She took a deep bath, dressed in a short-sleeved dress and went to have a haircut in Claremont. She had a bottle of champagne and a steak in the fridge for supper. If she had seen Lesley she would have invited her to dinner, and Rita felt awkward inviting Daniel and Dirk or Cindi for something this important, so she was alone. Rita did not mind. The time to herself was her treat.

"Tea or coffee?" The salon was bright, clean and warm, abuzz with the hum of fashion and style.

"Tea please," Rita replied.

She sat in the corner of the hairdresser's couch with a pile of magazines and a tray with tea and biscuits. Rita turned the pages, looking at all the faces, forgetting to match up hairstyles. Who were all these people? She searched their eyes for some clue. The teeth so even, eyelashes and blush deeply imprinted. That is the benefit of a new hairstyle, Rita thought. A short bob, something summery.

"Right," said Leonard, the hairdresser. "That's a lot of hair we're going to take off, Darling! Are you sure? Once it's gone..."

"Yes, I know! But I'm sure, yes."

"Well," he gave an exaggerated smile. "Legs straight, feet side by side or the line

goes funny. Thank you.”

Rita obliged the tall man, watching the busy mall in the mirrors while he snipped. A thin teenager swept parcel after parcel of Rita’s hair into the garbage until, finally, it was over. Her head felt insanely light, she stood three centimetres taller without that weight on her shoulders. A broad smile boarded her eyes, spread across her cheeks. Her face was longer, her eyes wider and further apart. Her thick hair held the shape of the bob around her face comfortably.

“What a transformation!” Leonard held a mirror up to the clear line of her nape. Rita bent her head, looking at it. Her sleeves finally fell flush on her shoulders. A haircut was a good idea but she had not anticipated how she would feel leaving the salon, swishing her head from left to right, watching her hair in the sunlight.

Cake and coffee and window–shopping!

Doya walked to Steenberg station, travelled third class to Wynberg where she swapped to a minibus taxi bound for the city. Confident people clambered into and out of the squashed taxi, dressed in snappy clothing. The smallest space was occupied. The sound system blared Bob Marley, Peter Tosh and Jimmy Cliff. Delighted, Doya listened to the tunes, humming through the southern suburbs to Cape Town.

The buildings in the centre of town obscured Table Mountain and the taxi stopped beside a thriving market. Doya wandered through the stalls of materials, the rolls packed high atop each other. Laces stretched loose beside cotton reels, elastic and ribbons. Doya admired the colours flapping in the wind. She did not find a dress, for which she was secretly relieved as she did not want to accomplish her task too quickly. She shopped down the fast–food kiosks on the right hand side of the block. Samosas, juice and chicken peri–peri! The saleswoman nodded in a confident manner, as if she had long been accustomed to Doya and her order. A girl with dark plaits dipped beneath the shelf on the opposite side of the kiosk and patted the saleswoman on her shoulder, whispered into her ear. The woman turned to the girl with surprised disbelief in her eyes, handed Doya her purchases and winked at her before turning back to the excited child.

Doya chose a bench beneath a tree. Steady streams of people lined the counters at kiosks. Pigeons and seagulls cooed and flapped while pedestrians dodged them. Doya ambled down the streets to window–shop. The town centre was large, a kilometre or more. The streets were full, lined with shops. The bustle of Cape Town and the thickness of the crowds took her by surprise. Doya almost looked around for singing women. Many black people strolled through the streets or traded cloth or vegetables. White people strolled about as well. They did not seem to stand in anyone’s way and they did seem to mind out for old people. The outfits looked smart but Doya envisaged something bolder for her first party in fifteen years. She had better luck in the shoe department stores on Plein Street. Doya chose navy heeled Mary Janes. She had not chosen her outfit but Doya had a hunch that any item of clothing would fall brilliantly with those shoes. In St George’s Mall she sat on a shaded bench. Here, too, the streets were full. The hoots of the traffic sounded like music. People whistled and shouted to their friends. The shouts and busy chatter were the chorus.

“Oh hello dear. I’m Maria,” a woman of Doya’s age wearing a traditional black and white waitressing outfit introduced herself. “Are you having a good holiday? Doing a little sightseeing?”

"Yes. Thank you."

"All travellers put their feet under their chairs in the same way! It must be a particular muscle pulling. I can see it a mile off."

Mark's Coffee Shoppe, Doya read the sign of the enclosed street café with wide windows across the mall. There were only white customers seated within.

"Sometimes you need a decent refreshment," Maria prompted.

"Yes," Doya agreed.

"There's nothing to stop me bringing you a takeaway."

"I am hungry," Doya agreed.

"What can I bring you?"

"Tea, please, and chocolate cake." The tea was strong and aromatic, the cake warm, served with cream.

"Where are you from?"

"Moçambique."

"Welcome, African sister!"

"Thank you! Where are you from?"

Maria pointed right of Table Mountain. "Just up the road."

"I am shopping for new clothes. I have shoes," Doya pulled the new pair from their packet.

Maria admired them. "Cape Town's got a lot of outdoor markets, you should try those if you want something special. Have you looked on Green Market Square or the Grand Parade?" The markets were both within two blocks of St George's Mall. Doya nodded when she realised Maria was referring to the market through which she had just walked. "And there's a market in Claremont, next to the station. Catch a taxi from the Parade." Doya nodded. "Ask the driver to put you off at Claremont station. The market is right between the Main Road and the Station. You can't miss it." Maria tapped her cheekbones lightly. "Have you been to Wellington's?"

"No."

"Wellington's is in Darling Street on the way to the Parade. Turn right after two blocks and follow the road down for two blocks. I think you will like it there!"

Doya bought nuts and dried fruit from Wellington's. The shop had entrances on two streets. It reminded her of the markets in Lourenço Marques where she had bought maize and spices for Aveline and Maleika, Phamidzai. Mercado, Doya grinned, pleased that such purchasing still took place, that Maria had known that she would like it there. She caught a taxi to Claremont and browsed on Claremont Station market where she found a stall with African clothing in beautiful cloths from Malawi, Moçambique, Kenya. Doya tried on a mauve kaftan with orange embroidery on the neck, shoulders and hem. The fabric trailed to her ankles in a magnificent celebration of colour. With the shoes she had a perfect fit. Doya put her old clothes in a plastic bag. She could not take it off.

A golden khaki kaftan with cream and orange embroidery swung just as delicately from her shoulders. Doya counted out money for both garments and handed them to the saleswoman. Doya headed for the station and passed the post office, the post boxes built into the wall. What did they cost? Doya joined the queue. She listened to the questions. She did not like the abrupt manners of the white people, so unequivocal. She watched the postman wink at the customer at the front of the queue.

Rita put her parcels and handbag up on the counter. The postmaster leaned forward, winked and licked his lips.

"Can I help you, lady?" He was around her age. His dark hair was thinning, his eyes gleamed, his cheeks were pink.

"Are there any post office boxes available?" Rita stammered out her words, glad of the iron grid between them.

Doya listened in surprise. Someone else was getting a post office box?

"For yourself?"

Why the question? He did not wait for a response.

"Identity document?"

Rita slid her identity document beneath the grid. The postmaster made a big deal of his search below the counter, for what she had no idea. He smiled up at her each time he popped up. Meantime, the queue behind her grew longer. People were staring at her. Finally he took out a form, placed it in front of himself.

"Naam;" he recited, "Rita de Wet." She nodded and he filled the squares out precisely. "Adres?" Was he going to shout it out to all the people in the post office? The form onto which he copied, Rita stared at it upside down on the desk, was long.

"Beroep?"

"Excuse me?"

"Het jy 'n werk?"

"Can I fill that form out myself?"

He frowned and drew the form towards himself. "Jy mag net so goed my nou vertel. Ek gaan in elk' geval jou vorm proses, jy weet." Rita smiled at him blankly. He pushed it under the grid to her and said, in a somewhat threatening tone, "If you're sure you don't need my help."

Rita stood at the counter placing letters in boxes. The form was hard to read, the print obscured by the glare of yellow. Why they would need all this information? Was she making the right choice? She should have gone right home after coffee instead of dawdling at the market stalls. A post office box had seemed the perfect alternative to giving her address away to Janus but she was already in further than a mere question. That man knew her name and her address! Rita tried to keep calm but it was difficult. What if he had friends who had friends who knew her? What if he told them over drinks? What if they filled in the gaps?

Angry voices broke her self-examination. A bird-like postmistress with long hair had replaced the bald lizard behind the counter. Had she eaten him? Her head protruded from the top of an elongated neck and her chin jutted rudely toward the grid, toward the customer who stood graceful as royalty in a resplendent kaftan of the likes of which Rita had only dreamed, tall on blue baby-doll shoes. The bird woman clasped her hands together, hunched her shoulders inwards.

"That man gave the form to that woman," Doya pointed at Rita.

"No, he didn't."

Silence.

"It's not the same form. We don't keep application forms for post boxes here, okay? Don't you speak English?"

Rita held hers up and called out, "We do!"

The bird woman stared incredulously at Rita. "Is that form yellow?"

"Yes."

"Is it green?"

"No."

"She needs a green form."

"Oh."

"She's black. Black is green, white gets yellow." The postmistress turned to Doya. "We don't keep the green forms here. You are not supposed to live here. We don't process black applications here. Only white."

"Where are those forms?" Doya would write.

"You have to apply. There are application forms, for application forms," she said, as if this were a warning. She pulled a sour face and scribbled something on a scrap of paper. "There," she said, looking back and forth between Doya and Rita.

Doya left the post office with the paper clutched in her hand. Rita followed, her form also in her hand, into the busy street. For a long, awkward moment the two women stared at each other. Neither woman flinched. Each gazed questioningly at the other. They both smiled. Two women, the same age, the same height. Doya covered her hand with her mouth and laughed. Rita swung her head forward, giggling.

"I'm so sorry about that woman's attitude."

"Don't worry, it's nothing," Doya said.

"It's not nothing, it's abnormal," Rita replied. "I don't know what they do to them to get them this way. It's so rude!"

"Doya," Doya offered her hand.

"Rita, hello."

They shook hands.

"Would you like to have a cup of tea? Something with sugar in it. I need one!"

Doya was not thirsty but she wanted to sit. Where on earth did this Rita come from? "Yes, I would like to sit. Thank you."

Rita led Doya across Main Road and into the quiet side street where she had earlier had a coffee. The room hushed as the women took their seats. Rita pretended not to notice, as, apparently, did the waitress who recognised her and bounded over with great enthusiasm to take their orders.

"I see you have a sore leg," Doya remarked as they waited.

Rita gaped and almost blushed. "Ja, it's almost better. An accident at home," she brushed it off. "Your English is good."

"Thank you. I am not used to talking. I read more. I am from Moçambique. We speak mainly Portuguese. Shangaan, French also. But English is okay for me."

"Ja," Rita laughed. "Me too. Italian?"

"No, no Italian," Doya shook her head. "What is your language?"

"Afrikaans."

"On the television news?"

"Yes," Rita laughed, "that's right. I love your sari!"

"I bought it today at that market at the post office." Doya shook the other kaftan out of the packet for Rita to see.

"It's a good market, I must have a longer look," Rita nodded. "Shopping day?"

"Yes, for a party. I have new clothes and new shoes."

"Whose party?"

"Mine! No, some friends, I don't know them," Doya laughed, holding her head in her hands and shrugging at Rita. "They are also from Moçambique."

"A surprise party! That's lovely, to see people who come from your home."

"Is this your home?"

"No," Rita shook her head. "I came here from Paarl, a small town not far from here. Have you been there?"

"No," Doya shook her head.

"It's pretty," Rita said, then laughed at herself for saying such a thing. Their tea arrived. The women opened the lids simultaneously and stared inside the teapots before pouring. Two cups of tea, the first thirstily drunk and the second sipped more slowly.

"Where do you live?"

"In Constantia. It is the house of my bosses, the Berthas. They are in Pretoria. I lived with them in Pretoria and I have been here for three months. I am thinking where to live, what to do with my life."

Rita nodded. This made sense to her. "Cape Town?"

"It is a beautiful city, I am happy to be close to the sea. Wherever I go it must be close to the ocean." Doya spoke softly, excitement in her eyes. She sat comfortably, chatting and drinking tea with a strange woman for the second time that day. She thought of Jean-Pierre.

"So, about the post office box. You can have mine, if you want it. I only need one letter sent to this address. Once I have that letter you may as well have the keys. No one will know."

"I'm hoping for a letter," Doya told Rita.

"Me too."

"A reply to a letter I have not written."

"Me too."

Doya nodded. Rita's lack of assumption of Doya was odd. Doya saw a light flash within Rita's eyes when she was not on guard – what was it? The spark of competence, of interest and audacity, lit in Rita's heart. It was not the same as confidence but it was similar.

Rita drew a map of Observatory onto a serviette and added her telephone number at the bottom. "If you are ever hanging around, pop in and say hi. Or call. I've got a bakkie. I can come and fetch you." Rita made her voice sound casual. She did not want to look greedy or bored. She only meant to show Doya that she was sincere, that she planned categorically to honour her promises.

"Bakkie?"

"Truck. A small truck. Would you like a lift home?"

"It's far."

"I don't mind. I love that drive."

Doya was suddenly tired. The thought of travelling for half an hour and walking for another hour to the house overwhelmed her. "No, okay, I will take the lift," she nodded. "If it is not too far for you?"

Chapter Fifteen

Paluka and Doya drove along the coastal road with the windows down. Paluka had borrowed a turquoise sedan car for the occasion. The sea air invigorated their arms and faces. Paluka turned onto a dust road and minutes later the headlights beamed onto silhouettes of buildings which flickered and disappeared as the voices from behind the houses rose and fell. Several buildings surrounded a yard between four corrugated buildings where women cooked chicken over a fire and men played with children, chatting in small groups. The men were jovial, relaxed with the children and the women. Everyone cheered as Doya and Paluka stepped up to the soft yellow of kerosene and candles beside the blue and pink glow of the cooking fire.

“Doya! I am Muidini,” Muidini embraced Doya. “ And this is Jadi,” Muidini introduced a second woman. “Welcome!”

“Hello, Paluka,” Muidini and Jadi drew Paluka into the airy square. Doya embraced person after person. Everyone clasped her tightly and patted her on the back. They had dressed up for the party, luckily she had bought her kaftan and shoes! Doya did not ask after Jean-Pierre or Letsamo, Maleika, Aveline or Phamidzai; Waradwa, Passião. They did not ask about old names, only celebrated the new ones which reappeared. Doya accepted a beer and a plate of food. The music was loud, discussions embarked upon freely. The idea of how unsafe she had been for all that time hit Doya the most as she watched the big eyes of children negotiating their cups and juice, eating eggs, rice, chicken and chips with wide-eyed happiness. The families met each weekend. Four women and men lived there permanently with most of the children. Some would leave the following day and new people arrive, according to work schedules.

Timbilas!

Doya heard the first notes of the marimba chope. Real muenje, from Inhambane, she recognised the depth. Her mind swirled and she struggled to her feet to be ready when the first steps pounded. Paluka and Muidini put down their forks and the group began the hour-long dance. Their combined energy moved between them. Music settled in her form. Doya matched the rhythm, remembering movement after movement. Each scene of the timbila recounted a stage of the struggle for independence. A priest apprehended with an arms cache, banished by Samora Machel. Doya’s feet disconnected clumsily from her thighs, slowly she bumbled back beneath the beats. The places in her

body where concentration on balance tingled lightly almost tickled her stomach from inside. Flesh was an alive, moving situation. Sixth movement, seventh, eighth. Doya relaxed into the strength of these survivors which lay not in the surface shape of their bodies but in the core of their marrow, unbending, accommodating.

Majika!

"Yeeheee!" Someone shouted, hands holding hers guided her. Doya looked up to see Paluka smiling broadly, laughing for the strength in their bodies which continued to tick despite all manner of assail, producing the requirements constantly.

The stars left the sky. The revellers woke many men and three women for work. The girls prepared water for washing and breakfast, the boys helped to assemble coats, shoes and bags.

"Where is the polish?"

"Salome! Where did you put the soap!?"

Paluka tapped Doya on her arm. "I've got to go, too," he shook his head. "I must get the car back. Do you want a ride?"

Doya shook her head. She was too settled.

"Didn't think so," Paluka grinned. "I can come and fetch you tomorrow round lunchtime, if you like?"

The women walked the workers to the road. Most took the train to Langa to the compound; the three women went to Somerset West, one to Gordon's Bay, two to Stellenbosch. They were drivers on a fruit farm and would be gone for two weeks. Paluka turned back to Muizenberg.

"Vamps a prai!" Muidini pulled her shawl close around her arms. "Let's take a walk!"

Muidini, Doya and those who remained on the empty road crossed to the beach, their toes on the cold sand. The children, especially excited to have a party and a sunrise dip on the same weekend, ran around uncontrollably. The women walked in a chain, stumbling and supporting each other. Their soft ripples of laughter matched the shirking and shrinking laps alongside them. Shells brought in on the last tide were admired, some pocketed as keepsakes, some returned to the soil and water to be found later by other parties. Jadi and Muidini grabbed Doya's arms and pulled her into the sea. Everyone dipped. Fully clothed adults and naked children held hands in a row and rushed screaming into the water.

Doya woke later to the hubbub of movements and languages she knew from childhood. The iumembe sounded over the evening sky. Makonde? The room was bright. The walls were lined with newspaper clippings which Doya had not noticed in the night of forests, Table Mountain, the ocean. Children scrubbed clothing and women prepared the evening meal. The older women sat talking at the fire. Doya was directed to the gap in their circle after she had washed and put on a jersey. She ate pap and onions followed by pap and sugar and drank hot black tea. When she had eaten Doya sipped a beer and leant against the wall. The men began arriving an hour after dark. The women made a large fire around which everyone chatted, reclining against the walls or each other's knees. New people arrived, rejoining the group as if they had never left it. The children rigged a tarpaulin between the houses and the little ones went to sleep. The warmth carried to all of them as they relaxed and drifted off to tell memory stories;

remember when, remember this; and to play the guitar, humming gently. They told the old stories, about the old ghosts and spirits which pervade as good people. Out poured the wounds and the scars, the atrocities, whole villages at a time murdered and razed. Following the drought, the land had been overrun by warmongers pumped on drugs. They were all anti-marxist yet anti-state; Old Renamo members, Portuguese, Frelimo dissidents. The forests were emptied of animals and covered in landmines. Rebels abducted civilians for galinda to carry weapons and wild animals to camps. Civilians tried to keep the enemy forces at bay but failed. Children carried out injustices. Young girls were orphaned while fetching water; boys working as porters or in the fields faced the same predicaments. There was famine. There was Soviet aid. The whales had all been sold. The turtles at Ponte no longer buried their eggs high up on the beaches. Various governments scavenged along the shore each week. There were both bombings and airdrop supplies. Chinese and Asian investment ploughed through the economy.

A million were dead. More than a million were refugees.

The older children sat preening and teasing each other. One began braiding Doya's hair, her deft fingers pulled strand from strand, untangling and weaving with a pressure that seemed both to numb and to awaken. Take a layer off and let the next rise. Doya noticed when Paluka dropped her at home late the following evening how the child had taken the palest shells to weave into her braids.

She made a bed in front of the fireplace and drank a cup of tea in the cushions, watching her fingers clasp the mug. She was one of the lucky ones. Not the first nor the only; she was part of everyone. When you throw caution to the wind and just believe that your right is right, you always end up with the benefits of the cosmos. It is scary, hard, and reaching the point where clarity returns may take a decade but it will return.

So many people, who could have foreseen? Next time she would take provisions, and she considered a present to thank Paluka for his friendship.

Chapter Sixteen

"Thanks so much," Lesley returned Rita's shirt on her first Saturday free. She had two new shirts and a new work skirt.

"Lesley! I was hoping I would see you. Can you help me with the salad garden and vegetables? They need to go in soon."

"Planting? I'd love to. Which vegetables are you going to plant?"

It was not a huge space. Rita planned tomatoes and peas, just the light things which tasted different if she bought them. "Peas," Rita began but Lesley interrupted her.

"Peas!" She looked quite shocked.

"Peas, yes; peas, parsnips, a little lettuce, spinach, tomatoes. Broccoli."

"Where are you going to plant them?"

"On the side, next to the bathroom tree."

"Where I come round to the back?" Lesley did not water the alley, as she thought of it. She always walked past the beds and forgot them immediately.

"Yes, that's where the new beds are."

Rita must tell Lesley about meeting Doya.

They took out paper and represented patches in square centimetres. Rita and Lesley walked outside to look at the ground. Weeds struggled up around the roots of the tree.

"This soil needs turning." Rita gazed thoughtfully at the earth.

"With compost? I could dig it in so long."

"Now?"

"Sure; I can do some weeding quickly and turn the compost in," Lesley felt nervous, suddenly. She swallowed. "If that's okay," she continued.

"Of course!" Rita hugged her, "I am just happy that you can help me. Of course it's alright."

When Lesley looked up from completing a task, she was smiling shyly. Clearly, very happily. Lesley enjoyed the quiet productivity. The work stretched her arm muscles in the place where soldiers and brownies wear badges. She seemed to enjoy the work so much that Rita stopped herself from offering to pay Lesley. Lesley evidently had her own behalf, a cowgirl with the hose swung over her arm in a ready lasso, her hair loose on the wind.

"Who would you vote for, if you could vote in the elections?" Rita asked.

"No."

"No?"

"I would not vote in elections run by this government. It's an illegal government."

"But it's only local government elections! And it's over a thousand local authorities, all race groups. Seven thousand positions, just to look after our own affairs."

"Doesn't matter; even local government is an oligarchy, an illegal oligarchy. They are not a democracy; that is illegal."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean, most of the country is not allowed to vote. That's illegal. And the representation of the Regional Services Council is based on the consumption of services in each area, so the RSC is biased towards areas which already have electricity and water. It's rigging. If you take part in it, you are part of it." Lesley tossed her hair over her shoulders. "Vote No Confidence! That's what everyone says. Anyway, I'm waiting for the next elections, when everyone is free."

"You mean the next elections when you are old enough to vote."

Lesley shook her head.

"I'm thinking of Wynand Malan's New Democratic Movement."

Lesley was silent. She remembered that Rita had a brother named Wynand.

"But black people and coloured people are already allowed to vote," Rita argued.

"Only land owners which means very few black and coloured men will vote and even fewer women, and only for the candidates elected by the Nationalist Party. Landowners could vote twice if they owned land in two places and took advantage of the 'safe vote'. It's a false choice. It's rigging."

"How is that rigging?"

"Hello? Rita! Did you ever hear of a person having more than one vote? It's practically feudal, like one-manor-one-vote. And obviously the Nats are going to nominate people they can control as local government representatives of black and coloured people. They seized the newsletter of the Anglican Diocese of Cape Town for saying the wrong thing the other day. They accept no alternative points of view. And if you do have land at the moment, you're probably on the right side of the government, so you'll vote for them more than once. You know what the students say? Why bother with spending all the money on an election, they should buy us a tangible joyride, like a concord or some big rides park. The government ignores the needs and demands of a large number of citizens, then calls it maintaining security."

"Plus," Lesley went on, "there are now seven bodies which report to the President and the results of this election will not even pass through parliament or Cabinet or the Prime Minister. That is only one of seven bodies or councils competing for the President's attention. So the outcome makes no difference. I seriously doubt if anyone in Parliament or the Ministers' Councils will take Provincial Administration seriously."

"What are the other bodies?" Rita asked. She knew Lesley knew the answer.

"The Great Indaba for the rewriting of the Constitution. The President's Council; the community policy making body; Cabinet, the Prime Minister and the Ministers' Councils."

"Seriously, you do have political tendencies," Rita teased Lesley.

"No, not like that, it's just, it is my country. And yours. We should be involved." Why Lesley felt like crying she did not know. Tears pushed under her eyelids with a heaviness which tried to lodge in her brain. Finding no resting place there the heaviness descended her nape and settled in a hollow behind her heart, leaving her standing quite straight-backed as the tension eased and she wiped her eyes, blew out.

Later that evening Lesley wandered up to The Joint. She figured there would be people and action going on but only Tony sat at the bar which stretched the length of the room. Lize, the proprietor, sat behind it. Between them was a chessboard upon which Tony's attention was so utterly focused that he did not notice Lize get up, pour a gin and tonic into a beer glass and take Lesley's R3. It was only when Lize put the drink down next to the chess board that he looked up, saw Lesley and started to laugh.

"You give new meaning to the word Sport," he said to Lize.

"Heh heh heh; sour grapes," Lize laughed back at him.

"Anyone around?" asked Lesley.

"Just us and Judy and Funeka in the kitchen. You're the party, my girl!"

"If I'm the party can I liven it up with a little toke?"

"Not in front of Tony. We wouldn't want to compromise his principles, now would we, Tony?" Tony was a traffic cop, not accepted at the biker club up the road because of his tendency to fine drunken drivers at three in the morning. Lesley giggled and went through to the back. She lit her tweeter off a candle. The Joint was comfortable, colourful and crowded with furniture. Benches lined the walls. Small round tables and short barstools circled the inside of the room. The benches were renowned for the number of people they held, some stretched out for a quick snooze while all around them the conversations continued. Rugby was a national poison to them. They smoked dope, wrote plays in their spare time, played backgammon all afternoon on boards across the bath if the weather was too cold and the house too vulnerable to do anything else. They were thinkers who moved in and on, most did not understand that there was also a base society with its own patterns existing in the same square metres.

Normally the journalists arrived around midnight with their stories of the day. Students with access to the student press also gathered to hear the details. Teachers, medics, law students; everyone helped to fill in the gaps and build a composite understanding of the violence in the country. Their contacts in other parts of the country updated them with news from other cities and towns. The only cause for disturbance at The Joint came from the police, if they were bored enough. The Joint was a soft-target. The building did not qualify for a liquor licence. The cops mostly took their fine from Lize's till and spent it dopping at the bar while the clientele finished studious games of chess and went home leaving Lize to close up and go home too.

But whiskey had become important for its potency, not its conviviality. Four students from UCT and students from other tertiary institutions had been detained, some from their parents' home where they had been on holiday. There were spies, no one admitted to being the culprit. Without the crowds in that back room the fairies along the walls who almost danced into each other's arms seemed to be separated by vast tracts of white paint. They were as like magnets, repelling each other for individual space.

Judy came out from the kitchen. She had been a year ahead of Lesley at school. She laughed, "This place is disgusting. Honestly, I don't advise anyone to eat here. The

food is so old.” She did not seem to mind that Lize could hear her. “It’s true, I’m telling you! Seen Brendan this evening?”

Judy’s lover was always dipping in and out of everywhere.

“Nope. Got any food for me?”

“You sure you’re that hungry?”

“Yip.”

“Toast and sugar and tea?”

“Okay.” Judy went to put the order in. “Want to hear a weird story?” Judy returned.

“Sure, go ahead.”

“This morning, about 4am, this guy arrives and knocks at the front door. So he stands there knocking and calling for my mother for nearly an hour. Shit hey. I just don’t get it.”

“Was he to die for?”

“Complete stud.”

Neither could understand Judy’s mother’s choice in men. Her current lover was a small grey man with a toupee, so thoroughly unappealing that they could not imagine any passion existed for him beyond the Kentucky Fried buckets he brought in with him every Friday evening. Judy sometimes received some of this chicken, sometimes not. It depended on how her mother was feeling. Judy’s mother was a fickle woman.

Lesley nodded.

“So I rap on the window and I go, “Hey mister?” He goes, “What!” I say, “My mother doesn’t work any more. She’s not going to come and answer this door to you now.” But he doesn’t listen. He just goes on knocking. And I’m thinking, how am I ever going to get to sleep? Guys like that don’t listen to anyone – they’re not even afraid of the police, but then, I guess, who is? So, he goes on. My mother sleeps straight through and I start getting pissed off. Eventually I’m thinking Andrew would have killed him. He’d just have gone straight out and fucked him up. So I open the window, it was so loud, jees, Les it was classic,” Judy laughed, “Aha! I say, “You better watch out you don’t come doing that when my brother’s home from the border. He’ll kill you.””

Lesley started giggling. Judy’s eyes were dancing.

“He says, “Shut your mouth you tramp, do you realise, I could be your father!””

Lesley burst out chuckling.

“So I tell him, “In that case I’ll let you in. There are some bills you might be interested in knowing about,” and I ran as if to open the door. As I got there I heard the front gate open and close. I nearly died laughing.”

“Jesus!”

“Ja, but he skulked off after that. Good, or I would have called the police. It’s freaky. Weirdo’s out on the streets are pissing me off.” Judy paused and added, “Andrew’s in a demobilising unit. Part of his R’nR’ post Angola.”

“Shit.”

“Yeah.”

“I didn’t realise he had been up there.”

“Mmm.”

“How long was he there for?”

“Don’t know,” Judy shrugged. “Long enough to freak him out.”

"Hey, girl!" Tony shouted to Judy from the front of the bar. "Want to play some pool?" He swung his pool cue and bounced it on his shoe. "Figure I'll play something I could win at," he joked.

Funeka brought Lesley's toast and a pot of tea. A young man with a twelve string guitar came in and looked around the Joint. She was the only person there. He looked at her.

"Aragorn." He was a regular.

"Lesley."

"Isidiore!"

"Mmm? My guitar?" Aragorn seemed confused.

"Isidiore! Aragorn of Isidiore!" Lesley giggled at the homophone.

Aragorn caught the joke. "Have you seen my friend, blonde guy, curly hair?"

"Nope, not a soul."

Aragorn left and Lesley was still chuckling mildly when Dave entered and stood at the bar organising himself a drink. His Black Adder recitations kept her giggling, his accent so hilariously posh. His parents were British but he had grown up in East London. He was the most studious person she knew. He studied law. He told her about the cases he read, especially the funny ones. He was fun, saying he only wanted to keep her thinking, especially about the goodness of everything. He believed if everyone did that, the world would be a great place.

Except he would have been out of a career and he would have had to spend another few years studying. "Ahaw! Ahaw!"

"Eh yello!"

Lesley smiled broadly at him. "Cerise!"

"How are you? Aren't we all smiles tonight? How charming. What have you been up to?"

"Well I came up here, smoked some dope. Just chilling out."

"Yeah, you look a little spaced. You know, you don't want to go where that stuff is going to take you."

"I'm perfectly safe. See where it gets me? To the best company in the world."

"Touché, darling!"

"Yes," she giggled. "On guard!" She knew it was 'En garde!' and said the phrase flatly for an ironic tone.

Dave slapped his knee and doubled over laughing. "Courtesy of your esteemed wit, I propose a toast."

"Oui, oui, oui!" Lesley replied, raising her cup. Dave always made the same toast.

"To multiples!" He pronounced and downed half his beer.

"Multiples!" Lesley replied and sipped her tea. "Ask me what I have been up to."

"Aside from smoking dope?"

She cocked an eye at him. "In addition to my drugs, yes, David," she answered.

"What have you been up to?"

"Working!"

"Really?" Dave looked at her seriously. "You've started working!"

"Yip. I've got a job as a waitress in town."

"Congratulations!" He leaned over his legs.

"Ja, it's cool. Great. Hard work," Lesley cautioned. "But it's cash!"

"What's the deal?"

"Four hundred per month plus tips at around R60 a shift, more or less," she replied.

"Drinks are on you then!"

Lesley snorted. She knew of Dave's massive toothpaste-to-textbooks scholarship.

"Not quite, I'm paying rent."

"Oh? Where are you staying?"

"Still at home."

"You're paying rent to your mother?"

"Yip. R250," Lesley informed him proudly.

"That's a lot." Dave looked aghast.

"Really?"

"My rent is R165," Dave nodded.

"Well I pay for board and lodging."

"Right. Are you sharing your room? Then you should pay half my rent. At the most."

"I had considered moving out of home, you know, into digs or something. Spread my wings," Lesley admitted. She saw Dave's point. She did not want to discuss it further.

"Well now just don't fly too close to the sun, Icarus my lad."

They both laughed.

"How is Steven?" Dave's housemate had left on the run for the Transkei with three other men. Dave often recounted the most amazing tales of their escapades towards freedom. But tonight he was irritated by the question. He pursed his lips and shrugged his shoulders.

"Haven't the foggiest. I haven't heard from him for ages. Damn conshies," he continued, "I don't know what all the fuss is for. They're smoking it up on the beach at Coffee Bay while we dodge the bullets."

Lesley knew David didn't really mean that. He was terrified of the difficulties which faced Steven. They all were. The most terrifying thing of all was going to the army.

"They got Janet again, you know? I saw her father last night."

"Shit," said Lesley. "Again?" Janet had been detained for more than a year two years before.

"And they banned the Anti-Apartheid Conference, did you hear? Seven hundred delegates were supposed to be here. Someone actually fire-bombed the Sarmcol Workers' Co-op kombi on the way down to Cape Town."

Lesley shook her head. Dave nodded.

"So. Never mind bullets, I'm taking a holiday and going to the Freedom Concert next month. Are you going?"

Lesley nodded.

"Want a lift? My old cabby's decided to work of late. You could drive up with me. Have you got your ticket?"

"No," Lesley said.

"You can get them from the head of NUSAS. Cameron, I think his name is. If you can find him, that is. He's also gone underground so you'll have to join the police if you want to find a ticket. Ahaw! Ahaw! I'm going up through Botswana and I'll cross into Zimbabwe at Plumtree. Beit Bridge will be crammed."

"I don't have a passport."

"They won't be checking. I'll get you through, I'll tell them you're my little sister."

Lesley rolled her eyes as Judy clattered down the stairs. Her laughter tinkled with Tony's. "Beat him to history," Judy announced.

"Wayward youth! Vixen!" Dave teased her. Judy slapped him on the arm. "And the concert next Friday night?"

"What concert next Friday night?"

"Bright Blue on upper campus, at the Molly Blackburn Hall."

"Oh, yeah," Lesley remembered. "I forgot about that, I'm so focused on this Zim concert and saving and everything. Thanks, I'd never have remembered."

University of Cape Town

Chapter Seventeen

Lesley woke excited, beyond excited, ecstatic. Pay day! Her first ever. She was due R400. And the concert at the Molly Blackburn Hall was that night. Her siblings slept late as their schools were on holiday. Lesley showered and packed her clothes into her bag quietly. She had saved almost enough money for the Freedom Concert. With the change from her rent she had just over R600 and she had four more shifts before leaving Cape Town the following Wednesday.

She left early for work. That whole week her spirits were lighter. Things were starting to even out at home, especially because she was at work all day and sometimes went out in the evening, so everything was clearer. She still prepared breakfasts and lunches for her family and sometimes supper if she picked up fresh fruit and vegetables at the Station Market on her way home. The train stopped on the line outside Salt River. The points were down. The nose of Devil's Peak leant toward her, reminding her in its fatness of how close and obtainable the world was. When she came home from Zimbabwe she would save up again to move out. She had asked for the Wednesday, Thursday, Friday and the following Tuesday over the long weekend off in case of emergency. Monday the tenth was Kruger Day. She did not have her passport but she would travel with Dave. Her birth certificate was nowhere to be found. It was a risk, one well worth taking when she thought of the stories she would write about the concert. Dave had forgotten to call her the previous night. She would call him later.

Late by forty-two minutes and thirteen seconds, Lesley arrived at work panting and a little sweaty. The upstairs waiting staff, Fiona, Chinaed, Simon and Arthur, of whom Lesley now knew, were curling butter and chopping parsley at the kitchen counter. Randy and Joy stood at the stove at the far end of the kitchen. Lesley rushed up to them.

"I am sorry I am late. The trains~"

"Just get downstairs and do your prep," Joy admonished her.

Lesley charged downstairs. She threw her bag into the cupboard and tied her apron around her waist.

"She's touchy today," Mamma moaned as she piped whipped cream deeply onto a trifle. "Better get to those tomato sauce bottles," Mamma mumbled into the pudding. "Better get to those tomato sauce bottles! She caught a fit when she saw them this morning."

"Where are the others?"

"Others?"

"The other tomato sauce bottles?"

"We don't have other tomato sauce bottles."

"How must I fill these ones then?"

"We have one large tomato sauce drum."

"Okay." Second time lucky. "Where is that?"

"In the store. Back left."

Lesley spooned the sauce into the bottles. The gloop pasted over her hands, her arms, her stomach. A syringe would have been better for the job. The sauce landed in her hair. She swung her head and slashed red trails over her face. She giggled, remembering PW Botha after a tourist threw rotten tomatoes at him. Who would have thought you could have so much fun with tomato sauce?

The swing door swung open, in came Mamma. Strange, Lesley thought, when had she left?

"She's coming," Mamma tilted her head at the door. "She wants a word with you."

"Crikey moly," Lesley rinsed her arms and face at the big basin with the hard tap before Joy arrived.

"What the hell? You arrive late and mess up my whole bloody kitchen? Look; look what you are wasting! Who do you think will pay for this? Me? The restaurant? The customers? No, girl. You. You. I'll dock it off your wages today. The bloody cheek of it."

Joy yanked the wooden spoon from the bottle and threw it into the rubbish bin. She shoved a funnel fiercely into Lesley's hand.

"It takes time, okay. Time which you won't have if you insist on arriving late!"

"It was the trains~". Blaming others instead of taking responsibility. Lesley saw the woman was seriously furious with her and may just fire her if she did not take the situation seriously. "I'm sorry about being late and about the tomato sauce," she gulped. Every cell in her body compacted. She was almost in tears. She needed the job so badly.

"You are not serving my food like that."

"I have a spare T-shirt in my bag."

Joy pointed to Lesley's loose ponytail. "While you are changing you'd better do yourself up. You look like rubbish! This is why I don't employ blacks here, you know. But look at you, you're even worse than them. You look like you've spent the night in a tree." Joy turned to Mamma. "Her mother was right about her, I see," she said before she flounced out of the kitchen through the swing door.

Lesley's ears and jaw prickled. "What's she talking about?"

"Your mother."

"What about her?"

"You are planning to run away?"

"Run away? Uh, no."

"Your mother came to our house last night. She tell my daughter-in-law that you are running away. You owe money, huh? Joy gave the money to your mother."

"My wages?!"

"Ye-es."

"But I was going to give them to her anyway!"

"Well don't tell me. I know nothing of anything."

"And the rest?"

"What rest?"

"The change?"

"I was in my room the whole time. I heard only through the wall." Mamma turned her back to Lesley.

Steal her wages! What kind? How dare her mother interfere in Lesley's work? How dare Joy give Lesley's wages to someone who had not earned them? Shaking, Lesley swallowed her words back. She gulped them into her stomach for the process of digestion which would feed the words one by one in single file up to her brain through her blood later for sorting and annotation. She took off her apron, picked up her bag and walked upstairs.

"Did you give my mother my wages?"

"Your mother phoned and we met last night."

"My whole salary? Every cent?"

"Listen Lesley, she told me you owe it to her."

"R400?"

Joy nodded but Lesley could not read her eyes for the truth. Perhaps Joy had the extra R150.

"I would have paid her."

"Well," Joy shrugged. Randy came out of the grill with his tongs and stood watching the scene.

"You do employ black women," Lesley said. "Two. Two hours per day. If you're so blind that you can't even see your employees then I'm not surprised you couldn't tell the difference between a woman who worked for you and a woman who did not."

Lesley went straight to Dave's house to see if he would give her a lift for R250 and she could pay the difference when they came home. That would leave her with cash for a ticket and no more. She could live on potatoes.

"You still here?" Dave's housemate Ruandre explained through the bars of the security gate that Dave had left two hours earlier. He had called Lesley the previous night and her mother told him she had left with the university. Ruandre stood in her towel with sleep in her eyes. Lesley thanked her and left. She went home and fetched her savings before anyone else discovered them. Her mother was out. Wherever her mother was she was having a fat laugh at the tears she thought Lesley was crying. She refused to feel forlorn. It was her only form of resistance. Lesley went to the library and chose three books, then for coffee in town. She was not going home. Oh no, she might never go home. She saw the afternoon show at the Nu-Metro in Rosebank and had supper of pizza and coffee with a magazine at Pizzazz. She changed for the concert in the toilets.

Bright Blue were playing up the road! She had a mission. The gables and verandas down Main Road were basted golden in the sunset. Turrets and traffic lights, balconies, balustrades. Cars lined both sides of the road like she had seen in pictures of southern France. The trees outside the Town Hall seemed exotic. Even the traffic was

happy. The cars which passed her were full. Everyone had beers, people hooted at her and each other.

“Hey, girl, take a ride on the roof!”

At Woolsack Drive, to hoots and screams, Balessa and Aaran stopped and picked Lesley up. Their hair was long. Where they had been resolute searchers of deals and had insisted on shopping for cheapness, they now wore thigh high leather boots and bomber jackets. Lesley felt strangely tomboyish despite her outfit of flowing skirts and shirts but safe, sitting behind them as they drove.

“Are you guys practising for the strip-tease?”

“Ja hey, we want to apply to be the girls in the Christmas cakes at office parties.”

They all hosed themselves laughing.

“Haven’t seen much of you,” said Balessa.

They were both studying at the university. They had boyfriends. Their timetables were remote from hers. Deadlines for papers on subjects about which she knew nothing. They were sophisticated, she always knew they would go far. They heard the music from the car park and hurried to the Molly Blackburn Hall.

Amawethu started their set. Their melodies gathered the crowd to sway and skank lightly. The crowd was cheerful and calm, picturesque as Cape Town. Lesley went to the bar. Crates of whisky, whiskey and beer lined the walls. People started to get happy, they danced lightly.

“Helen!” Lesley recognised another school friend whom she had not seen that year who leaned sexily over the other side of the bar.

“Hello, Sweetie!” Helen blew her a kiss. She glided over to Lesley, even taller than she normally was. Roller-blades, Helen raised her skirt to show Lesley the true reason she moved so effortlessly.

“Hi Andrew!”

Judy’s brother appeared between them with a drink in his hand. “Hi lamb-chops,” he kissed Lesley and squeezed her bum and Helen’s before either of them registered what he was doing. He grinned widely at them. “Good T-shirt,” he nodded at Helen’s chest.

“Andrew, please stop harassing the women, please,” Judy slapped her brother on the arm.

“Jesus, don’t fucking hit me,” he responded. “I’m on fucking holiday! I spend my life protecting these gorgeous beauties, the least they can do is be nice to me when I’m on holiday.”

Lesley and Judy backed away. Helen rolled to the left.

“Where are you two going?” Andrew stepped in front of Lesley and Judy.

“Nobody’s business but ours!” Judy never let her brother get away with his aggressive behaviour.

“I am coming with you.”

“No, you are not,” Judy struggled to pass him. He grabbed her arm tightly. Judy’s skin went white in his grip. “Who will look after you?”

“Andrew, did it ever occur to you that I look after myself for three hundred and fifty days out of the year? You are here for only two weeks! Enjoy yourself! Stop worrying about where we’re going. Mingle; make some friends.”

“Some people would be grateful for protection for two weeks of the year,”

Andrew grabbed Judy's elbow and shoved it against her body. She smiled, held his fingers gently and started walking away from the crowd. Lesley and Helen watched them talking furiously at the top of the stairs.

The changes in Andrew were scary. They had all known each other since childhood. Not a year and a half before the four of them spent time together, drinking and playing Risk, Poleconomy.

"I just wish they would hurry up and do something to save the guys who are out there. I don't know if it will help Andrew, I don't know if there's time for him, but something should be done," Helen was nearly in tears. Lesley started dancing. She drank some beer and declined any dope.

Bayete took the stage with their jazzy brass Mbaqanga flavoured soul music. The crowd cheered and whistled their keen appreciation. Beer flowed. Black Sufferers took the stage next, their bluesy dread guitars thundered through the hall. The crowd skanked to the music as surfers take to waves in the sea. Bright Blue arrived on stage and the crowd went mad. People rushed to the stage, other people came inside and gathered in the hall, clapping and whistling. Here was a band popular with the youth of the whole country. Bright Blue moved people to tears with their renderings of everyone's emotions. The musicians struck up and everyone fell quiet, waiting for the lyrics.

"I knew a man who lived in fear
it was huge it was angry
it was drawing near
Behind his house a secret place
was the shadow of the demon
he could never face.

He built a wall of steel and flame
and men with guns to keep it tame
Then standing back he made it plain
that the nightmare would never ever rise again
But the fear and the fire and the guns remain."

Basil Coetzee played the sax solo. Arms a-prickle, everyone swayed to the sound. Bright Blue turned the mikes onto the crowd for the chorus.

"It doesn't matter, now; it's over anyhow;
he tells the world that it's sleeping.
But as the night came round I heard it slowly sound;
it wasn't roaring, it was weeping!"

To these young South African students *Weeping* was like a national anthem. They sang it with more conviction than they ever would *Die Stem*, with more clarity than *Nkosi Sikelel' iAfrika*, which most students at UCT did not know, never having heard it before.

"And then one day the neighbours came
they were curious to know about the smoke and flame
They stood around outside the wall

but of course there was nothing to be heard at all
'My friends,' he said, 'we've reached our goal
the threat is under firm control
As long as peace and order reign
I'll be damned if I see a reason to explain
Why the fear and the fire and the guns remain.'"

Lesley felt claustrophobic. The crowd was thick. The stairs were packed with people. She went outside for fresh air. In the clear night, the nose of Devil's Peak tipped itself higher into the sky. The bass beat faintly through the walls. Lesley walked down to the fountain in the plaza, circled the fountain. With no place better to go and a freedom from constraint, she spun. Her arms pulled to the tips of the stretch of her fingertips and she balanced on air, she spun. She turned and turned. Fifty, sixty times. Thinking she may fall, Lesley hoisted an energy doubled in strength and spun back in the opposite direction. She bounded over the fountain and the earth with no care. She released the grip in her muscles to an innate balance of symmetry that kept her upright, effortlessly flying, travelling at the speed of light. She would never fall. Her wings would catch her.

"Jees, are you a ballerina?" Andrew watched her, smoking a cigarette.

"Nope, maybe one day I'll be a trapeze artist!"

"Crazy nut-head," Judy rumped Lesley's hair.

Lesley crawled home at around six in the morning. She slipped in through the front door, slid down the passage. There were no lights on in the house. It was Saturday. She headed for the shower as if she had just woken up. Clean as a cucumber, not even a sausage out of place. Lesley noticed in the shower that the splotches had ascended to her neck. She was getting flakier and flakier. She got into bed and closed her eyes just like her siblings who slept calmly in their room. Lesley was suddenly fearless. What's the time? Crunch time! There was nothing else to do but sleep. And she was tired.

Chapter Eighteen

Dangers lurked everywhere. Regardless, Rita went out, a single woman, to the movies in Rosebank. She walked the promenade at Sea Point or Camps Bay. She packed her picnics, locked her doors and checked behind herself. She explored avenues open only to other people her whole life through. She was leisurely, indeterminate, gathering pieces of herself for the first time in her life. Even the shadows had become inviting. Instead of hurrying away, Rita looked back at them to see what they were, poked her way through the greys to definition. If reflections of her self existed in a place she would see them. She reasoned against her fears with the knowledge that she would rather discover any dangers which lurked behind shadows than they her. It was her business to look deeper, to face up to them and maintain her dignity. Mr Isaacs had even persuaded her to sign up for Karate. He insisted that she learn a martial art if she insisted on living alone. Rita conceded his point. She wanted to strengthen her muscles.

Sometimes, Rita spoke to herself. She thought this was highly amusing. Words, just to make a noise. She wanted to coo like a bird. Nonsense words, conversations with herself arguing different viewpoints. When the words had insisted on being spoken she did not falter to say them.

Destined again for Sandy Bay, Rita pulled up nonetheless in the parking lot at the harbour in Kalk Bay. The view from Boyes Drive was too tempting. Rita skirted the shouting fishermen while inspecting their wares on the quayside. She walked out onto the harbour wall to watch the boats moored in the small harbour and the water moving all the way to Hangklip. The sea burnt loudly against the walls but the harbour was calm, the green and red lighthouses at the mouth were picturesque. Rita sat below the red lighthouse on the harbour wall. The sleepy village pressed down the cliffs onto the seashore, roofs colourful against the mosaic green of societies and nature. A train blew its whistle clearly through the air and snaked along the tracks from False Bay, stopped between the buildings, the end carriage amidst tables and large umbrellas of a restaurant built beside the station into the sea.

Rita bought a Yellowtail and a Red Roman and had them scaled, gutted and packaged in small grainy blue plastic packets. She walked back to the restaurant but did not find the entrance from the road. She spied a nursery built into a driveway in which a woman sat knitting a baby blue square.

"Hello? I was looking for a restaurant," Rita explained. Her eye was immediately drawn to the saplings and seedlings. "I saw it from the harbour wall. I think it is built into the sea."

"The Brass Bell? Cross under the subway, it's behind the subway on the seaside. Are you walking the catwalk?"

"Excuse me?" Begonias, African violets.

"There's a path which runs right next to the sea all the way from Muizenberg to St James. You can walk even further, to Fish Hoek and Glencairn, but you have to come back up onto the road at parts."

Rita could not resist splurging. She chose begonias, African violets, three small ceramic pots, seeds and seedlings for the vegetable garden. She bought six bags of seeded manure which were piled outside the back wall.

"The catwalk is really pretty," smiled the saleswoman. "Take these," she passed Rita a stack of plastic flowerpots. "If you have any spare ones, bring them back with you."

Rita whistled home. She caught no red robots until Observatory. The garden shed was dark. Rita left her purchases locked in the bakkie and the garage and walked up to the hardware store.

"Wim!"

His face was round, his blue eyes smiled at her. "Rita! How are we?"

"Fine, thank you. How are we?"

"No complaints, just paying the rent," he chuckled. "You've been scarce?"

"Housebound."

"Really?"

"Ja, I had an accident and I've been a bit slow. But now the house is calling me again."

"Shuow, can't keep a good dog down," Wim chuckled. Rita felt her cheeks warm with embarrassment. "So what can I help you with?"

"I was just wondering if I can drill a hole through my kitchen wall and put an extension cord through to the shed outside?"

Wim wrinkled his forehead and pursed his lips. "Well, that's quite a question! It's a bit dangerous, a bit of a rough version of something an electrician would do." Wim shook his head slowly. "I don't see any problems. As long as you are careful you should be alright."

"How will I know where to drill? I don't want to go through the electricity wires."

"Ah."

"And Wim, what should I use to drill through the bricks?"

"Tell you what, I'll come and have a look. There might be a bit of chiselling involved."

"Don't worry, I am sure I can~" Rita began as Wim climbed the stepladder and delved in a box. He retrieved a drill bit almost half a metre long and held it up to her.

"Yes, yes I know you can do it for yourself, but who will be there to congratulate you? Or am I going a little far?"

"Ja, nee, dis 'ie regte lengte," Rita smiled at him.

"Do you need the cord?"

True, she did not have the actual means. “Ja, I was thinking ten metres, and the plugs too,” Rita said as Wim measured out the flex. “A five point adapter and two or three three-prong plugs. I need one for the kitchen too. And,” Rita continued as she saw it would all be done that very afternoon, not over a few weeks, “I need a light to put in there. Something,” what was the word?

“Hardy? Durable?”

“Yes, something durable.”

“Have a look in that pile over there. Ja,” he winked, “you know your stuff, just like a feminist!”

A feminist? What did he mean? Wim hustled over Rita’s confusion while she chose an outside lamp. Leaving Sara in charge of the shop Wim walked to Rita’s house with her.

“You’ve done well with the sanding and the paint work,” he traced his fingers over the wall. “Your floorboards are lovely.”

“Thanks, Wim,” Rita was suddenly shy again. “It wasn’t an easy job, I can tell you.”

“I’m sure. These old cottages never are, but they are worth it when you strip them down. Where are the mains?”

“At the back of the pantry, on the right.”

Wim tapped the brick wall, listening for an echo, measuring and explaining as he progressed that the wall would sound different if there were water or electricity pipes behind the concrete. Once he heard the pipes he could follow them fairly predictably around the wall. He showed her the place he thought best for drilling. “Why don’t you let me drill it through for you now?”

Wim blasted through the concrete and bricks but the drill bit did not reach the full width. “Hmm,” Wim growled. “This is going to be interesting.”

Rita fetched the long extension cord. They would have to drill through from the shed. They measured the distance precisely and Wim started up again while Rita ran back to watch in the kitchen. Finally silver pierced through red.

“Who–hoo!” shouted Rita, jumping up and down as the bit burst out of the brick. “We’re there! Fantastic!”

She inserted the extension cord into the hole to Wim and wired a plug onto the flex. Wim attached the adapter at the other end. Soon her new light was up and the shed revealed for the first time in all its grizzly spidery finery. Wim and Rita piled her seedlings and pots onto the shelves. It needed to be cleared and painted but it would soon be comfortable enough for her to use even in winter, sweating in the heat of her own creative process, the wind and rain beating against the shed as she blasted through old dusty things.

“Yee–hoo!” Rita shouted again and hugged Wim, as if she had won a prize and could not control herself. “Amazing! Thank you so much!”

“It’s a pleasure, Rita. Yes, you are doing a great job here,” he patted her on her back. “It’s a pleasure doing business with you.”

Chapter Nineteen

Lesley had one month or R374, thirty odd cents after her blasted weekend. She had paid, albeit inadvertently, for six weeks worth of rent, meals and clean changes of clothing. She could afford either to live her normal life through October and be broke by November or to spend R120 in October and have cash to pay her rent in November.

Life is an enormous gamble, swapping time for money, money for time. She had to find another job. She had not been to visit anyone, including Rita. She did not feel like explaining why she was not in Harare. The story was too long and to her it was already history. She had already moved onto the next rung of the stepladder balanced precariously against the Tower of Babel. She had not offered her mother any money for October. Lesley wanted her parents to know that she knew that they had stolen her money. Her mother would have to make the first move if she wanted to steal from Lesley twice.

Lesley prepared her CV again and photocopied her Matric Certificate, her testimonial and Taalbond Certificate at the chemist. She went through the yellow pages and made a list of the crèches in her area in alphabetical order with their telephone numbers and space for the name of the person to whom she spoke, the dates and times of her interviews on each line. She compiled the list so quickly that it seemed like the easiest formality. Inspired, Lesley sat down with a large cup of tea to call but she crossed them off more quickly than she had anticipated as people were outright forthright that the law had recently been amended to protect children from arbitrary care. What? Oh, yes; Lesley remembered the newspaper articles, the magazine features with children tied together in a row with cigarette and iron burns stamped into their skin.

“I could cook?”

“Well I’m glad to hear that, but this is what is known as an unsolicited call. We are not looking for new staff. I don’t need a cook. Good luck, but there’s nothing for you here.”

Practically the only skill Lesley had to sell was her cleaning. She ran down Lower Main for the paper. Scouring the Classifieds revealed only the stiffness of her competition in the category. She fetched the local weekly which ran a local Domestic Help Wanted column. Lesley wrote down her cleaning philosophies and household tips in point form, gathering her particular skills in her mind. Most of her enquiries in this

regard were fruitful. She made two appointments for the week ahead and one for the coming Saturday morning at a penthouse in Oranjezicht. R50 for six hours' work with a bit of laundry to start at nine.

Lesley rose early to write before leaving that morning. An upside down mist rolled in over the Cape Flats. The mist was deceptively cold. It would burn off by ten and at midday the city would be sweltering. Lesley took up her pen, sat on her bed. She knew she might forget her desire to write unless she tried to remember. Revert to the safety of the drying ink. Always the pull of new blue which glimmered at reality, urging her to keep going in fat curvaceousness; the streams and rivers should run free. Crawl as a spider on its lair. Adhere to the words as she traversed them, feel the resonance vibrate and trill. The harmonies hung uncomfortably. No pleasing breadth expanded her chest to life and wonder. Lesley doodled, watching ink soak up a scrap of tissue paper. Devoid of pounce this kind of amnesia was possible.

Lesley grabbed a jacket and hit the tracks. She caught a taxi into town and walked up Plein and Upper Orange to a part of Oranjezicht with which she was not familiar, puffing her breath out against the mist which clung to her hair and gathered on her eyelashes. The city was ice cold, quiet of an early Saturday morning. She arrived at the old block of flats. The building was tall and dark, the walls dun. A notice on the lift door read, "Out of order", not knowing the extent. Lesley ran up the stairs. Eventually, dry-throated, she reached the seventh floor. She knocked on the only door.

"Come in!"

Lesley opened the door and stepped into the hallway. A telephone stood on two old directories, dog-eared. Thin etchings covered the wall. She passed the kitchen to her right, the bathroom to her left and arrived in the studio bedroom. The flat was apparently devoid of smell. It was old, though, and very cold.

A woman stumbled up from a low bed and lurched naked across the room, almost tripping on the rug which had gathered beneath the sofa. She slid instead and stumbled over books of faraway places, grabbed a towel and threw it over herself. She stubbed her toe and jumped on an upturned plug socket. She showed no pain. Her feet were white as snow. Was Lesley in the right place?

"Portia?"

"Yeah, you're here for the cleaning? Can you start in the kitchen? No wait, the bathroom first."

Lesley peeled off her jacket and pulled on her oversized shirt which had been for exercising years before. Portia walked back to the bed, indicating a massive pile of clothes in a toss and tumble on the floor. Washing? Lesley took it to the bathroom but where would she hang so many clothes in a flat that small? Half burnt candles dribbled across cracked holders and covered half moons on the trunks beside the bath rim. Lesley took them to the kitchen. She put on the kettle to melt the wax as Portia entered the kitchen. Lesley returned to the bathroom and poured hot water and Handy Andy into the bath. No gloves. She did not normally use them, now she saw their value. Hair infested the basin drain. Lesley retrieved the meshed mass, flushed it down the toilet and poured disinfectant in after it. To have disinfectant that close to a toilet and not to use it? She winced.

Lesley scrubbed the bath, the toilet and the basin. As she scrubbed ingrown toothpaste off the mirror Lesley watched Portia's reflection open the fridge, grab the

milk, look for tea. She chose a mug, sloshed water in and out of it and set the kettle on. The bread bin was empty. The chairs had no backrests. Portia leant against the wall with her feet on the table. The kettle boiled. Portia got up, returned sliding in filthy socks. She made a cup of sweet tea and chain-smoked two butt-ends.

Lesley prepared to finish a surface round in the bathroom. She returned to the kitchen to pour boiling water over the underneath of the candlesticks to loosen the wax and to survey the damage. Batter percolated in an ice cream container with several forks in it. Arabesques of spaghetti filled one wall. Lesley cleaned the candlesticks and finished off the bathroom.

"Thanks," Portia looked at Lesley apologetically. She stood up, stretched and yawned. She was in no particular hurry, certainly not to clean the fat stains off the two-plate cooker. Far too indelible they were, permanent. Accumulated histories packed upon each other. Lesley filled the sink.

Should Lesley call Portia to use the bathroom? Lesley stuck her head out of the door to catch Portia lifting the covers and peer at a head, replace the duvet. Duet. The words stuck in her throat, itching. How do you clear your throat again? Portia snuggled up to the second body, hairy and close from stillness on the bed. In sleep. The body sighed. A hand reached out and bulges of cold flesh shivered upon each other. Lesley was petrified. Glued to the spot, so light she almost stopped breathing. Curves were traced, dimensions remembered, movement began, continued for a time then ended. The two bodies lay entangled on the dirty sheet.

Lesley closed the door and stumbled down to the street. The quiet glow of the wan mist hit her full in the eyes. Her eyes watered, she was jittery. She had no energy to walk to town and she had made no money to pay the fare so she hiked from Cape Town High. The cold front swirled thickly over Kloof Nek. Soon it began to drizzle. No one stopped for ages. The longer she waited, the more drenched she became, the less likely it was she would ever get home. Eventually a middle-aged woman stopped. "Get in the back," she nodded curtly. Lesley must have looked a fright. She felt a fright. "Where are you going?"

"Wrensch Road?"

"Close to the school? That's fine. It's on my way."

Had Lesley ever been so tired? They drove down De Waal Drive without speaking.

"Where have you been?" Her mother's voice cut through her joy at getting home. Both her parents sat in the lounge. Her mother looked wild, her hair was teased in front from scratching her head. Her father's eyes were pallid. They must have been fighting all night.

"Nowhere."

"Excuse me! I said where have you been?"

"Just walking around in Obs. Nowhere."

"I beg your pardon?"

Spoiling for a fight. Great. "Please, let me just go and have a bath and lie down."

"Where have you been all night? Whose car did you just get out of?"

"I was here last night, Mom. I left early to go to work this morning." Lesley was whining. Dejection? Lethargy? How had her mother seen her getting out of a car two blocks away?

“Work? Come here. We’ve been in this lounge all night. We would have seen you. Jeziz! You reek of dope and sex. Let me see your eyes. Look at me. Look at me!”

“I was only trying,” Lesley stared defiantly at her mother, looked across the room at her father. He peered over his beard so as not to see her better. The mound of beer cans in the room threatened to outgrow them both. “Actually, I haven’t had my daily fucking yet. I should get that in while I remember,” Lesley said and turned straight back outside again.

Lesley did not mean to say anything so stupid. She could hardly believe her own audacity. They could not possibly last more than another hour, which happened to correspond almost exactly with the amount of time necessary for a cup of tea and a chat. She knocked on Rita’s door but there was no reply. She went round the back but she could tell from the unusually solid silence that Rita was out. Lesley kept walking until she got to Arnold Street. Were Kelar, Grant and Renate still living there? The kombi was parked in the road. No one answered her knock, but surely they were still asleep? It was not even eleven o’clock. A big comfortable chair stood behind the stoep wall. She took off her wet layers and sat in her last dry layer. She folded the wet clothes as a pillow on the armrest and pulled her knees up to her chest to let her mind unpack the events of the day. She was glad of the time just to think, undisturbed, about what she had seen. The whole scene was a weird *déjà vu*, but she could not think why. Although she recognised the people, she did not know them. She felt uneasy about Portia’s attitude and the carnal indulgence she had witnessed.

“Lesley, is that you?” Renate’s face peered over her.

“Shit, hello, yes,” Lesley sat up. “I was waiting. I must have fallen asleep.”

“You’re lucky I ran out of papers,” Renate held the smooth pack up to Lesley. “I didn’t even see you on my way out. God, you’re naked! What are? Your clothes!” She picked them up from the ground. “You must be freezing! Come inside, sit down.”

She led Lesley into the kitchen and fetched a towel and a blanket to dry and warm Lesley.

“What’s happening?” Renate lit a candle, rolled a joint and stirred tealeaves into a large barrel teapot. Perhaps Lesley should tell the truth, for once, not lie. Where to start? The situation was far too complex for a single-sentence answer.

“I dropped by earlier for tea, must have been eleven or so.”

“It’s one now, you know?”

Lesley nodded and shrugged her shoulders.

“Looking for Kelar?”

“Yip.”

“I, uh, I think there’s someone with him.”

Now? Where else could she go to wait out the day? Perhaps Rita was home by now. Lesley felt extremely tired. Absolutely bombed. She contemplated the option of pretending to leave and coming back to sleep in that chair. “Shit,” she whispered.

“Were you expecting, was Kelar expecting you?”

“No, no,” Lesley shook her head and sobbed again, like a toad.

“Shit, are you okay? I didn’t know you guys were serious.”

“Well I wouldn’t have waited while he fucked some other woman if I’d known that’s what he was up to, fuck no.” The sharpness of her words jarred in both their ears. Would she have? The peace of aloneness was marvellous, inviting. Lesley got up to

leave before she cried too loud tears, before her feelings became too strong for her to control.

“Where are you off to?”

Lesley shrugged her shoulders. “I don’t really know.” Her nerve was failing her. She had to leave, but Lesley dropped her head. “I really don’t know.”

“What about your tea? You need to warm up a bit. Here,” Renate called Lesley. “What’s going on?”

“I just, I can’t go home.” The situation was far too difficult to explain. There were too many examples and not enough plot to say what was what, certainly not to a stranger who did not know the people involved. Tears poured thick and fast down her cheeks.

“I’m sure I’ll find somewhere,” Lesley smiled, struggling to regain some kind of devil-may-care attitude to Renate, whose eyes knotted in confusion in the candlelight. Lesley’s last moorings snapped. She sank to her knees, her arms limp before her, her head spun as she realised by the adjusted height of the room that she could not feel her legs, she had begun to lose control to the fear and more to the point there was someone there to witness it.

“I’m so sorry,” Lesley said, but her words only came out sobs.

“Oh honey!” Renate put her arms around Lesley, tight like a baby.

Lesley returned home later that night, slipped straight past the lounge to bed. She woke ill the next morning. Her head ached. Her throat rasped over two incisions down the back of her throat which leaked liquid out the tips. It hurt to move or to swallow. She sat up claspng her head. The furniture seemed to lean away from her. Lesley stumbled to the shower with a fever of ice on her skin and sat in the spray, waiting for the heat to soak into her. The tiles were freezing. Green goo grew in the grouting. Lesley went back to bed and fell asleep almost instantly, still shivering in the damp towel. She woke feeling even worse. All the beds were made. Her throat was so hot she could barely see. She drank two Disprin. No one was in. Lesley sipped milk and put a mug of milk in the freezer. She longed for the cold to squash out the heat, drop the swelling. She made rooibos tea with sugar and ice-cubes.

The Disprin started to kick in, her throat started to clear.

Lesley opened the fridge and looked past her mother’s bulgarian yoghurt and cottage cheese. She took out the bread and ate two slices dry. She could not remember the date. Lesley started crying, ripping her throat with the motion. She sat down on the floor, her legs dangled into the hole. Lesley had to get up but pointlessness hit her full in the face. She would only have to go through the charade of calling people and asking for interviews, knowing that she could not ask for more than R500 per month at the very, very most.

She should never have asked about the concert. Now she was on her own with almost no right to her bed and nowhere to go. That was the stupidest part of the whole story. How could she undo the previous month? Sometimes everything was forgotten in the reverie of a hang-over. She would have to shrink, stay out of her mother’s way. Play by the rules, fit the groove exactly and never move without its flow.

The bread loaf on the counter was suddenly half its size. Lesley hurried into the shower thinking how deeply she needed warmth, taking Jik and Handy Andy with her to clean the tiles. It was a wonder no one had seen the goo. She aimed the hot water against

the tiles to warm them and billow a hot mist around herself. Beneath the steam she scrubbed the goo away from one corner and sat in that spot breathing, sweating out the fever. She would do the rest in the next trips.

The illness was wild and itchy as a woollen coat. The stifling prickles which covered her cheeks and pushed out her cheek bones brought Lesley a new sense of self-sufficiency. Lesley was not hungry. She was occasionally thirsty but she could take water. She was not cold, although she would be once the fever died. Every few hours she showered the sweat off herself and returned to bed. Twice she took her sheet and duvet cover into the shower with her to rinse the linen. They dried in less than an hour in the sun and Lesley went to sleep in a decent smell. Lesley was ill but she was calm and quiet. She burrowed into the mattress as into a canyon in the earth. With the blankets piled over her, she existed as land, contained and full.

And so passed a week's worth of exact replica days. Lesley went to buy medicine from the chemist and bought food which she kept under her bed. She did not expect anyone to take care of her and she was not surprised that no one did. She saw her siblings looking oddly at her while she slept, as if she were strange, different from them. The siblings were not to talk to anyone who was grounded, although they all shared a room, an instruction they did not normally respect because it was impossible. She slept through their mealtimes and tried to talk to them later, but none were interested, they did not even wait for her to finish her sentences, or else they offered sarcastic brush-off answers.

When next Lesley looked, she had around R180 and nothing to sell. She had missed her two cleaning appointments without phoning in her apologies and she knew that was a limitation. Her throat had cleared; she was unexpectedly thinner. She knew what to do to make some cash and how to go about organising it. It was easy. It had always been an option, at least from an access perspective. Ugly, pretty, fat, thin; there were always openings. Only the top agencies wanted qualifications but they also assumed a previous lifestyle of luxury: good clothing, decent make-up, shoes, underwear, obviously, and jewellery, all of which Lesley had precisely none.

And it was a good option from a financial perspective. At least this way she would be able to save which was better than settling for less than R8.50 per hour to kill herself cleaning up other people's disgusting things. There was only the question of allowing the invasion of her body by people who she neither knew nor liked. It was an investment, Lesley consoled herself. She would make a new life with her savings. An investment, a timeous intervention into time to allow her to breathe, shell up some reserves. She looked at her collateral, blotchy, pale. Lesley surveyed the lift of her cheekbones as she held her hair behind her head. Fortunately she had been through a gothic phase in high school. She scabbled in the back of the bathroom cupboard and found an old blemish stick and kohl liner. She found pale pink lipstick in the medicine cabinet. She put them all on. Transformed. She looked like a movie star. Lesley blew herself a kiss and went to buy a newspaper.

From what she knew of prostitution, it was better to work in a brothel with a madam rather than privately or with a pimp. She went through the newspaper and made a list of agencies in accessible distance from Observatory. The names were hard to read, they made no syntactical sense. *A X-X-X Agency*. She chewed the top of her pencil. A

or an X? An ex-rated movie, An X-X-X Agency? A Triple X Agency? A Three X Agency? A Triple Star Agency!

Her first interview was in Salt River. She walked, approaching Kellar's kombi as she walked down Arnold. It had not occurred to her but his place was on the way. She decided to pop in and visit, not for long, but she had half an hour. She walked up the stairs almost happy. She might have had ten hours at her disposal. She blew on her hands as she waited for someone to answer the door. Stopping to get a grip on her nerves was surely the cosmic purpose of her inadvertent choice of this route.

"Hey Lesley," Renate answered the door, her hair loose down her back. "You look rad."

"Shot." They went through to the lounge. The theme of *Chariots of Fire* blared out the sound system, matching the televised white water rafting sequence exactly.

"Hey, how's it going? Did you guys go to Harare?" Lesley greeted Kellar and Craig, sat down in the lounge and watched the water rushing on television.

"Nope, not that I know of," replied Craig. They all laughed. Lesley did not know whether Renate had told Kellar about her visit, but she had already taken on so much more that it hardly seemed relevant. Smoking joints, slow-boating daydreams. She was relieved, they accepted her presence as utterly natural. Kellar curled into her skin just like she was always supposed to be there. No one spoke. They waited until everyone acclimatised and smiled with sweet tea made by Renate, invisibly. Words unsettled rather than ensured their procedures, perhaps because they were so wired they communicated in brainwaves, perhaps because their routines were so well rehearsed. It was like the first time she got her period, Lesley wanted to tell someone the important new step happening in her life but it was not polite. Five more minutes would not hurt. The synchronicity between the music and the movement was entrancing. Rivers swirled against rapids, rocks, craters, and canyons.

As Lesley leaned forward to leave Craig asked, "So Lesley, do you want to come out with us later?"

"Well, sure. Sounds great. Where are you guys headed?"

"Town, 10-2-8. It's a big party. A celebration," he sat back.

"What's the occasion?"

"I've got a job," Renate shrugged her shoulders.

"Wow! Congratulations!"

"Yeah, at the Grill Bar, in Newlands. Started last Monday."

"Oooh! Larny land! Muchos mullos, eh?"

Renate giggled, "Yeah, rigger buggers! Loaded to the eyeballs."

"Are there~" Lesley started to enquire about other positions as Craig interrupted her.

"Yeah, she's been making some good tips, putting her arse out all over the place for the khaki boys, hey Miss Money-Penny?"

Quick as a flash Renate gave him a karate chop on the top of his head, then fisted him in the stomach. Craig did not flinch. He slowly replied, "Don't tempt me, baby. Don't tempt me. Any case, think I'm not proud of you for going out there into the real world to suck those bastards of their cash? I am, baby. I know how hard you work to get their bucks off them, I'm proud you can keep it up."

Renate exhaled her smoke. She watched Craig from below her eyelids. He did

not return her gaze, just kept watching the TV and smoking his joint. Renate turned to Lesley as Craig drawled, "Renate's taking us out to celebrate the success rate of her jeans."

"Okay!" Renate jumped up, a sharp shortness in the word at which Craig looked genuinely surprised. "Okay, yeah, I mean how much have we got?" She leaned over to examine the ganja. "Let's get cracking. I'll take you out."

"And Lesley?" Craig insisted.

"Renate, I can't stay, I've got to mission. Plus I've got no cash, only smokes."

"That's brilliant, you bring those smokes and we'll consider that fair, won't we, Renate?"

"No, you don't see, I've really got things," continued Lesley but Craig put his hand in the air to conduct her silence. Kellar sat up and cuddled her protectively into his armpit. Renate needed her there; they all did. Renate rolled a huge spliff, smoked some and handed it to Lesley. The plan had been organised. An anti-climax! This situation was bigger than she was, she could not leave.

Lesley had been let off her task. Completing it was deferred. It was a big decision, finding a job like that. She had accomplished the first phase. Craig went outside to smoke a pipe and Kellar followed him after a minute. She would probably not have another chance at the same place but it was not exactly the only one in the city. How close would she get to the next interview? Kellar came back and tucked himself around her. The same programme was still on television. Suddenly they found they had reached the end of the cigarettes. Also the dope.

Shelley Street.

Scoring on Shelley Street was dead easy. They portioned out R20 for a bankie, then R50 for a shoebox, then R20 when Renate pointed out that none of them could afford to get bust with a shoebox.

They climbed into the kombi, started the noisy engine in the quiet street, went singing down the road. They pulled in at Shelley Street, squirted water to clean the windscreen. A guy came over to Craig. He outlined their needs. The guy disappeared.

"Where's that other R30?" Craig turned carelessly to Renate.

"What?"

"That other thirty bucks we had just now. Where is it?"

"Why?"

"I want to see how much his buttons are."

"What do you want to see that for? You know how much they are."

"I want to see if this guy is so stupid, he'll us score two for thirty."

"Fifteen bucks a button? Are you crazy?"

"Just watch, he'll do it. Just give me a chance, okay? If he bites, then you give the cash."

"Craig," Renate handed him the cash, "I've told you before I don't dig you taking buttons, okay. I don't like it."

"Did it ever occur to you that I was not asking if you like my taking the pills, I was asking if you'll pay if he agrees to the deal. Now hello! Do you read me?"

"Just give him a chance!" said Kellar. "Let him try. No harm in trying, right?"

No harm in trying, no.

The men ground the pills, stuffed their pipes, smoked off the pipe. Each shook green and clasped his knees to his chest, then fell over, rolling aside.

"I hate this," Renate lit a double-blader as the guys started coming round. Lesley wanted to leave but not right at that moment. They watched television in silence, smoking themselves sicker, their heads giddier, their stomachs turning.

Craig sat up suddenly. "I'm sorry we didn't go out for a celebration, I'm sorry baby. I'll make it up to you, I promise."

Renate crawled over to him, "Don't worry baby, I'm here, it's fine, we'll go out another time," she kissed his chest. "Hey, my baby?"

"Mmm?"

"Feeling okay?"

"Mmm."

"That's good," she cuddled into him. "Hey, I'm here," she joked, "Baby, come with me, come with me."

"What?"

"Don't you want to fly?"

"Yes, I do want to fly – yes."

They shuffled out the door, supporting each other down the passage, past a bucket beneath a crack in the ceiling. The whole house was freezing. Kellar and Lesley fell asleep on the couch. In the middle of the night they smoked a joint together over a cup of coffee and went through to his room, made love for the first time.

Chapter Twenty

The candle and candlestick Doya chose for Paluka remained in her cottage. Each garbage day, different men arrived to fetch the rubbish. Once Doya asked after Paluka, forgetting his other name. No one recognised the name. Her heart sank. Maybe the Moçambiquans would know where to find him. Doya walked down the beach until the mountains had the same aspect she remembered from that morning and crossed the road onto the sandy plain. The Moçambiquans were not there. There was no evidence of their homes other than dusty patches of soil beside long grasses, the fireplaces beside.

But this is impossible, Doya searched the area. The wind had erased their footprints already.

Doubting her earlier geometry Doya returned twice more to look for the Moçambiquans. The second time she scurried so frantically across the plains that she did not notice the sunset, it was night before she returned to Muizenberg. Doya choked back her tears. She worried to think that people could just disappear. Abandoned, again. Where was Paluka? A hard cold feeling settled over her mind, listless. She caught a late train and walked back from Steenberg Station so late that she struggled to see her way. She hurried along the roadside, her head pounding from the lights of the oncoming traffic.

The only person who would help her was Rita, from Claremont. She had a bakkie and she had offered her help. Exhausted, Doya slept late into the morning, waking rested but still unnerved. She barely washed the sleep from her eye before making her way up to the main house with Rita's number. Doya picked up the receiver and was about to dial when a familiar but unexpected car pulled into the driveway. Doya went to the window. The Berthas were unloading boxes from the Jaguar. Unthinkable. She slipped the serviette into her shirt pocket.

Mrs Bertha arrived inside first. "Hello, Doya!" She looked Doya over sharply.

"Hello," Doya returned.

Mrs Bertha swung her parcels onto the counter and threw her plastic bag of rubbish into the bin. "I am going to shower," she announced and flounced out of the room.

Doya packed away the groceries, washed the coffee flask and plastic cups. In came Mr Bertha with a cardboard box. He dumped it on the table where it clinked and

rattled for a second afterwards.

"Leave this, it's for the workroom," he said, without even greeting her.

More boxes, boxes in boxes. Piles of towels, hats, jewellery. Doya washed everything as she unpacked it. She worked all day and slept badly, thinking of the alarm clock set beside her ear for half past five. The Berthas ate their breakfasts early, no matter what. Her internal clock kept brilliant time but Doya did not trust it to observe their importance three months after her independence commenced. Instead of sleeping peacefully until it sounded, Doya tossed the whole night itching over the fact of it. An alarm clock, an impartial impulse ruling her life.

After breakfast Mrs Bertha separated piles while Doya packed away. Half the piles went to the cottage, the furnishings from the main house in Pretoria. Curtains of which she intimately knew every square centimetre adorned her kitchen, her living space. Duvet covers.

"You know Doya," said Mrs Bertha as they sorted the towels, "Flora is also going to come with us to Cape Town. Won't that be lovely? We all move together. The whole family."

Doya nodded. Mrs Bertha had that look like she was about to give her an instruction. But Mrs Bertha only smiled and shook her head. Doya took the towels to their cupboard and returned to find the cottage empty aside from the boxes.

Where was Paluka?

There were not many boxes, the Berthas had only packed the Jaguar and they never put the roof racks on it. By midday Doya was in the kitchen, ready to start lunch. Mr and Mrs Bertha arrived in the kitchen. They sat down at the table.

"Ah, just something light, please Doya," Mr Bertha said.

Doya put out bread, cheese and pickles.

"We were thinking, the cottage is big. Maybe you and Flora could share it?" Mrs Bertha spoke. Mr Bertha nodded. "It'll be nicer for her, than, you know, living with us, here," Mrs Bertha hurried.

Doya froze. They were so casual. Flora would have had to share a bathroom with someone in the house if she lived in it. Unless she were to shower in the back yard with the shutters drawn inside the house so no one could witness her ablutions. Doya stared out of the window. The view through it was infinitely preferable.

"Doya?"

"Yes, Mrs Bertha?"

"We thought Flora can have downstairs and you can have upstairs. We thought," Mrs Bertha glanced at her husband for reassurance which she received in the form of a curt nod, "we thought you would prefer the privacy."

Privacy? On the top? Impossible. At least on the bottom you were invisible if the person on the top was seated or lying down. From the bottom you could see straight into the top, except from in the kitchen but there you would hear everything.

"I like downstairs," Doya responded quickly. "I go out sometimes at night for air."

Mrs Bertha swallowed loudly, set her mouth in a straight line. "I see," she said. "Well. No need to get excited about it now, we'll only be here in, what, eight weeks?"

Mrs Bertha began eating again. Doya turned to Mr Bertha. Mr Bertha was not paying attention. He looked up from his soup and caught her gaze. Neither Doya nor Mr

Bertha moved or spoke. Mrs Bertha looked up from her plate to see them both staring at each other. She stopped chewing.

"No," Mr Bertha replied, firmly. "Uh," he shook his head a little. "Doya should have the upstairs room, as we discussed. Flora will leave earlier than Doya in the mornings now."

"Darling!"

"Darling, we made the arrangements after a lot of thought, I just don't see any reason to reconsider." Mr Bertha tapped his fingertips on the table.

The Berthas left to go shopping and Doya escaped to her cottage. Already she felt the presence of another sharing the space. Anew she looked at it, sizing it. It would be tolerable if Flora were upstairs, but she? Creak up and down those stairs for twenty more years?

Six more months, eight more with six on the top floor. Then she would leave, find her own place, maybe go home to Moçambique. Doya made herself relax. Moçambique. The beats of islands drummed through her veins. Jadi, Muidini. She would find them. Jean-Pierre. She would go back with one of the truck drivers. She could make it once more through the forest. She had one foot back in the ocean.

The Berthas returned and Doya unpacked the litres into the deep freeze, the cardboard boxes into the cupboards. This was all her food. Her own mini-store in the corner of their kitchen. But why should she have a fridge in her cottage? The Berthas thought she spent her time in the main house although they were not living there.

"Doya, do you know where the newspaper is?"

"I think it is in the kitchen."

"Could you check? I'm looking for the map," Mrs Bertha said. "Darling, do you know where the map is?"

"No."

As Doya exited the room Mrs Bertha called after her, "Oh Doya, do you know where the passports are?"

"No," Doya turned back to the room. "I don't know where they are." What of her own papers?

"I thought we brought them down."

"No, I did not see the passports. Do you ~" Her passport?

"Darling, we used them in Pretoria last week." Mr Bertha interrupted Doya, addressing Mrs Bertha in a slowly patient tone. "They must be at home somewhere."

"The title deeds!" Mrs Bertha jumped up. "Come on, Darling! I'm sure they'll accept those. We'll take our chequebooks as well. Now, where's the polling station here? Doya, see if you can find that newspaper?"

Doya brought the paper and handed it to Mrs Bertha, who sank into the chair nearest her and opened the pages. Should Doya ask for her passport? Ask them for her freedom? An hour of sunshine, the best in the afternoon, Doya went to sit up in the dell. Mrs Bertha came outside. She called Doya and walked down the stone path, rapped on the sliding door. Mrs Bertha could not get into the cottage. Doya had both sets of keys in her pockets which sometimes happened when she moved frequently between the two houses, with nobody to let her in if she locked herself out. Whatever Mrs Bertha's question, the answer had nothing to do with Doya. The house was super clean, completely set up to their order. Only they knew where their possessions were. Doya

stayed exactly where she was. At length Mrs Bertha came back up the path. Doya eased her forehead with one hand, kneading over the seat of her intelligence. She had better get back to the house. Doya stood.

It was the same as when Mrs Bertha had arrived to teach her new things in the kitchen, explain a new brand of oven cleaner to her. A hole appeared in her space, with it a net of consumptive frustration which sucked everything into its stretch, even the food digesting inside her, making her wretch. Doya wavered, looked up to regain her balance. The sun was setting behind the forest. Its golden blue pushed out towards the mountain swathed behind her. The Berthas were leaving soon. They seldom stayed longer than Sunday night. She would go on.

Almost immediately she thought this, Mr and Mrs Bertha left the house and drove away. Surprised, Doya cooked their supper and ate her own. Her food tasted gummy and bland. She heard the Berthas returning as she set her alarm clock. Doya was tired, she faded quickly. The house door slammed, then the car doors, gates again. Doya squinted at the luminous stripes on the clock. What? Almost ten o'clock.

Pretoria?

She hauled herself out of bed, walked barefoot up to the kitchen and switched the lights on. They left a note propped against a new pair of socks and a jersey. They were definitely gone! One day early! There was a pang of regret that she had not answered Mrs Bertha and said goodbye instead of hiding away from imaginary demands. But there was also happiness in the knowledge that her gut instinct had been correct. She had moved, once again, when the time was right.

Chapter Twenty One

On polling day Rita rose at dawn to a glorious morning. The heat peeled from the sky and landed sizzling on her skin. The seeds and seedlings were still in the shed. Rita switched on the light and picked up the designs she and Lesley had made for the new beds. She could pot the seeds and plant the seedlings. She made some tea and toast before taking up the designs again. Something niggled at the back of her mind. Lesley. She would enjoy the work. Where was she hiding?

She would not do the work alone. Rita dressed and considered the election. For whom would she vote? No party truly represented her interests. None even came close to her interests. Her interests? Growth, development, recreation. She should spoil her ballot. The day was perfectly calm. She still had not been out to Sandy Bay. Rita packed her bag for the beach with a snack and was almost ready to leave when the 'phone rang.

"Hello, Rita? This is Doya."

"Doya! How are you?"

"Fine, fine. How are you?"

"Fine, fine. It's lovely to hear from you."

"One question?"

"Ja?"

"Can you go to the beach with me?"

Rita took a bottle of wine and two glasses. She replaced her ID in its box. Rita left immediately but stopped the bakkie outside Daniel's house. She walked up the stairs to Lesley's and knocked on the door. A small girl opened it.

"Yes?" Her notes slid up a scale.

"Hello. Is Lesley here?"

"No." Her notes slid down again.

"Is she coming later?"

The child shook her head. "Lesley's gone away."

"To a concert?"

"A concert? Maybe..."

"Is your mother in?"

"Yes," the girl nodded.

"Can you call her for me?"

A small woman arrived at the door, obviously distracted. "Yes?"

"I'm Rita. From No 1."

"Yes? What do you want?" Lesley's mother stared rudely at Rita.

"I'm looking for Lesley. Is she here?"

The little girl shook her head. Her mother shoved her just inside the door and closed it to a thin slit. "What do you have to do with her?"

"She helps me with my garden," Rita began. Lesley's mother did not respond. "I haven't seen her in a while. Where is she?"

"Your guess is better than mine. I'm busy," Lesley's mother snorted and closed the door.

"Can I leave a message?" Rita called loudly. Lesley's mother did not return. Rita got back into the bakkie and sat for a moment, shaken at the bluntness of Lesley's mother's response. She drove to Doya, thinking of Lesley. What was the name of the restaurant that Lesley worked at? They would know where she was. Le Merry Chain; no, Le Merry Cuisine?

"Oh, your hair!" Rita admired Doya's glittering shells.

"You like it? Thank you! I found some~"

"Shells?"

"Friends. I went to a party, remember I told you?"

Rita nodded.

"A little girl did this. And your leg is better," Doya continued.

"Ja, almost back to normal! I just have to exercise, but I'm so lazy. This is lovely. Your view is amazing. So peaceful."

"Yes, it is beautiful. And I want my own place," Doya joked at herself.

"Still not good enough?"

Doya shook her head as they walked through the garden.

"That little girl did a lovely job," Rita admired the shimmers in Doya's hair.

As soon as the women were together they both felt younger, lighter. They drank a cup of tea in Doya's lounge as Doya explained her search to Rita. Rita listened and agreed to help. The women bought a small picnic in Lakeside and travelled down Lord Baden Powel Drive in a calm and hot quietness while Doya added the angles of the mountains to find the place she remembered.

"Rita, turn here when you can."

Rita took the next turn-off onto a dust road. Doya chose left at the crossroads. Three kilometres revealed not one single sign of a community. They drove back up the left cross and down the right one, got out of the bakkie to search the landscape and listen for sounds of people. Both strained their ears. The perfectly hot day carried a slight breeze which evaporated their sweat and kept them cool. Up and down again. Only mountains and the coast on the panorama.

"We would see people," Doya murmured. The mountains seemed desolate, dry. "Houses. Let's go?"

"Go?" Rita felt helpless. Perhaps Lesley's mother's disconsolate response had taken the wind out of her sails. She almost told Doya of Lesley's disappearance, but as she did not know that Lesley had disappeared, she did not.

"We are lost." It was the same conclusion Doya had drawn previously. "I don't understand. Where did they go?"

"It's an election weekend this weekend. Maybe they've been moved."

"Moved?"

"By the government. They move people sometimes."

The torment at the thought of these people in the hands of the government flashed across Doya's face.

"Shall we phone? Ask some questions?"

Was Rita crazy? Tell the authorities where to look? "No," Doya replied, "Who can we ask? Maybe I am wrong, maybe we will tell the police about them!"

"But there must be something. Someone."

"The only thing to do is to go to a beach, down here on the bay. Eat our lunch."

"Are you certain?"

"Yes. Certain. If I go home I will just go round and round in my head. I don't want to sit. Just sit and look at the grass."

Rita and Doya stopped at Muizenberg and walked out to the left of the beach beneath the train station stairs. They drank a bottle of fruit juice quickly and watched children surfing waves and playing Frisbee. They soon noticed beach constables patrolling the scenery, asking members of the wrong race groups to leave the segregated beaches.

"Hey, you!" The constable pointed at Doya and Rita. "Move!"

"I have been here before," Doya almost asked him.

The constable folded his arms across his chest. "Are you admitting to committing a crime?"

Doya shrugged her shoulders. "Let's just go," she turned to Rita.

"I know a better beach," Rita suggested as they crunched up the sand to the bakkie. "Sandy Bay. It's for nature lovers, you know, naked people? It's a bit of a walk but I am sure no one will bother us there! The water is cold."

Cold as inland lakes on winter nights?

Doya and Rita parked and alighted the bakkie within twenty minutes of escaping the constable's wagging ragged fingernail. The two women strolled through the undergrowth, escaping at each turn the police and disappearing people alike. Their eyes relaxed on the curves and bends of brush. They walked in silence, relieved at the impunity of nature, and hurried over the boulders to the beach. Both Doya and Rita laughed at the white sands and turquoise waves which constituted the view of the bay. Two mountains peaked against the sea. Five completely naked people, reading or swimming, shared the space. Doya and Rita descended to the shoreline swirls.

"What a beautiful place!"

"Here, my leg is sore," Rita sat down. "Whew!" She and Doya spread their towels in the sand.

"This is the right beach. Thank you for bringing me!"

"Ag, it's nothing. I think we are safe from them here. Now we can relax," Rita shook her head. "Relax!"

The two women unpacked their picnic. They were hungry. There was no shade as they ate in the direct heat of the sun. When Rita had finished eating she dosed herself in sunblock. Face, neck, arms and legs. She kept her shirt and trousers on. She was shy

to expose herself, but the sun would be on her, on all of her...

Doya finished eating and discarded her clothing. She lay back in the sand. Rita passed her the cream.

"What is this?"

"Sunblock."

"Sunblock?"

"Factor 30. To block out the sun."

"Block it out?"

"The sun is powerful. It's dangerous."

Doya laughed gently. After all she had gone through, a tube of cream could protect her. She undressed and rubbed the pasty whiteness into her body.

Rita grew hotter. She removed her shirt and dosed her chest but she felt awkward with her naked breasts hanging forward and her legs locked into bulbous sheaths. She removed her trousers and her underwear, dosed the rest of her body and lay down on her stomach quickly.

Doya watched the view. Birds hung across the mountain faces. The ocean surface was glazed, brilliant, a sheen. The bay was similar to Ponte de Ouro. Not as long, but definitely close in landscape and in colour, especially with the close mountains as a backdrop. The water in each wave was translucent, the sands the same scintillating white, not quite as hot. What had become of the Moçambiquans? Not one trace of their community? How could that be possible? Desperation eked from Doya's body to the sea, seeped out of her with the knowledge that her destiny had her safe for one more afternoon.

Rita had almost dozed off. "I am going to swim," Doya told her quietly.

Rita squinted up and nodded. Doya stood heavily and walked to the water. She hardly felt the cold, she noticed only the refreshing sounds and stillness in the peace and quiet. She entered her old favourite way, wetting her calves, jumping the waves, allowing the sea to introduce its sensations to her. No shock, rather a subtle easing in.

Rita flipped up. Blinking in the dazzling light she looked for Doya and located her knee-deep in the sea. Rita stood naked on the beach. Her nakedness seemed to focus her attention away from her body onto all the other details of the view. The mountains and rocks, shells and grasses, valleys, sands. Nakedness was a matter of clear thought, Rita realised, not sensation. It brought her acute powers of observation, not self-consciousness. She ran up behind Doya and, screaming in the freezing water, dove straight into the sea. Doya watched a wave swallow her.

"It's great," Rita called behind another rising wave. "Come on! You're only making it worse the longer you stand there!"

"No, I am making it better! I used to do it like this when I was a girl. Not running like a chicken with a dog chasing it!"

Rita joined Doya and together they inched in centimetre by centimetre. Knees, thighs, solar plexus. Rita's hair was almost dry by the time the water reached their stomachs.

"This is the way," Doya said as she submerged herself in the ocean to steep out the heat in her head.

The heat in Rita's body rushed up to the crown of her head as the cold cleaved the clean nape of her neck. Rita sank her head beneath the water and held it there for several

seconds to let the heat soak out completely. She shook her head to dislodge the bubbles and allow the cold in to freeze her scalp to its normal temperature.

“Fantasties!” Rita cried, jumping out the water. She was indeed swimming in the Atlantic Ocean. Doya floated with her arms behind her head. She wiggled her toes in the swell. Rita laughed at the small hands they resembled. She and Doya swam out a distance and admired the view from the sea’s perspective. They did handstands and somersaults in the water all the way back to the shore.

Rita got out of the water. To dry off and warm up she attempted her control exercises. She balanced on her right leg with the shore-side breeze to carry her. She paced out fifty steps and stretched, overbalanced beside birds. The fresh friskiness tingled on her flesh from the sea. With salt in her eyelashes Rita was an innocent child again. Afterwards she wriggled into the sand on her back, naked as she could be. Heat enveloped her in a membrane which it fired onto her skin, baking her.

Doya flopped back into the sea. The water was too good to leave. She swam out. The salt, the cold and clarity are a balm, a life force. She swam out farther, watching the waves grow above her. One grew too heavily, Doya turned and flung herself atop the water to rush with the chute. The energy took her, she went with it, she needed to stop breathing for those six seconds, to hear the sound of the bells, the waves on the surface of the sand trapped by the weight of water. Doya brushed against the sand on the shore. Again she went out, wanting not to prove her strength but to feel it; her arms, her feet inside the tunnel, the water around her ears. Doya took a third wave, gliding in the pull. She launched herself into nature, turned herself into the power, sharpened herself against it, readied herself for another match. Mermaids call from the sea reeds, what answer should she give? That life is more than she would leave? She could not go with them; no.

No one watched her. She was free. Water streamed down her head into her eyes, blurred her vision in a curious haze. Doya took up handfuls of wet sand, rubbed them onto her right arm. Fresh sand from the ocean floor scoured her body, arms, legs, tummy, shoulders, neck, feet, her face. Fresh sand soused her pores in salt and cold, invigorating her. This was the closest she would get to below the sand.

Rita awoke and looked around the beach for Doya. Finally she made Doya out atop the rocks on the far side of the beach. From the fullness of Doya’s gaze to sea and the uninterrupted hold of her frame Rita understood that Doya had big questions to answer. Rita grabbed the wine and glasses. She sauntered off and clambered up the rocks.

“Doya! Hi. How about some wine?”

“Mmm,” Doya raised her eyebrow in a half-smile. “Certe! When is it not time for wine? Thank you.” She took the glass Rita passed her and waited while Rita filled the second glass.

“Good health!”

“Good health.”

They clinked glasses. Each woman sipped slowly in the afternoon heat.

“It is so perfect,” Doya said. “I am happy that you brought me here. As if good does exist. As if it can be victorious. Nothing can change that.”

“The pleasure is all mine. I have been meaning to come here myself and I haven’t made it. This is definitely a beach to enjoy with friends. A toast!” Rita raised her glass.

Doya raised hers.

"To absent friends!" The old traditional words spilled ungainly from Rita's smile. She had not properly considered what toast she would make, something to do with friendship and bonding. "Sorry, Doya, I didn't mean~" she winced.

"To absent friends," Doya repeated heartily. She found it fitting to drink to all her friends who were absent from her life, to salute their lives in the presence of such glory. Doya smiled and for the second time the two women clinked their glasses and sipped their wine, wisely watching the waves in the sea.

"I'm sorry that we didn't find your friends. We should look again, check again next week and the week after. Maybe they'll come back."

Doya nodded. Maybe this was a temporary removal just to test her resilience, see if she would hold on even if the heavens moved again. But Muidini and Jadi had not mentioned leaving, and what about Paluka?

"I know better," Doya replied. "I know nothing stays in the same place twice." She drew a circle in the air. "It's all always moving. It's so terrible! But it's so right."

"Depending on where you are on the circle at the time."

"Exactly."

"This is my third life," Doya said, her quest thick on her tongue. "This one must work!"

"Who were you before?"

"A daughter, a wife, a mother. A cleaner and a cook," Doya listed. "Now the Berthas say I must be the housekeeper, but what can I do? I will do something new, now."

Rita laughed. "I thought you meant like reincarnation!"

"No, no, nothing like that. Life is full of lives."

"Well, by your counting, I'm on my second life," Rita squinted, seeing herself as a child, a wife and mother, and as herself, now.

Doya raised her eyebrows.

"Ja. And I also want to know what the future holds. All that is still going to happen. I want to get on."

"No, no, no, no. That's not it. Time is only there to help you." Doya knew that time was your own. "In life, with all that there is to do in one life, we need time to work for us, like a rope on a mountain path. When you need help, there is time; afterwards, you go on again. It is not time or age which counts, only existence. Life is not time."

Rita laughed. She saw it; pulling herself up a mountain on ropes, letting go on the even straits to shake her hair loose and take in the view. Discarding time when she was happy, discarding it when she was sad, using it only to cope, as a way to tell her story, as a washing line on which to peg her progress.

"I don't follow this stuff too well," she confessed. "But I get what you are saying, like chapters in a book."

"Not like chapters, like a new book. Everything changes; nothing stays the same, not even you. It's a new life. New choices, new people, ideas, thoughts."

They retrieved supper from the main house in Constantia.

"Take what you want. It's like a store."

Doya started with the rice and beef and tomato stew while Rita bathed, soaking

with memories of Sandy Bay and nakedness.

"You want my kaftan?" Doya offered Rita the garment when Rita appeared in her towel.

"Really?"

"Sure." Doya saw how tempted Rita was. "Here," she passed the kaftan to Rita. "You can use it if you like."

Rita dressed in Doya's kaftan and watched over the cooking pots while Doya bathed. The garment gave Rita a feeling of elegance, spaciousness, grace. She walked carefully inside the thick, soft material. Her sunburn, snug and ticklish, rolled her shoulders involuntarily.

Doya and Rita ate their supper sitting just inside the sliding door to Doya's cottage, beneath the stars. They drank coffee and chatted past midnight, entertaining and entertained. The following morning Rita rose early from her bed on the couch and showered in the huge garden. Again she wondered about Lesley. If she had not gone to the concert, why had she been so scarce? Why was her mother so rude?

Doya prepared scones and tea for breakfast which they ate in the honey-smelling grasses outside Doya's cottage. The radio broadcast the election results and confirmed Rita's worst predictions. The National Party had won most seats, with a rise in seats for the Conservative Party, the Afrikaaner Weerstand Beweging and the Herstigte Nasionale Party. The PFP, Independents and New Democratic Movement barely featured in the results.

"What does this mean?" Doya asked Rita.

"Worse than before. Shall we call the municipality and ask about your friends?"

"No," Doya insisted. "I have no papers! Let's go back to the beach."

Chapter Twenty Two

Lesley stayed with Kelar, Renate and Craig, living on potatoes and spaghetti, bread and jam, tea, cigarettes and ganja. She fetched her clothes and a few notebooks from her parents' house. She was prepared for a humdinger and her family were all home, playing bridge in the lounge but they gave Lesley no indication that they had noticed her presence.

She returned to her new room in her new home with Kelar within forty minutes of leaving. She preferred it there. Kelar was her lover and he took care of her as well as he could. During the days they smoked, slept, read and wrote together, discussed literature, affirming each other's understandings. They played chess. In the afternoons they went to the beach to sleep off the heat in the shade of an umbrella and at night they danced up storms in night clubs in the city centre until daybreak. They slept late, until the streets grew noisy. The constant stream of spliffs and alcohol provided a giddy happiness and the relaxation was starting to pay off on Lesley's body. She was quite tanned. The splotches were all but gone, as were the pimples. Renate had trimmed her split ends.

In the new year she would fetch the rest of her clothes and her birth certificate. Find another job and save some cash.

Chapter Twenty Three

Doya and Rita embarked on what each felt to be the first true holiday of their lives. Neither cared for anything but sun, sea and enjoyment. One evening in the second week they stopped at a Mediterranean restaurant on the seashore for dinner. The palm trees waved gently across the beach as the two women donned their shoes and dusted sand from their hair. They locked their beach bags in the back of the bakkie, entered the restaurant and queued to be seated.

"No tables for two," the manager rocked on his feet as if he were checking them into hospital. "Sorry."

"Shall we wait at the bar?" Rita turned to Doya. She was starving. She started walking into the restaurant.

"Uh, no," the manager hesitated. "The bar is not in use this evening. It's undergoing renovation."

Five barstools lined the bar and two couples were seated in four-seater tables. Two white couples.

"Rita," Doya pulled her back.

The manager started towards the door. Doya and Rita exited the restaurant flabbergasted. Neither could speak properly.

"Suddenly I'm not hungry," Doya said.

"I don't believe it."

"What was his problem?"

Doya and Rita tried the next two restaurants with the same result. Proprietors and staff all turned their menus to their chests with the same indignation. The wind blew chilling over the vista. The pink underlining on the clouds seemed a small consolation for the loss of spirit at being turned away from an atmosphere, a bottle of good wine, a meal. Seagulls circled overhead Doya and Rita, their cries cut sharply through an otherwise perfectly smooth evening. The mountains stared down in stern resignation. Doya watched their mountain faces intensely.

"Twelve Apostles," Rita said. "Those mountains, they're called the Twelve Apostles."

Doya heard their wisdom. Cabeça do Velho. The old ones always watch. They never stop.

"But I don't understand." Rita opened the bakkie. "In Observatory everyone eats in all the restaurants." She had noticed this on the two dozen occasions she had driven down Lower Main Road at night.

"Do they?"

"Yes!"

"Let's go there?"

Rita drove to Machado's and soon they were seated with good bread and water on the table. A cooking fire glowed comfortably across the interior. Carl, the waiter who had greeted them at the door with a wide smile, long blond hair and pale blue eyes returned to take their order.

"I'll have the Calamari, Lourenço Marque prawns and chips. And dry white wine, please. A bottle, Rita?"

Rita nodded.

"Do you always serve black customers?" Doya asked as Carl wrote down her order.

Carl looked askance. "Yes."

"We have been turned away in three places tonight," Doya informed him. Rita nodded.

Carl shrugged. "It's to do with the right of admission. These days you can basically serve whomever you choose. In Obs we wouldn't really make a choice away from black people or Indian people or any type of people. We wouldn't want to."

Doya nodded. "A guest is a guest."

Rita ordered seafood rice. Three other parties of diners gathered in multiracial groups, involved in their own matters, laughing at their own anecdotes. Their voices rose and fell around Rita and Doya as the two women began to enjoy themselves. Nobody noticed as they finished their first bottle of wine. Doya picked a corner off its label absent-mindedly. After their second bottle, Rita did not trust herself to drive to Constantia and back.

"Look at this! How much have we drunk?"

"A bottle each?"

"Are we pissed? Don't you want to stay at mine tonight?" Rita almost meant her offer as an inference of her good spirit, but Doya relaxed and agreed. "Yes, I do."

Rita imagined the police. What if she and Doya were arrested? Detained? She pictured Doya and herself together in a holding cell, then apart in two cells, for surely the police would store them separately? Rita shook herself. There had been no raids since August. If the police arrived that night, she and Doya would make a plan. They would cope.

Doya ordered a third bottle and finally a fourth. The following morning Rita peeled off her clothes and ran a cool bath through a pounding hangover. Her hair was still sticky from the sea, her skin too. Neither she nor Doya had the energy to undress when they finally stopped laughing, let alone to bath. How had they got the bakkie into the garage? Rita would have left it in the road if Doya had not laughed at Rita's first six attempts and sung, as a song they had heard in the restaurant, "One-more-time, Rita! One more time!" This is what had set them off in hysterics.

Doya slept in Rita's old bedroom. Rita tried to give Doya Rita's own bed. She explained about the ghosts and began pulling the heavy mattress off her old bed to sleep

on herself in the lounge. Doya had laughed, pushed the mattress back onto the bed and lain down on it.

"Put out the light!" She told Rita. "I am ready to sleep!"

Doya woke with a feeling of expectancy in someone else's life. Sunlight flooded in through pale yellow curtains, visibly warming the room. To wake in someone else's bedroom, between sheets tucked by someone else's hand, the notches on your headboard placed by strangers. The seafood and alcohol from the previous night energised her. She was thirsty. Was Rita up? What was the time? Doya smoothed her hair from her face and ambled through to the kitchen. Rita sat in the back garden, greatly refreshed for her bath, eating a bowl of fruit salad.

"Bom dia!" Doya leant on the door wiping sleep from her eyes.

"Hello!" Rita grinned. "How do you feel?"

"Good. I need to get out of this shirt."

"Do you want something to eat? Tea or coffee? A bath?"

"Tea, yes. And a bath."

Rita stood, her head swung madly. "Whoops!"

"Back to Sandy Bay?"

The two women bought a picnic of fruit, water and bread rolls.

"Hello Rita! Good to see you walking."

"Hello Mr Isaacs," Rita shook his hand. "Mr Isaacs helped a lot after my accident," she told Doya. "Mr Isaacs, meet Doya."

"Hello Doya. Off to the beach?" Mr Isaacs changed the subject coyly.

"Yes," Doya replied. "It's the weather for it. Would you like to join us?"

"Two beautiful women in the prime of their lives at the beach? I'd love to, but unfortunately some of us are working." He walked them to the bakkie. "Which beach are you going to?"

"Sandy Bay," Rita replied, giggling.

"Oh! Sandy Bay," nodded Mr Isaacs. "Well if you are doing so much walking already, then let me ask you, do you know about the reservoirs at Constantia Nek?"

"No?"

"That's a treat, if the old legs can take it! Park at the Nek and follow the jeep track to the reservoirs at the top."

"Thanks!"

"Enjoy yourselves!" Mr Isaacs waved them off.

Rita drove over Constantia Nek. As they reached the Kirstenbosch Botanical Gardens Doya leaned forward. "Rita, let's go up here. I want to see something."

Rita turned up the driveway.

"I used to come here, to Carols by Candlelight."

"Really? I've never been in here."

"We should go. It's very beautiful, it's so fresh."

The summer deepened into a burning smoulder, tourists arrived in the city. Helicopters churned out the airwaves while the wind blew. Doya and Rita went to Sandy Bay and the reservoirs. They stripped down in tucked away coves and talked for hours at a time, drinking chilled wine and eating mussels on rye. The women got hilariously drunk, nearly choking to death on their laughter, falling about and slapping the ground. The water was cold in the mountain and at the sea but Doya's technique allowed them

full reign. They did not mind the long walks, the magic pathways over the wildest rocks. Rita did her exercises and Doya walked out onto the rock formations which always reminded her of the old faces, the old guardians of her life. Magic faces watched over Doya and Rita. No one interrupted them at all.

They went to the Groot Constantia fair and milled in the crowds shopping beneath the mountains for clothes, linen and pottery. Doya and Rita were both hooked by the psychedelia, by the colours these people used in their lives, not especially for an occasion. They purchased tablecloths and pillowcases. All the colours of the rainbow were at their disposal.

They could spend the same amount of money on new dresses and kitchen crockery but they were not allowed to drink a bottle of wine together beneath the vines of the restaurant. Rita bought two embossed glasses from the restaurant, and then a bottle which the hostess opened for her. Rita remembered Wynand explaining how he did this when he accidentally went out unprepared with his girlfriends. Doya was happy to take her cue from Rita's eyes because Rita managed not to treat Doya with patronising contempt. She asked instead what Doya thought about certain aspects of life. The determination with which Rita raced at life head on was matched only by the humility with which she accepted each situation she encountered. Such a grip on reality must surely be about the future, Doya considered, or the present. Not the past.

Rita and Doya discovered a swimming pool in the forest. A young woman dipped in the water and three soaking children stood in a row next to the pool. "It's Lady Anne Barnard's bath," they shouted in unison before dive-bombing into the water, screaming, "Oh yeah," as they hit the water. As if it meant something to them to be in her swimming pool.

Rita and Doya walked up to Lower Main Road for supper the evening before Rita's first trip to the Epping vegetable market. The glass front doors were covered in posters for art and music events, with a large advert for a waitress in the centre. They took a table behind a column at the back of the room beneath an almost-completed mural of beautiful women clad in white robes lying beside an Italian seaside vista.

"You know, I was thinking of travelling to Italy!"

"When?"

"I had not planned that far. A young friend of mine was supposed to come with me. But I have not seen her. I must remember to go into town and fetch the papers."

Luigi and David prepared the best four seasons and ham and mushroom pizzas either had ever eaten. Doya enjoyed the atmosphere of Observatory and its people. The murals on the walls, the earth-tone colour schemes and solid crockery; the young students who waited at her tables with huge cheeky grins, well-tended hair and skins. They ate loudly, they spoke over each other. There was never awkwardness that was not joke-fodder. They were passionate. They often mentioned Moçambiquan names to Doya to which she reacted with a calm nod and slow smile, as favourite views and trees to sit in were recalled. They discussed seafood and adventures in the forests. Doya would relax and smile, too, at their zealous happiness to serve her, at the incongruity of everything. Doya remembered their determination for early rising and daylong activities from Bonhomie, how they came back in the evening with filthy faces to be cleaned before they ate ravenously. Happily. The soft peals would sound over the moans as they puffed their

ways out of their chairs after desert and traipsed quietly off to bed.

After their meals the two women were full and tired. They slept deeply. The alarm clock woke Doya as well as Rita, whose aimed thud stopped the noise, a little too soon for their liking. Doya snuggled into bed, pulling the covers tighter for a few minutes more. She agreed in daylight to get up at this hour. Now she wanted to stay sleeping, warm, obliterated.

Doya heard Rita's quick step and thick bath running. Daniel was probably also bathing right now. Or would he sleep until the last minute and rush out of bed with his hair awry? Six months previously Rita would not have considered this early morning journey with Doya and Daniel as connected to her life in any way. Rita dressed and tucked her sleeves around her arms, noticing how smooth the shapes were. Her body was compact around her. Rita stretched the muscles and ligaments in her legs, feeling herself as taller.

She ran a bath for Doya and put the kettle on. Doya awoke clear-eyed to Rita's soft knock and call. When Doya washed, the warm water melted around her. The two women pulled scarves around their heads, tucked them under their collars.

"Nice morning for it," Daniel shivered at the shoulders, his hands in his pockets. He tapped the bakkie with his bum. "This is going to be useful. Normally we drive home sitting on sacks of potatoes and butternut!"

Daniel had sleep in both his eyes. Rita resisted an urge to crunch the dry clumps. She checked her eyes in the rear-view mirror. Clean.

"Morning Daniel. Meet Doya. Doya, Daniel."

"Morning," Daniel slid into the cabin.

"Have you got the money?"

Daniel took out a wad of cash and Rita counted it. R300 exactly. She whistled beneath her breath. Two or three neighbourhood dogs barked briefly and Rita, Doya and Daniel all froze, eyes glistening and wondrous. They smothered their chuckles and fastened their seatbelts. The bakkie roared to life. No other traffic on the highway saw them nip down their lane on an even keel, zoom straight on the coastal road to Epping Industria, then Epping. At a quarter to six it was still too early for movements on the roads. They arrived before the doors had opened to shoppers. The night lights wove watery through the bakkie windows. The only sign said, "Moenie Spoeg Nie / Do Not Spit", and the small group compared spitting noises until the doors swung open.

"First, we need tokens," Daniel explained. The only other woman to be seen at the market sat behind the till of a small office built into the wall. She also wore a scarf around her head. Muffled noises of people and boxes, engines and business surrounded them. Rita exchanged the money for fifty yellow tokens, twenty green and ten blue. They claimed a trolley and pushed it through the doors into the market.

The market was housed in a large open warehouse with a roof of corrugated iron. The walls were painted a dull greying yellow but they were obscured by a centre awash with colour. The pink tails of carrots flew three metres through clean air. Leeks and parsnips cascaded in luminous tresses. Towers of vegetables and troughs of fruit shone in the weak fluorescent light.

"Hard to imagine," Daniel warned, "by eight, some of these piles will be gone. By ten everything will be sold out. We come early to beat the traders! See those men?" Daniel pointed to four men who held cards instead of tokens. "They don't swap for the

tokens we use. See all the boxes have a colour swab on the side? The traders leave matching cards on the vegetables they want, they don't load as they buy. Whatever they book is kept until they've finished ordering. When they've paid for what they have chosen they come back and load it in one go. That's why it looks like there's more available than there is. Just look, see how much is gone already?"

Rita and Doya looked about. According to the old clock above the token office the market had only been open for twelve minutes but yellow, pink, green and blue cards were already placed on much of the produce. Rita grabbed her bag with such a look of hurried confusion that Doya laughed at her.

"It's okay, there's still plenty," Daniel smiled. "Like I say, that's why we get here for six. We used to come at eight and wonder why we didn't get the good stuff!"

"Aha!"

"The different colours are for products of different values. A sack or tray is usually one token, sometimes two or three. Everyone must have some of everything. Whatever is left over, the house keeps. Sometimes you can get lucky. If there are twenty two artichokes, and twenty three members!"

"Surely I would leave my artichoke and give one to everyone else?"

"No, then you would not buy the artichokes. There must be enough for everyone. The important thing is that you choose, okay Rita? For the next twenty five weeks you are going to eat vegetables chosen by other people. This week it's all up to you."

Doya left Rita and Daniel haggling over details and discrepancies and walked outside to the packing area. The buildings were almost visible in the approaching daylight. The seeping sea fog seemed to curl into salty particles of air. She walked behind the warehouse to where the trucks backed onto the long market platform and men in human chains offloaded the produce. Sparkly-eyed people shouted brusque instructions from beneath balaclavas. Doya heard Swahili, French, several languages which she did not recognise, English with a heavy Portuguese accent. Despite herself, Doya approached the speaker. You can not really walk up to a person, pronounce yourself an illegal alien and ask for a ride home.

"Bom dia!" Doya greeted him. He was drinking soup.

"Bom dia!"

"Co'm estache?"

"Tout bein, obrigado."

"Estau Portugès?"

"Não."

"Estau falar Portugés?"

"Si."

"I am from Moçambique," Doya smiled.

"I am from Nelspruit."

"Nelspruit? Do you know Moçambique?" Nelspruit is close to the border crossing at Nkomatipoort.

"Sure, I go up every week. I'm going this afternoon. Do you want to come with me?"

Today? Doya was not ready. "How is it there?"

"Good," he nodded. "It's just the mines. The whole place is covered in them. But they say Princess Diana is coming, so," he laughed, "it's good. It's looking up."

"Maybe next time," Doya replied.

"I'm in Cape Town every Thursday morning. I leave as soon as those men are finished unloading my truck."

"Obrigado. A té loãg."

There was an easy way out. Doya returned to the market. The queues around the kiosk window were five deep. Men shouted and gesticulated, jostling. These customers had allowed themselves five extra minutes of rest in the morning. Rita and Daniel were in the middle of the market, toward the back. Doya dipped up and down isles of vegetables and fruit.

"Apples for you? Granny Smith, Golden Delicious?"

"No, thank you," Doya replied.

"You can try if you like. Trying is free." A young salesman stepped up to her with an apple in each hand. He reminded her of Paluka, his jacket large and lax over his sweater.

"Do you know Paluka, the Destroyer?" These were the only words in her mouth.

"Paluka? Everyone knows Willers."

"William," she exclaimed. That was his name. Will, Bill, Doya remembered Paluka's voice. "Is he still here?"

"Where else would he be? What's your name?"

"Doya Mokavanga," Doya replied.

"Okay Doya Makavanga, I'll tell Paluka that you're looking for him."

"Thank you!"

"Sure," he threw her an apple. "So sweet! Try it."

Doya bit into the apple. "Thank you," she said.

"An apple a day," he reminded her as she wandered on.

Rita and Daniel piled their vegetables into the bakkie. Once back in Observatory Rita made tea and sat with her head down on her arms on the kitchen table. She yawned deeply.

"Fader!" Daniel chided her. "This is where the work begins. Do you have any black bags?"

Rita gave him the roll and he separated twenty one bags and laid them out throughout the house. "Perfect. The best thing to do is to take five or ten of each vegetable at a time, dump the load at a bag and come back for the next load. Start with the piles furthest from the kitchen and work back to the kitchen."

Rita, Doya and Daniel carried sacks and crates in from the boot and set to dividing the lot. The day was quite advanced before they sat down again. Twenty five piles of balanced produce lined the kitchen, the passage and the lounge. Potatoes, peppers, onions, artichokes, parsnips, cabbage, lettuce, spinach, trays of peaches.

"I almost forgot," Rita exclaimed over sandwiches in the garden. "Don't you perhaps know where Lesley is?"

"Lesley? Lesley, my next door neighbour, Lesley? No. Why?"

"It's just, I haven't seen her and I wondered. She helped me with my garden when my leg was sore. I thought she went to Zimbabwe but her mother says she didn't."

"That's more than I know. Lesley's a quiet one. We don't often see her."

"Well."

The first members of the co-operative arrived and Rita did not have an

opportunity to enquire after Lesley's mother's rudeness. The last member left at eight-thirty. Each time a person rang the doorbell Rita answered it, eager to meet the visitors. Their car boots were already full of books, for swotting or marking. She felt as if she already knew the people as she handed them their parcels. She searched unwittingly for further acknowledgement of her connection to them.

University of Cape Town

Chapter Twenty Four

“Doya!”

Doya was alone at the Constantia house for the weekend. A man called her from the front gate. Doya struggled to recognise his voice through the garden. Anile? Paluka? Doya ran out of her cottage. Paluka was at the gate. He looked completely different wearing normal clothes with his hair gelled back.

“Oh Paluka, hello!” Doya hugged him. “How have you been? Where have you been? You look so smart! Are you also on holiday?”

“Nah, we’re on strike,” Paluka pronounced proudly. “Sorry I haven’t been round to see you in so long, Doya. I couldn’t get transport to come out this side. It’s far.”

“Strike?”

“Ja. For better wages, more time with our families and double pay for Christmas Day. You know, that’s fair!”

“Oh Paluka!” Doya leaned forward and kissed him, pressed his arm tightly. “I am so happy to see you. Did you speak to the man who sells apples?”

“Who?”

“I met somebody who told me he knew you. Didn’t he tell you I am looking for you?”

“No, I didn’t speak to anyone.”

“Oh.” Doya was surprised. “Do you know where the Moçambiquans are?”

“What do you mean?”

“Muidini, Jadi, no one is there. I looked three times. The first times I walked and then I went with my friend in her car.”

Paluka looked confused. “I hadn’t heard about anything like that but this city has been pretty strange. I’ll ask around. Don’t you go causing yourself to go grey, Doya! We’ll find them.” He cleared his throat. “Any case Doya, I came about New Year’s. What are you’re doing on the night? Do you have any plans?”

“No, Paluka, I have no plans for New Year’s.”

“You must come out and celebrate with us. What do you say, Doya? What about a bit of a dance? We’re going to a township dance club, which is na-I-yce.” Paluka skimmed his left hand to the left but ducked his body away to the right, smiling charmingly at her. “The Yellow Door, in Gugulethu,” he winked, “and that’s what made

me think of you.”

“Paluka, I will love to come,” Doya agreed. “Thank you for asking me.”

The telephone rang inside the main house. “That is Rita.” Doya unlocked the front door. “Come in. Have something to drink. Can I bring her? She helped me to look for Jadi and Muidini. I think you will like her.”

“Sure,” Paluka nodded. “A whole gang of us are going, probably twenty or so.”

“Hello!” Doya answered the telephone breathlessly.

“Hello, Doya?”

Mr Bertha!

“Doya!”

Mrs Bertha! They talked on two telephones separately.

“Hello,” Doya replied.

“How are you?” Doya recognised the tone of guilty amendment in Mrs Bertha’s voice.

“I am fine. How are you?”

“We were worried. We tried to ‘phone for three days and you did not answer.”

Mr Bertha was firm.

“I am in the other house,” Doya explained, unsure herself whether she meant her garden cottage or Rita’s house.

“How is Cape Town?” Mrs Bertha drawled.

“Fine.”

“Doya, we’ve got some news. We won’t come down to Cape Town until the eighth of January. Can you manage on your own ‘til then?”

January? Still a month of time to herself? That gave her New Year’s alone.

“Did you hear me? January eighth? It’s over Christmas and New Year, but we’ll put extra money in your account. We were going to come down, but, can you manage?”

“Yes, I can manage.” Had they always planned to leave her on her own for New Year? Were they simply making excuses?

“You will look after the house until then?”

How did she swing it so that Doya was potentially the negligent party? “Yes, no problem.”

“We’ll ‘phone and check on you, don’t you worry!”

When she put the phone down, Doya’s heart was racing. “That was my bosses on the phone. Not my friend.”

“Oh, good.” Paluka replied. “Didn’t seem like a friend. What did they say?”

“They will be here after New Year’s, on the eighth.”

“Great! More time to do the fandango!”

“The fandango?” asked Doya. Paluka danced up and down the kitchen with a broom.

“Yes,” Paluka laughed. “The damnfango! Let me leave you my number, and take yours. We can keep in touch. I’ve got to get going. I’ve got to fetch a friend from Tokai. And don’t worry! Worry never helped anything.”

Doya called Rita as soon as she waved Paluka off. “Rita, my friend Paluka was here. He has been on strike.”

“That’s fantastic. How is he?”

“Fine. He has asked us to a party on New Year’s Eve.”

"A party for New Year's?" It was almost December.

"Ja." Doya liked Rita's short word compared to "yes," with all the effort of the closing "s".

Rita laughed. It was the best invitation she had received in decades. "I'd love to, Doya. Thank you for asking me." A lump rose in her throat. Why should Doya consider her so deeply? "Where is it?"

"At a dance club, the Yellow Door. I told you there is a yellow door for the rubbish?"

"Yes, you told me. A dance club!"

"I need something to wear to a dance club," Doya realised.

"There are material shops in Woodstock. I've got a machine, we can make~"

"A sewing machine? Rita, Mr and Mrs Bertha called. They are coming in January."

"Your bosses?" To Rita the Berthas were characters from another realm. It had not occurred to her that they might appear in person.

"They 'phoned now, while Paluka was here. They told me they will be here on the eighth of January." The more Doya thought about it, the worse she felt. "I need to leave. I don't want to be here when they come. It can be anytime. Tomorrow. January, February. Aiysh, I can't stand up!" Doya could not stay in their house for another day. She was bent almost double. "The~"

The same thing that caused Rita to leave? "Pressure?"

"Pressure?"

"A really heavy feeling, like an explosion in your chest and your head."

"An emergence?"

"Emergency?"

"I need to move out."

"Straight away? Right now?"

"Today."

"Where do you want to go?"

"I don't know," Doya answered. "Somewhere close to the sea."

There were no easy answers. Observatory was a grey area. That was why the government had almost applied the emergency movement restrictions on the area. "What about Observatory? You could stay with me to start with. It's not that close to the sea," Rita added, "about half an hour to Muizenberg on the train, but you are welcome if you want."

Doya hesitated. "Rita, I will stay with you now while I look for a new place. But I need to find my own place. Living with you is too easy, it's," she paused.

"Cheating?"

"Mmm?"

"Pretending?"

"Exactly."

"I understand."

Doya cleared the bathroom of her personal items, packed her bags. She left her uniforms in the cupboard and went to the main house to check that everything was in order. She put the milk into the freezer. What if the house were burgled? Would the Berthas come to Cape Town if Doya did not answer the telephone for a week?

For two weeks?

University of Cape Town

Chapter Twenty Five

Lesley read in a sunny patch beneath the window, her notebook at hand. Kelar had nipped out with Craig for take-away fish and chips.

"Hey, what are you doing?" Renate was edgy. She did not say why.

"Nothing." Lesley closed her book.

"Can you help with the kitchen? Craig's going to give it to us if he comes in now."

Us? Why should Lesley be implicated in Craig's power? Craig scored shamelessly off Renate's life, using her money, her time. Renate seemed to believe that she was not worth much more than the status of being his girlfriend. Lesley almost refused. But if Craig was rubbed the wrong way, Renate was rubbed the wrong way too, and then Lesley was in the nick from both of them. Lesley cleaned the lounge and the kitchen quickly.

Craig and Kelar came home with fish and chips wrapped in newspaper.

"Who are these Israelis, anyway? Where'd they come from?" Craig read the headlines on the fish and chips newspaper as they sat eating. The newspaper was four months old but the question remained a fair one.

"The Diaspora."

"Excuse me?"

"The Jews who escaped Hitler were given a place to call home as refugees."

"Oh please!" shouted Craig. "Do you think I didn't know that? Everyone knows that." He laughed derisively.

"Is~" Lesley continued.

"Shut up," Craig interrupted her.

"What?" Lesley swallowed, her heartbeat accelerated. Shut up! She looked at Kelar but he pretended not to notice. Lesley watched him chewing airily. Soon her relationship with Kelar would be the same as Renate and Craig's. Now that she had proved her intelligence all she had left to offer was that she knew when to shut her damned mouth. Lesley stood casually, left her fish and chips on her plate. She fetched her bag from her room. For some reason she checked that all her money was in it. It was.

She opened the front door.

"Where do you think you're going?"

Craig called after her, not Kelar. "My mate Dave. Lives in the next road. See you!" Lesley betrayed herself by being too nice. Playing the game. She closed the door over Craig's words. "Free world," she muttered.

But Dave had already left for the summer vacation with his parents. Lesley walked back to her house. She missed her family. She tried to blot it out. The good and the bad. When she missed her sisters and brother Kelar would hold her tightly and whisper his love. He said time healed all types of pain, and she should never worry. That she should go and cry if she wanted to, just like in the song. But now here she was crying, and she did not expect Kelar to be interested in her reasons.

She had to save for a deposit on a room and a month's rent. Her funds were still at R110, which she could blow in one hour but just as easily stretch over three weeks. What right would she ever have to say what she truly wanted to be? A writer, a writer. Who gets the good stuff? Lesley had thought she had it but now she realised that she had misunderstood the terms of the original debate. It was not a question of comparisons of life, of lives, of destinies. It was simply a question of life.

Lesley thought of Rita's garden, of Dave and his car. She had not been to her old street aside from to fetch her clothes. Since she turned her back on her parents a certain part of her life, which stretched by accident to include Rita, was shut out of her thinking. She had the feeling that everything precious to her was being stolen, that the earth had shifted and she had landed on a square which was more like a black hole as it threatened if she looked into it to suck her so far in that she would disappear.

She did not look into it. Instead, she looked up, to the future. Still three and a half weeks to getting a job, four weeks if she counted past Tweede Nuwe Jaar, the unofficial second public holiday of the New Year in Cape Town. She would have to make her cash stretch. She would be early if she went job-hunting on the third. No one hired anyone until at least the third, if not the fifth. No point in being late, Lesley told herself. Then she could move out, get settled on her terms.

Chapter Twenty Six

Doya moved into Rita's spare bedroom and called Paluka sitting on her bed to tell him her news. She set up house-hunting appointments. Rita returned the telephone to her old room for her new friend's usage. Rita and Doya ventured into Observatory's most nefarious nooks and crannies to find Doya a room in which to live. For the most part the houses were clean and well-kept, the rooms were in student digs and hippy communes. The residents offered Doya and Rita tea politely, as if afraid that the two women were frail and might die without immediate refreshment. They seemed harmless enough but not exactly charmed at the idea of having an adult on board. One particularly disheartening young man described the role of the Vatican in the Second World War to Doya and Rita and went on to explain the continued impact on their lives in the form of doctrine espoused by the church. Doya felt herself catching the blues. She and Rita stared fixedly at his grease-ridden head for almost an hour before he let up his ranting and informed them, apparently without circumspection, "We are still interviewing people for the room for a couple of days, but we'll call you. Thanks for popping by!"

Doya and Rita left for Salt River Road later than they expected but not to be outdone they visited each material shop down Main Road for a general overview of the materials available and their average prices, and to check which shops had catalogues of patterns. Doya felt the textures closely, almost without looking at colour. The materials slid grainy against the inside of her fingers. She flipped one after the next for some seconds each and turned back to Rita, nodding her head.

"There is a good choice," she advised, but chose nothing.

Rita and Doya intended to walk back up the street to choose patterns and materials but they were tired from this first perusal, their heads too crammed with facts and choices. Their shirts were welded to their bodies in the heat. They wandered instead into the second hand shops, admiring kitchen furniture and appliances, mirrors and washstands. Doya and Rita stood close up to several items, exclaiming their admiration, but neither bought a thing.

Rita and Doya went to the beach the following day. Later that week they saw a room in a beautiful Victorian house below the line before going to look for patterns.

"Hello!" gushed the landlady, kissing Rita on the cheek. "Welcome! I'm Theraisa. Come in, come in." She turned inside, nodding at Doya. "Have a look

around.”

“Thank you,” Doya replied. She nudged Rita. “Do you know her?”

“No,” replied Rita.

“It’s me,” Doya realised Theraisa’s mistake. “I want to live in the room.”

“Oh! Gosh! I thought you were... Golly!” Theraisa kissed Doya on the cheek. “I love your hair,” she touched the shells.

“Thank you,” Doya said, stepping back. She explored the house briefly, which was lovely as she remarked to Rita. Doya sat down, straining not to sink into the over-soft couch, as Theraisa, clearly embarrassed but according to her tone offended, explained her ideals in separate food storage and cupboard space.

“Mmm,” Doya nodded knowingly. “What’s the time?” She asked Rita.

“Eleven,” Rita replied.

Doya stood. “Thank you,” she addressed Theraisa. “I will think about it. We must go,” she turned to Rita. “Or we will be late.”

“Yes,” Rita answered. “We can’t be late.”

“I didn’t like the look of that woman,” Doya said in the bakkie. “Was it our mistake?”

“No!” Rita was vehement. “Stay with me.”

“Thank you,” Doya looked into Rita’s eyes. “Thank you. Let us wait. This can not be the end. I will see what will happen.”

“You are always welcome. My offer is open.”

They drove to Salt River to look for patterns under the anonymity of page-turning at the easels and the quiet dustiness of doorbells chiming and tills ringing. Pages of painted women posed in new outfits. Rows of women, children and friends filed into and out of the shop. The traffic in the road was silent on the other side of the wide windows. Softly spoken women bedecked in tape measures offered to help in any way, their eyes wise and friendly with choice.

Doya felt inclined toward trouser suits, Rita to a halter neck dress. After three days of hunting, Doya had a pattern for a halter neck trouser suit, Rita, her halter neck dress. The women were now deeply in need of fabric. To this end rolls piled thick were fetched down, spread wide across tables, considered, described, measured.

“I went to a market in town where the materials were better,” Doya told Rita. She explained the Grand Parade, and Maria, who Doya had met on the same day as Rita.

“That was my birthday,” Rita added.

“That day we met?”

“Ja.”

“You didn’t even mention! We should have drunk wine!”

Rita shrugged.

The Parade was only open again on Saturday. On Saturday morning the two women walked up and down the stalls until both women’s eyes fell on a bold roll of electric oranges.

“That’s gorgeous,” said Doya.

“Wow,” Rita agreed. “Apricot.”

“Peach.”

“It’s an endless debate,” the saleswoman informed them, a cigarette dangling from her lips as she shook the material open on the table. The material was even more

powerful than it had seemed from a distance. Doya and Rita stepped forward together and pulled the material open further.

"Apricot, peach; one person's orange is another's cerise. And I have learnt that brown is purple, green is blue."

Rita and Doya laughed.

"Colour is so important, seriously," continued the embarrassed yet enthused saleswoman, which made Rita and Doya laugh even more. She blushed and muttered, "Any case it's your lucky day. This is the sale table. R30 the whole lot on it."

She turned to a couple on the other side of the stall who admired a large turquoise piece for a duvet cover, discussing how to get pillowcases from the same block. The cloth was a metre short. The couple seemed very in love as they chose calico to fringe the cover. The saleswoman stepped into the middle of her stall, gathered plastic and rubbish, tucked material beneath the coils. She stamped her cigarette beneath her foot and poured some water from a bottle, drank it quickly. It was a scorching hot morning. Table Mountain and the city hall sank beneath the glare of the sun.

Rita and Doya shook the cloth open over the table. Several metres of soft crushed satin slid silken between their fingers. The colours collided, crept subtly towards the edges before turning back to ramble into coherence.

"It's your colour," Rita pointed at the material against Doya's arm and nodded.

"It's your colour," Doya returned with emphasis, pointing at Rita's fingers pressed deep into the material. Rita always wanted to give things away. Why? Doya held the cloth against Rita's cheeks and laughed, cocking an eye at Rita, "Huh?"

"There's enough there for two, even three outfits. Why don't you both take it?" The saleswoman dragged on her cigarette, her question as arbitrary as a pair of scissors.

"We're going to the same party," Rita replied.

The woman shrugged. "It's New Year's Eve! Who will even notice what you are wearing?"

"We have different patterns. We can both take it," Doya agreed.

"Okay," Rita agreed, starting to smile. Rita and Doya bought their material and strolled into town. The crowds were thick and the paths between the stalls on Green Market Square were narrow. Rita and Doya soon became irritated with the bumping shoppers. They could hardly focus on the merchandise before someone knocked them flying.

"I know a place," Doya said, leading Rita all the way up to the Gardens before admitting that she was lost. The two women returned to the Parade to start again. They arrived at Mark's Coffee Shoppe and sat down on a bench on the walkway. Tourists, traders and buskers strolled up and down St George's Mall. The air was loud with panpipes, with a harp, a saxophone and drums.

"Hello!" Maria recognised Doya. "More sight-seeing? Ah, more shopping!"

"Yes!" Doya laughed. "For New Year's. Look, we have our material."

"Ooh, very nice! You girls are going to party!"

"We are going to a dance club," Doya laughed.

"Which club?"

"The Yellow Door."

"The Yellow Door! Oh, you'll love it, you'll have the wildest jol," Maria nodded approvingly.

"I also had a yellow door," Doya joked.

"So you've moved?"

"To Observatory to start."

"That's great. You must visit me every now and again. I'll keep my ear open for a room for you."

Rita and Doya went home with their material, ready to tackle the patterns. Rita dashed into the shop for quiche and something sweet on the way home and reappeared waving a small stub of paper at Doya.

"A new place, the notice went up today. In Kalk Bay, have you been there? It's right at the sea. Close to Muizenberg. I think you will be lucky there," Rita said. "I've got a good feeling about this. See what it says at the bottom?"

"Upper Quarterdeck, Yellow Door," Doya giggled. She 'phoned immediately she walked into the house.

"Yes. I am interested in the room advertised in the shop in Observatory?"

"Wow, that was quick. I just walked in from putting that advert up." A young woman's voice answered the telephone.

"So it is still available?"

"Yes. Do you want to come and see it?"

"Yes. But I must tell you that I am forty five and I am from Moçambique." The Vatican student and Theraisa had put the fear in her.

"Oh? I'm thirty and I'm South African. I've never been to Moçambique."

Rita still had the eats and bakkie keys in her hands. They locked the house back up and took off for the double story house across the road from Dalebrook Pool.

"Super speedy!" A woman answered the door. "Come in. I'm Margot."

Margot led them up a short flight of stairs. The stairwell was painted a fine sunflower yellow, the stairs were green.

"Have a look, see what you think."

Doya ambled around the bright rooms. The house was large, cosy and centred with a colourful ambience. A piano stood in the lounge. The couches and chairs were comfortable. The kitchen was small, clean and organised. The room available for rent was on the first floor. Large windows overlooked the massive coastline of False Bay. The room had a fireplace and a basin with hot and cold water, above which hung a small mirror. It was furnished with a cupboard, a single bed with a mattress and a desk with a wooden chair. Doya could take her next step with the minimum fuss. It was perfect for her needs.

"Would you like some tea?" Margot called up the stairs.

"Yes, please," Doya and Rita returned.

"Would you like some quiche? Or a Chelsea bun?" Rita offered.

"Sure," Margot accepted. Rita took the food to the kitchen, leaving Doya to get a feel for the room alone.

Doya loved it!

The bathroom was across the landing on the first floor, with a shower and a large pink bath with heavy old taps in the middle. The toilet flushed, the basin was large with a larger mirror, a small cupboard hung beside it on the wall, a pink bathroom mat covered the floor. The walls and tiles were soft pink, the window and shower curtains yellow.

"This is a lovely house," Doya joined Rita and Margot in the kitchen, smiling.

"It's a beautiful room."

"You should see mine!" Margot chuckled. "It's also lovely, but very different views. Of the mountains."

"Your bathroom is also nice," Doya smiled. "Comfortable."

"Thanks! I did it myself."

"Is it your place?" Rita asked.

Margot nodded. "I was lucky. I bought three years ago when I was teaching at a private school. It's taking forty years to pay off but it's mine."

"What do you do?"

"Me? Very boring actually. I live here on a small scholarship with my two cats. I am finishing my Masters in Botany. I let the spare room for extra income so I can afford to concentrate on my research. That's about it."

"How can you let out the room to me, a black woman?"

"Kalk Bay is a grey area. To be honest, the grey line is about six blocks down from here, but nobody will bother, I don't think." Margot looked guilty suddenly, as if she thought Doya suspected Margot of tricking her. Margot shrugged, shook her head. "This is a sleepy fishing community. People generally mind their own business. There's nothing going on here aside from the ocean and the harbour," she added jokingly. "No banks, no petrol stations."

"That is perfect," Doya saw the sincerity on Margot's face, and Rita nodded.

"What do you do?" Margot asked Doya, relaxing with a squint smile into her well-cushioned armchair.

"I am not sure, yet," Doya replied. "I have plans, many plans. First, I am finding my house. I am looking for a room close to the sea. Then I must learn this city. I have enough money for rent for two years. I can put it down right now, if you want to see."

"Would you stay here for two years?"

"Yes, I think so; there is no reason for me to leave."

"I could use the money right about now," she admitted. "Well, that would be brilliant. From deciding to let my spare room to having cash for two years in," she crinkled her eyes, "less than twelve hours?" Margot laughed heartily and then added more quietly, "I could use a person just arriving and staying for a while."

The front door creaked open and closed.

"Jonny," Margot pointed with her eyebrows at the top of the stairs, listening to a light but slow tread up the stairs. "That's good. If you are going to move in, you'll need to meet him. Jonny has his own key, in case his mother is out and he gets lonely. He lives in the flats next door. His mother is Mrs Becket. She takes in laundry and she also cuts hair. Everyone, this is Jonny!"

"Hi, everybody." Jonny hesitated at the top of the stairs. He was thin and pale. His eyes and hair were dark.

"Come in, Jonny, come and have a chat with us."

Jonny sidled over, leant on Margot's knee and the arm of her chair. She ruffled his hair.

"This is Doya, who might come and live with me, and this is Rita, Doya's friend."

Jonny twisted around Margot's chair. He bent almost in a somersault over his arm, still attached to the chair.

"Jonny's learning to play the piano, aren't you, Jonny?"

The child nodded, painfully shy.

"He's very good."

Doya put her arm out to him. "Show us how you can play the piano."

He grimaced but sat down at the piano, opened the cover and began playing. The women continued their discussion in low voices, not disturbing his melody.

"Well, when do you want to move in?"

"When do you want to let the room?"

"The 23rd? I'm having a party on the 23rd and I leave on Christmas Eve for my parents in Citrusdal. You could start moving your things in as you like and then come to the party, meet everyone and stay from then. We'll make it my leaving do, your welcoming do."

"How much money do you want?"

Margot laughed. "I'm not much good at dealing with money, I would prefer to have it all up front than to deal with it each month. Why don't you give me deposit and three months' rent?"

"Perfect!" Rita clapped her hands together, excited and pleased.

Doya and Rita cut and pinned their material that afternoon. That night, too tired to cook, too happy to eat at home, they went to Machados for supper to celebrate.

"Hello Rita, Doya, how are you this evening?" Carl seated them at their favourite table as Doya and Rita replied that they were fine for all their days in the sun.

"White wine spritzers?" Both women enjoyed a spritzer before dinner.

"Yes, thank you."

"Rita, do you know what I want to do?" Doya had only one dream unaccounted for. Perhaps she was on a high from her other successes. She asked Rita this question without even thinking of what she was saying.

"What do you want to do?"

"You're going to think I am crazy," Doya warned her.

"Okay," Rita agreed, cocking her head.

Something in Rita's eyes made Doya hiccup. "I wanted to do this from when I was small."

"What is it?"

"I want to go to drama school."

"Drama school?!"

"Yes. I want to study to become an actress."

An actress! Drama school. Rita shook her head and raised her glass anew.

The following morning Doya withdrew R800 for the deposit and three months rent, and she and Rita took the first of her possessions to Kalk Bay. Doya was filled with trepidation that the plan might alter. It had not. She and Rita crossed the road and walked down to the harbour, taking in the pubs and restaurants alongside the sea, the outcrop and caves behind them.

"This is the Atlantic, you know. The water is warmer than Sandy Bay."

"I know!"

For the next week Doya and Rita shopped in the mornings before the crowds were out for the items that Doya needed. In the afternoon they worked on their garments. After the traffic died they headed for Kalk Bay to unpack Doya's possessions and set up

her room. Margot greeted them from the depths of her room. She was finishing a chapter for her supervisor and could not leave her desk. Doya and Rita laughed. A duvet. Sheets, towels, kitchen utensils. They hung curtains in Doya's window.

Doya moved the rest of her belongings to Kalk Bay alone on the train. When Doya refused her help with the car, Rita took the opportunity to go into town and start organising her passport. Rita struggled to choose Doya a Christmas present, because Doya and she were together so much and because she had no idea what to buy for Doya. Eventually she decided on tickets to the Carols-by-Candlelight performance at Kirstenbosch. Had Doya not told her she had seen the shows and that she thought them beautiful, refreshing?

They continued sewing each day. A week before Christmas Doya and Rita tried on their New Year's outfits and tucked the other's lining, pinned the other's hem. The two women drank a cup of tea in the kitchen, feeling like super-stars in their new clothes.

University of Cape Town

Chapter Twenty Seven

"I've got a surprise for you!" Rita and Doya took a chest which Doya had found for her room to Kalk Bay the evening before Doya was due to move into the house.

"A surprise?"

They returned to the bakkie. Rita drove to Kirstenbosch.

"Carols by Candlelight," guessed Doya, incredulous, as Rita indicated to turn left up the narrow driveway to the Gardens.

Rita gave the tickets to the woman at the turnstile, who held them neatly in her hand, smiling while Rita waited, as did Doya, in turn. All three women stood in the kiosk turnstile, smiling at each other and waiting. Rita's mouth twitched at the edges and her eyes narrowed in puzzlement. She held out her hand for the stubs which the woman returned. Doya started walking and Rita followed her. Their shoes ticked over the cobblestones of the paths at Kirstenbosch. Both Doya and Rita trusted their feet to click over the stones like pebbles skipping water; not scraping. Past the children who handed out programmes and candles set in paper plates to protect their hands from dripping wax. Doya knew, as did Rita, that the woman thought someone else was meeting Rita, that Rita was Doya's employer, not her friend.

It was a perfectly still evening. There was no need for a shawl to be draped over a shoulder. Rita and Doya arrived at the amphitheatre and spread out their blanket. The orchestra warmed up beneath the pale outline of trees in the evening. Doya watched the families gathered on the grass, so secure in their rhythms. She was not the only black guest at the event. Many families had black childminders, just as she had been to Carols by Candlelight with the Berthas. Were they charged an entry fee?

"You know what is so funny?" Doya leaned closer to Rita. "There are black people everywhere we go. Did you notice?"

"Ja," Rita said.

"Aside from people like me, walking wherever I like. Everywhere we go," Doya waved her hand, "black people are working there, white people take other black people to work there, too."

"I know," Rita observed. "Only their women servants. Not the men."

"True," Doya agreed. "What if we went to one of those restaurants and pretended that I am your servant? Will they~"

"Doya I would never do that," Rita interrupted her.

"Nor would I. But will they serve us?"

Would they? "I don't know, Doya."

The choir arrived and took their places on the small stage. Soft strains of strings peeled out over the horizon. The microphone clicked on and the wind shuffled the conductor's notes. He pulled the pages together, lifted his baton to the air. The choir began the first hymn, "Oh Come, All Ye Faithful". Doya dug her candle into the grass and balanced it against the plate. The glow revealed only the green of the grass around its circumference. Rita was impressed. The only alternative to holding the candle of which she had thought was to blow it out, which seemed a little heartless.

"I have seen this done before," Doya winked as Rita dug her candle into the ground. They listened to the children singing beneath the stars. The innocence on the faces of the choir as they sang to God and the angels made everyone believe that renewal and healing were possible. But Doya felt detached, as if her renewal were this separation. The wind picked up and blew scraps of singing over the valley. Rita felt it too, Doya could tell by the patient pleasure on her face.

"It's nice," said Doya. "I do not believe in this god, but I do like to hear the voices."

Doya caught the train from Rita's house the following morning and helped Margot pack for her holiday and ready the house for a party. Doya went to sit in the window of her room. There was nothing to be done but sit quietly and do nothing. What was this feeling of living inside a normal space with equals?

So. So far. The sea in her view, in her everyday life. She opened the window. She could hear the sea too. She had done more than she had envisaged, it had taken less than she predicted. With Paluka and Rita's help Doya could relax. She could even start thinking about the next phase. She sat in the window a long time, until party guests began arriving and their noises wafted up the stairs.

Rita's car pulled up across from the tidal pool. She knocked on Doya's door.

"Coming?"

"Hello, girls!" Margot introduced Doya and Rita to other early revellers. Margot was already quite merry, she beamed from ear to ear. "These are the bar-tenders Aragorn, Wiel, Goggie and Bobbie. Anything you want, they'll see to your needs. They're getting paid," Margot leaned dangerously over the table and tugged Goggie's shirt playfully. "Remember?"

"In alcohol, remember?!"

The neighbourhood kids, themselves on the way to becoming raucously drunk, poured drinks for Rita and Doya. Everyone polished off wine by the gallon. Rita and Doya were drawn into several conversations in the back yard. It was a hip multiracial crowd, arty.

"Do you want a toke?" A cigarette-like object was passed to Rita.

"Boom?" She asked.

"Very big boom!"

Rita took two furtive drags and passed it to Doya. A Christmas tree flickered with lights, a kiln opposite it. Margot fired all her own pottery in it, she explained the next morning as she left for her holiday.

"Practically every piece in this house I fired myself," she exclaimed. "Go wild," she winked. "Have a great time. Really, this place takes a good party. Trust me!"

Rita left soon after Margot. She began the hemming on the skirt of her halter-neck dress. The circumference was wide. She went to bed and slept late, independent of any other agenda on the planet.

Doya was alone in her new home. She made a fire in the fireplace and stared into the roar throughout the night. When her eyes could no longer make out the glare of the coals in the new day, she fetched her New Year's outfit and began to hem the trouser-legs.

Lesley spent an uneventful Christmas with Kellar. Craig and Renate had gone to Renate's parents. Christmas day dawned beautifully warm and Lesley would have loved to spend it on the beach, but Kellar slept late. Kellar did not celebrate Christmas. No tree, no decorations and no food other than bread and potatoes. No presents. Lesley lay beside him, thinking of other ways to get to the beach, of hitching to Camps Bay and partying with all the different people who spent Christmas with their families in the sun. How would she change her life so that she could be with them, like them?

She could not even see out of the window properly, it was set oblique from her view from the bed. Kellar's desk had the view out of the window but he did not like her to sit at his desk to write even when he was asleep, as he was, sound asleep alongside her. Lesley slid out of bed and went to tan in the courtyard. She took *Dune*, Kellar's favourite book. He said it had the best line he had ever read: 'The only thing to fear in life is fear itself.' Lesley agreed that it was the best line she had heard, constituting as it did a key to totality. She was intrigued to read more. She placed a mat from the lounge on the cement, which she covered with a towel, rolled herself a big joint and lay down. She smoked half the joint, opened the book. She woke in the late afternoon, her book closed and her back and legs as red as boiled red cabbage.

The heat of Lesley's burn persisted especially against furniture. The sting was hard to erase. Lesley stood. On Boxing Day she could neither sit nor lie. Lesley bet herself silently that she could sort out the whole house within one morning. She used her normal methods. She stacked the lounge cushions in the sun where they could air and cure. Bathroom, lounge, passage, kitchen. She finished within three hours.

The following days were windy and there was no talk of the beach. The courtyard was sheltered. Lesley did not want to look like stripy toothpaste and while the day's burning had been sore, she was significantly darker on her back than her stomach. She replaced her tanning mat, rolled herself a large joint and lay down on her back. She could not read as a book would shield her face from the sun. She smoked half the joint and rested her inner arms turned upwards beside her.

Rita and Doya set out for a calm beach from Kalk Bay, where the wind had blown throughout the night and into the morning. The two women drove to Kommetjie, Noordhoek and up the Atlantic peninsula. The wind seemed dead set against them. At the parking lot at Sandy Bay the howling gusts blew about their faces. The first small beach, not a swimming beach but visible from the path, pulled tough high seas. Llandudno was also properly blown out. The bakkie cabin did not suffice for a picnic. If Doya and Rita opened the windows even a crack, the wind howled straight through the

small space and sent their cups and plates flying. With the windows closed the two women sweltered. Blisteringly hot and irritable, sand-ridden and sweaty, Rita and Doya left Llandudno for Table View, passing Camps Bay and Blauberger without stopping. Table Mountain was the size of a matchbox on the horizon. Everywhere was blowing to smithereens. Rita switched on the ignition and drove back to Cape Town.

When Rita noticed Doya's sleeping body, she decided to stop at the harbour on the foreshore. Rita drove across the derelict area. The view of Table Mountain was uninterrupted and the port on the opposite side of the harbour was vacant. Desolate railway tracks led to the sea, road markings faded into the cement. The only building was the fish shop on the end of the quay which had sold fresh fish since Rita could remember. Her father's hand swung above her, his fingertips trailed past the crayfish crawling onto and across each other.

Doya stirred just before the sun hit the horizon. "Where are we?"

"At the docks. Feel like fish and chips?"

Doya was hungry. She nodded. "Have I been sleeping long?"

"About an hour. Maybe less." She started the engine as Doya looked around. "They're going to build a huge tourist attraction here. The biggest attraction in Cape Town. The city council and the harbour companies have taken all this land to develop, with shops and cinemas and hotels. I read about it in the paper."

Rita and Doya ordered Kingklip, chips, coke and coffee, which they ate in the back of the bakkie, quietly sucking their fingers. The wind became even more ferocious at sunset, rocking the vehicle. Huge waves curved beneath the dolosses. In the last glow of daylight Rita climbed out of the bakkie and into the howling wind. She leant into it; it supported her completely.

"Hey, Doya!" Rita rapped on the bakkie back window until Doya looked out at her. Rita sat heavily against the wind as if a chair supported her. She did not fall backwards. Her hair blew loose around her face. She folded her arms and balanced until she began laughing too much.

"Come on!" She called to Doya.

What was that crazy woman doing? Doya clambered out. She stretched her arms wide and round to the wind. She ran into it. The wind supported her at the same place. Rita and Doya ran into the wind, jumped backwards five metres at a time. Flying, dancing, hollering on the strength of the complete length of their breath they dove into the refractions of golden sun licks stretched lazy and still on the horizon. Power grabbed the back of their upper arms, lifted them whooping onto it. Their bodies bent on the currents. Their voices grew hoarse as they whoopeedoo'd and yayiha'd. The sea rose around them and slapped at the cement on the pier, and both women knew that whatever tide came to pound the land, their places on it were assured.

Chapter Twenty Eight

Lesley and Kellar wrote in their room, Kellar at his desk and Lesley on their bed. Lesley tried to feel the words move within her, peel out beneath the ball of her nib. Her favourite words spun on her tongue. Conscientious. Tincture. She wrote long words so that she did not have to pick up her pen frequently. The sound of her sleeve plopping across the page disturbed Kellar unnecessarily. He sometimes got irritated and had taken to snapping, last thing at night, "Turn off the light!" She was dependent on him for a bed.

Floccinauccinihilipilification. Supercallerfrajalistic expiallidotious.

Tracy Chapman played on the hi-fi, Lesley listened closely. "*Ooh you've got a fast car, is it fast enough that you can fly away?*" "*If not now, then when?*" Tracy Chapman had shot to international fame after the worldwide Freedom Concert tour.

"Across the lines, who would dare to go?"

In four days Lesley would go and find a job. With around R30 left to her name she had no choice. She had no idea what to do for New Year celebrations, aside from The Joint which would not have a covert charge. Craig and Renate had returned from Renate's parents in time for New Year's. They had plenty of presents, including tinned food and a box of vegetables, puddings, sweets, nuts and loads of cash. They wanted to go to a big gig in the city. Lesley did not remind them of The Joint, where chips and snacks were free on the tables. They could not take the thought of New Year's in PE when they could have been in Cape Town.

"Hey guys, what about some pinks?" Craig stood in the doorway.

"Pinks!" Kellar was disappointed not to have thought of the idea first, but pleased with the idea. "Now, there's a chance for a particular New Year's," he laughed quietly.

"Let's have PCP!" Renate called from the kitchen.

"Not for me," Lesley tried to be cool, as if she were too young right then, and waited for some future date on which to take the drugs.

Her tone was too imperative.

"Ooh, such a goody-goody!" Craig narrowed his eyes at her.

"I just don't think it's a good idea, that stuff is dangerous. I mean, it could be. No one really knows how potent it is," Lesley floundered.

"No," he grinned, "we do all know how potent that stuff is. Only you don't know.

Well then you obviously won't be coming, so?" Craig said.

Lesley and Kelar looked at each other.

"You are an observer," Craid continued. "You are not a participator, you have no right to go telling people what not to do. Kelar, sugarplum, is one of us. Not so possessive of our minds. You know what you need? You need a little loosening up."

Kelar, Craig and Renate clubbed their resources and took almost R200 between them early on the morning of New Year's Eve to buy PCP, pinks and their normal dope and buttons. Their plan was now to spend New Year's at home where no one would charge them for using the toilet. Lesley sat on the stoep stairs. The street was hot and calm in the late sun. The city dozed for their parties later. She might go to The Joint, if she felt like it.

After an hour of waiting Lesley began to get worried. They normally came straight back within half an hour rather than carry drugs on them. What was taking them so long? Had there been an accident? Lesley tried not to panic. She focused on good things, on the ideal picture of Kelar and her, Craig and Renate at a big New Year's party, with lots of people, braais dispensing free, delicious food, drinks tables, streamers, fireworks. A big party, second only to Mandela's Freedom Concert. Kissing under the night sky. She concentrated hard on the image, and she must have concentrated so hard that she fell asleep contemplating it, because she twitched awake when she heard Kelar's kombi trundling up the road. She nipped into her and Kelar's room as if to pretend that she had been happily ensconced there all along, but she need not have bothered. They were laughing so hard they had to crawl across the street and up the stairs into the house. They slid onto the floor inside the front door and stayed there, laughing hysterically, for quite a while.

"The walls, broer, the floors! Oh my GOD!"

"Jesus!"

How could she trust them? She was a stranger in a strange place. Lesley waited on the bed. Nothing had changed since the first night she could remember, since hiding in sleep from her mother. The only thing to do was to take her things and leave. She packed up her bag quickly, suddenly unconcerned if they heard. The pitch of their laughter remained constant. Lesley opened the window, jumped through it, closed the window and made it into the street with the gate closed behind her before someone opened the door, she never did look back to see who it was.

New Year's Eve. She headed for her family's house. She would stay under the pretext of New Year's Eve. Just long enough to wish everyone a happy New Year. Surely they would not find her visit utterly out of context? She would have to lose her bag or her parents would ask her about it. She would leave it under a car in the front of the carport. No one would see it unless they were snooping, and any snooper in a carport would be pretty suspicious. Lesley walked down Nuttall and arrived in her parents' street.

Neither her mother nor her father's car was in the carport. The side curtains were drawn, the front curtains too. The front door was locked on all bolts when she tried it. Her family only locked the house like this if they were all away overnight. Had they left for New Year's or would they be back for it? Daniel and Dirk's place looked locked up as well. Rita? Lesley imagined the conversations she would have with Rita about the past two months. The thought exhausted her. She needed to catch up for a minute, to

stand still and understand. Then she would tell her stories. Lesley tried all her oldest ways of getting into the house but the windows were all sturdily locked. If she could just shin up the lamppost and climb into the courtyard she could get into her nook. She might stay until they returned. She could deal with the trouble she incurred.

Lesley cleared a patch beneath the apple tree of sticks and stones. Safer than inside the house, she tried to allay her fears. Intruders would hardly think to look under a tree for the occupants of a house they burgled. If anyone came up the side garden as far as the tree they would have to pass the three windows of Daniel and Dirk's wall and she would scream blue murder before they got to her.

Rita was at her house, as was Doya. Paluka could pick them up more easily at four in Observatory, when he had to fetch Nonyameko from Langa, than at nine in Constantia, for which Paluka would have to make a special trip. Both women were festive and relaxed, looking forward to the New Year, to 1989. Doya hennaed her hair, Rita peroxidized hers and together they finished a bottle of champagne, toasting friendship and fortune. Paluka arrived early, nonetheless Doya and Rita were dressed, coiffed and beautified, high-heeled teenagers, merry as possible on a sunny afternoon.

"Lekker!" Paluka clapped his hands together when he saw their resplendent outfits. "May I say you ladies look lovely?"

Lesley heard the commotion of their chattering and the house and car doors slamming. She reached the boundary wall as Rita passed by in the back seat of a car. Lesley jumped the wall and chased after her down the street, waving her arms in the air.

"Rita!"

"Oh! Stop, please Paluka," Rita said. "That's my friend, Lesley."

Paluka stopped the car, grinning at Doya. Doya nodded, laughter in her eyes.

Lesley appeared at Rita's window. "Hello. Happy Happy Happy!"

"Hello Lesley," Rita said, hugging her through the window. "How are you?"

"Fine, fine."

"Where have you been? I tried to find you but your mother said you had left."

"I was staying with my boyfriend. You spoke to my mother?"

"Yes. You have a boyfriend? Congratulations!"

"Not anymore."

"Ah well."

"Yeah. What the hell does one do? Where are you off to?"

"A party. It's so good to see you! What are your plans for tonight?"

"Um, I'm still waiting to see how the evening's going to pan out."

"Why don't you come with us? If that's okay?" Rita ducked her head back into the car.

"Sure," Paluka and Doya both nodded.

"You're kidding! I'd love to! But I need to fetch my bag."

"Your bag?"

"Yes, it's under the tree."

"Sure," Paluka replied. Lesley turned and ran.

"I'm Doya," Doya said as Lesley hopped into the car.

"Thanks for waiting. I'm Lesley," Lesley replied.

"I'm Paluka; Paluka the Destroyer!" Paluka showed Lesley the warrior on his

forearm who flexed an arrow inside a bow.

"Oh," said Lesley. "That's nice."

"What have you got in that bag?" Paluka asked her as he replaced his sleeve.

"Mainly clothes."

"Where were you going?" Doya asked with a quizzical look in her eye.

"I don't really know," Lesley giggled. "Botswana?"

"I love New Year's Eve," Rita said, contentedly, her eyes glinting.

"What are you guys on?"

"Champagne, of course!"

Paluka winked at Lesley in the rear-view mirror. They drove down the N2.

"Ladies, you know the drill? When I say, 'Down', you both get down behind the front seats and I'll cover you."

"What?" Rita interjected. "Why?"

"Well we are going into Langa and then Gugulethu," Paluka answered pointedly. "Maybe it's not necessary but I don't feel like answering questions."

"Are we going to a township dance club?" Rita asked.

"Is the Yellow Door in Gugulethu?" Doya asked.

"Ja, but the Yellow Door is no ordinary township night club. It's one of the best clubs in the Southern Hemisphere. All the larnies go there, people even come from the Transkei. There are a handful of white regulars."

Rita's halter neck dress lay perfectly over her neck. Go to a nightclub in a township? Or spend the night alone while her friends partied? Rita remembered the security officers she had not begged, to whom she had preferred to lie about the donations in her car than appeal.

"We can take you home, if you feel uncomfortable about it. That is no problem."

Something in Paluka's offer made Rita embarrassed. Paluka was Doya's friend! "No, it's okay. I'm sorry, I don't know what made me go all funny."

"Rita, Lesley, down, please!" Paluka threw a blanket over the women as they approached the blockades, and pulled newspapers and a cardboard box from the back windowsill onto Rita and Lesley, who could still see and communicate with each other.

"Right. It's going to be a bit uncomfortable but we should be fine."

Paluka and Doya crossed the Langa blockade twice without hassle. Nonyameko squeezed her legs between Lesley and Rita which provided a better cover for the party-goers. Paluka drove steadily for twenty minutes and slowed for the next blockade. Rita and Lesley, still hunched into the foot space behind the front seats, heard the questions. Gugulethu. Paluka drove off again for a couple of minutes and then Nonyameko pulled the box and papers off Lesley and Rita, finally the blanket.

"Okay, it's a home run!"

Paluka parked and everyone got out of the car. Rita found her eyes naturally drawn up to the fall of the mountains which encircle the Cape Valley as she smoothed down her outfit. The view made her tilt her neck up and Rita relaxed her neck muscles, dropped her head comfortably backwards for the full perspective of the full panorama of the Cape Peninsula and main lands. She forgot the crinkles immediately.

Doya was already hugging people.

"Doya!" Jadi and Muidini embraced her, swinging on her shoulders. Everyone had been relocated to Noordhoek, to Lawaakamp. "Rita, look! These, these are the

people," Doya fetched Rita to meet the people for whom Rita and Doya had searched that Sunday at the start of summer.

"Surprise! I didn't want to tell you in case they could not make it," Paluka laughed.

A small crowd had gathered at the house and people were seated, standing, drinking, smoking and eating. In the back garden, several men and women braaied sausage, chops and chicken.

"Evening Ladies, I'm Saaid." A friendly man with a wide smile and shaded green eyes greeted Lesley, Doya and Rita. "Welcome to the party, it's so lovely to see you here. Hey Paluka!" Saaid called into the house. "Looks like one of your better new years already!"

The revellers inside the house laughed heartily.

"Ja, that's what you get for making an effort," Paluka joked back as he followed the three women outside. Saaid slapped Paluka on the arm lightly, and shook his hand in an old brotherly way.

"What can I get you all to drink?"

"I'm Nyosi. Like Nosi, with a 'y'," a young woman took Lesley's arm and drew her aside as Saaid led Doya and Rita to the drinks table. "It means 'Honey-Bee.'"

"What have you got in your bag?"

"Some clothes, nothing much."

"You do realise we are going to party at the top dance club in the Southern Hemisphere."

"Yes. Paluka told us."

"Do you have something to wear to the top dance club in the universe?"

"Not exactly," Lesley replied. "I've got a skirt and a shirt that might do." She retrieved the items and showed them to Nyosi.

"Come with me," Nyosi led Lesley to a room where she opened a cupboard.

"Take anything you want to wear. The Yellow Door is smart, you must look your best!"

"Thank you," Lesley said, flabbergasted at the generosity of this stranger. She chose a full-length ochre dress. Nyosi added gold eye-shadow and rust blush to complement Lesley's look, as she put it.

"Enkosi, Nyosi," Lesley replied.

"Akho 'nto," Nyosi replied, looping her arm into Lesley's. "Do you want a drink?"

"No thanks, I'm alright for now," Lesley replied.

"You look lovely!" Nyosi held Lesley's hands out to admire Lesley, and she turned Lesley around, blew her a kiss. "Now, let's jive!"

Lesley and Nyosi joined the rest of the party at the braai for light drinking and easy snacking until nine o'clock, dusk in summer. Everyone piled into the cars and drove to The Yellow Door. They parked in a square opposite an alley with a long white wall to the left and thick barbed mesh to the right. The party followed the alley until the mesh on the right became a solid wall and arrived shortly at a yellow door in the middle of the left wall. A pair of enormous bouncers took their tickets and searched them thoroughly. It was totally silent, no sounds of a party filtered through to them. Everyone hurried in.

The Yellow Door was full, the jazz Big Band, the audience in a brilliant mood. In

the smoky, jazzy atmosphere each second contained noise, hilarity, dancing and play. The revolution needed people who were happy, people who could laugh and party together. The Yellow Door was decorated in tinsel, streamers and balloons. Silver and gold confetti bedecked the black and white tile floor. The crowd was wildly enthusiastic about whole-hearted celebration and kicked their heels so the confetti flew into everyone's hair. They partied as if they had forgotten their age and all the wisdom to which their age attested. The mirror ball spun and the colour lights were like swimming in the sea.

Rita and Doya danced all night, taking partners of whoever stood close and so desired. Everyone had partners whenever partners were needed. Muidini and Jadi were raucous, Rita and Doya found themselves laughing loudly at their jokes. They were congratulated on their outfits. They laughed with delight at the exclamations as they told their admirers that they had sewn their garments side by side through December in anticipation of this particular night's party. The waitresses kept the drinks flowing and the decks steady. Paluka sat with Doya, Rita and Lesley, chatting about Doya and the party he had been to with her.

"I knew she loves to dance!"

Lesley danced to her heart's content with Nonyameko, Nyosi and the other women of her age. She was good with the steps and remembered them quickly when Nyosi showed them to her. Swinging and swaying in a line up the dance floor; after all the dancing that night, it was unlikely she would ever forget them!

At midnight, everyone popped champagne corks. Streamers were strewn and whistles blown. No one knew that within a month PW Botha would be ousted, but everyone danced for the changes that had already arrived. They danced for all the symbols of the fact that the tide had turned, that new energy forms had surfaced, easier to manufacture. They danced for the latest metal halide lamps in the upgraded floodlighting on Table Mountain, for the significant increase in light with a corresponding reduction in power consumption, for more in less.

As the sun rose, Lesley, Rita and Doya looked out of the open window. They could see all the way from Hangklip to Devil's Peak.

"Well," said Paluka. "Let's get you ladies out of here before there's any more damage."

Chapter Twenty Nine

“Let’s have a swim in Dalebrook Pool. The tide’s really low, come on!”

Lesley bounced into the kitchen. Like Doya and Rita she had risen some twenty minutes earlier, having slept late into the afternoon and wasted a glorious day. Unlike Doya and Rita she did not have a hangover. Doya and Rita located their costumes and crossed the road to the tidal pool. Way beyond midnight the three women sat together beside the water, listening to the ocean lapping gently against the shore. The world was quiet. The smell of the flowers in their blossoming was pungent and rich, the birds were silent and it seemed that every living creature was sleeping. They drank hot coffee and talked until the sun rose.

“I can’t believe how quiet it is,” Doya said.

“Tweede Nuwe Jaar,” Lesley explained, “It’s a Capetonian tradition. We celebrate New Year on New Year, and we recover on the Second New Year.”

“Second new year? That’s like a second chance, a second beginning.”

“Nope, it’s supposed to be like your first, because you didn’t know about the real first one, being too out of it.” Lesley also liked the idea of a new chance but she was joking along.

Doya laughed. They ate supper for breakfast and slept. The following morning Rita woke early. She left a note explaining that she was going home to fetch clean clothes. Rita drove home via her post office box. She opened the box and almost closed it before she realised that there was a letter waiting inside. She put her hand in to take it out, her heart pounding in her ears, already knowing that she would recognise the handwriting on the envelope when she turned it over.

This was it, the moment for which she had been waiting. The envelope was bulky, her name and address scrawled nonetheless over its full breadth. Obviously Janus had no need to be discreet and small, as she did. The date-stamp: 24 December 1988. He had replied with no hesitation. Rita held the letter against her chest and walked back to her car. Where should she go to read it? She drove homewards. She breathed, her senses amplified, the world a hyperreality. The letter lay on the car seat beside her. Rita made to pick it up and restrained herself several times. Her wrists glimmered below the purple grip of her fists on the steering wheel. She had lost weight, Rita realised. She was brown.

Rita had a strange flinch of being in control, being the driver. Her arms and legs took her where she chose to go. The robot changed, she took her foot off the brake and hit the accelerator. She did not think until the robots at the President's Residence. She drove the wide roads turning narrow, dipping right at the Rondebosch bridge to skate down Liesbeek Parkway as fast as she could. She took it fast, past Hartleyvale, up that same hill she had driven five years before, ducking and diving through Observatory to her front door. She parked outside, thinking she would not be more than two minutes. Just to fetch the lemon juice from the fridge.

The letter grew bold in the lap of the seat. Rita picked it up. The heat scorched her crown so she thought her hair would catch afire while she unlocked the door. Hotazel, that's a place she had been to, she joked with herself. The kitchen was cool. The curtains were still drawn and the windows closed. Rita opened the top of the back door and sat down, the envelope on the kitchen table. Suddenly she opened the contents. The address on Janus's letter was from across Paarl from where she had written to him, up near the Wellington road where he had been a young boy.

"My liewe Rita

Baie dankie dat jy aan my geskryf het. Ek was baie bly om van jou te hoor. So 'n groot verligting om te verneem dat jy nog êrens hier is, naby. Ek is bly om te hoor hoe gelukkig jy nou is, met jou nuwe lewe. Ek het selfs 'n paar hernuwings aan die gang, ek het ook huis getrek. Sanna, my ou buurvrou, het jou brief vir my gebring. Dis wonderlik om te dink, ons begin hierdie jaar sonder om te wonder waar ons elkeen is.

Oor Rudi en Alain kan ek geen verdere feite vir jou gee nie. Ek weet ongelukkig nie waar hulle tye is nie maar ek het onlangs 'n paar mense gesien. Jy weet dis nie my departement nie en ek is nie familie nie. Hulle wou niks aan my vertel nie, maar ek het gehoor vyf en sewentig persent van ons seuns in Mosambiek is aan malaria dood. Hulle begin nou in 'n aansoek oor inligting wat nooit tevore openbaar was nie. Waarskynlik kan jy die tye terugkry. Miskien as jy selfs jou vrae aan hulle oorgee sal hulle eerder wees met jou as wat hulle met my was.

In verband met Ryno, ek steur saam hierdie brief wat Ryno selfs vir my gegee het omtrent twee jare voor hy selfmoort gepleeg het. Ek glo ek weet wat daar staan, Ryno het alles vir my verduidelik die dag toe hy die brief aan my gegee het. Ons het gery na Bainskloof en daar, langs die pad, het ek alles gehoor wat jy nou sal lees. Vergewe hom as jy kan. Hy't plegtig vir my belowe hy wou verander, hy sou verander. Wat verby is, is verby. 'n Mens kan nie die verlede ongedaan maak nie. Daar kom jy nie verby nie.

As jy gereed is, ek wens jy bel my Rita. Dan kan ons rustig sit en alles bespreek. Ek kom elke maand in die Kaap, ek kan maklik 'n draai by jou maak, as jy wil. Dit sal wonderlik wees om vir jou weer te sien.

*Veels geluk met jou nuwe lewe, asook die nuwe jaar.
Janus."*

When Rita had finished reading Janus's letter she drove back to Kalk Bay, barely aware of the road, returning to the new people in her life without even knowing that she was doing it. The salty mist churned over her view, mixing with the natural fluids in her

eyes.

Rita banged unintentionally hard on Doya's front door. Doya hurried to receive her.

"Rita, are you alright?"

Rita waved the letter, her fingers clutching the envelope tightly.

Would Rita faint? Her eyes rolled in their sockets. She was sweating more than the day they bought the material for their New Year's clothes.

"Come in," Doya pulled Rita up, supporting her, walked her back to the kitchen, where she and Lesley had been discussing work opportunities. "What's wrong?"

"I had my letter," Rita puffed the words from her belly button.

"The one?"

"Yes."

Lesley looked from one to the other.

"It is from Janus, my dead husband's best friend."

Doya took the letter. It was written in Afrikaans. Doya passed it to Lesley, who opened up the pages. There were easily twenty, each covered in a sincere even slant. Rita began to recount the story she had just read.

"Your husband? He is dead?" Doya was confused.

"Yes. He shot himself in 1982. I never knew why, but now," Rita rolled her eyes, and looked at the letter in front of Lesley. Her husband had been having an affair during their entire marriage.

"Who was it?" Lesley queried, her shoulder turned sideways in a hunch.

"That's the one detail he did not put in." Rita shook her head. "He tried to leave the relationship but his lover threatened to kill me and the boys. Ryno's lover then tried to extort money from him. And that was why he shot himself."

"So he killed himself to save your life?" Lesley knew the story was too sinister to be a suicide. Was it the nuance of the bridal couple finding him which made her realise the picture was too stunning?

"Well, ja, and the boys. That's what he tried to make out, but," Rita started.

"The boys?" Doya shook her head in a question.

"Our two sons, Rudi and Alain. Janus wrote about them too, and he says," Rita continued, but Doya's confusion stopped her.

"You did not tell me you had children," Doya said.

Lesley sat very quietly, the letter before her.

"I don't. They also died, but~"

"Rita!" Doya rose and came to put her arm around Rita. This woman had lost everything, just as she had. Almost everything. "How did it happen?"

"In Moçambique. They were soldiers in the war. Five years ago." The congruence iced the words whistling over her lips.

Doya sat down beside Rita. Goosebumps roved across her arms, her neck. "Your children fought our children?"

After a life of devotion to their cause, Rita still stood accused of breeding child-killers. Rita had not anticipated how that would look to Doya. She began to cry.

"What does Janus say?" Lesley still pored over Ryno's pages.

"He says they died of malaria."

"Malaria?"

Rita picked up the pages and began combing through them, until she found the paragraph which had gripped her into this panic. "They think they know where the graves are. Janus heard just two weeks before he got my letter. 'Waarskynlik kan die lywe terug... uh, You can get the bodies back; seventy five percent of the soldiers in Moçambique died of malaria. They are beginning in investigating into the details that were never released.'"

"So this is why you live alone?" Doya watched Rita.

Rita smiled desperately into Doya's face, sat up straight, "Now I am going on. Starting again, like you said: a different book, new people, new patterns." Rita was rambling. She could not stop the words from exiting her mouth. "Malaria! Why didn't they send them home? Where were the bodies? I would have looked after them. Thank god I did not stay there. Can you think, I could have given them everything already? I could have married someone the way they wanted, only to find out now that they stole my children! Oh, my babies," Rita sank onto a chair, "I want to go to Moçambique. I need to bury the bones."

Doya shrugged. "No, Rita. You should not look for those bones."

Rita panicked. Was Doya angry with her? Would she lose her friend now? She sobbed again, turned desperately to Lesley who saw the fear on her face and held her hand, reaching out also for Doya.

Doya was crying, they saw. "No, Rita, once bones are gone they are in the past." She said it so gravely that the bones felt irreversibly gone. The women suddenly saw the bones pack under the loose soil of their own accord, leaves fall on them to cover them for ever.

"I also left my family," Doya continued. "I think my children are also dead. I ran away from death. I was thinking to go back and look, but that book is closed, now. I am looking to the future, only."

Doya nodded at the shocked eyes returned to her face. "I left my husband, my family. My job. My husband, Letsamo, was having problems, I was scared. I left them, I think they starved? Or were they shot? I thought I could go back. I thought only of myself. I was weak, I was afraid of pain, I did not protect my children. I did nothing to save them. I was so scared of dying.

"Yes, I walked out of the region. Over the hills, past sheep and rivers with crocodiles. That is why I have no papers." She comforted Rita, stroking her arm and patting her hair. "I left my children, I ran away from them just before the drought. I had a lift with a fat, fat man. It was supposed to be someone I knew, but he was not there, this other man arrived. So I fell asleep in the car, when I woke we were at a casino. He took me inside, I thought for something to drink. But soon he used all his money, and he tried to sell me."

"What?" Lesley could not believe her ears.

"Ja," Doya laughed, "I ran away, again, two times in one day. A lady with blonde hair helped me. I did not know where I was. I was in a room, she saw me. I tried to get behind the chair but she came and she showed me the way out, through a room filled with cars. She showed me and I went there. I was so scared. But I saw her after, in a long car with no seats at the back. Her hands were tied like so," Doya placed her hands in an inverted prayer behind her back. "She had this thing on her mouth. I went to help her, but the fat man saw me. He started shouting, and she shake her head like, Go, Go, and I

ran. She saved me, but I could not save her.

"I ran to Pretoria, to the Berthas. There, I lived fifteen years with one friend, Anile, but he left," she explained, "and then I had nothing. Nothing to say my name, no paper to prove that I exist. I was scared."

The women sat still, staring, Lesley could practically hear their hearts racing, and it seemed that she embodied their every hope as she nonchalantly poured water into the kettle and placed three cups and a teapot on a tray, fetched the milk and the sugar while it boiled. Poured the water into the teapot, picked up the tray and walked to place it on the table between them. Placed a cup before each, poured tea, then milk, then stood back, cleared her throat and swallowed back the tears she discovered running down her mouth.

"We don't need papers. Let's break in through Botswana, at Plumtree. Cut across Zimbabwe. My friend Dave told me about this. If we go up and via the Falls, we can pop in at Malawi too."

Rita and Doya sipped tea. They looked at Lesley.

"Make it a real holiday."

"God bless this child!" Doya choked in an aching sob which shook her shoulders.

"This guy Dave, he is a human rights lawyer. We can call him if you like."

"No! Don't tell anyone, please!"

"Are you gay?" Lesley asked cautiously.

"Why?"

"There are organisations especially for gay women," Lesley replied. "They are the fastest, those woman are efficient! But it doesn't help, if you are straight. Or maybe it does, I don't know."

Simultaneously they all smiled, amused. They giggled. The craziness of life.

Doya agreed on condition that Lesley did not reveal anything of her true identity during her discussion with Dave. Ruandre answered.

"Can I speak to Dave, please?"

"He's still in Jo'burg, you'll have to call him there."

"Have you got the number there?"

Lesley dialled again.

"Lesley! What a surprise. How are you?"

"Fine. Dave, I've got a friend, who's got a friend," Lesley began.

"Yes?" Dave replied. "This doesn't sound good."

"She's a Moçambiquan woman without papers. Where must we go?"

"Uh, well, my advice at this stage would be to go nowhere, rather lie low, play the waiting game."

"Dave, are you cooked in the head?" Of all the instructions she had expected, chill out was the very last.

"Yes Lesley, but that is neither here nor there, the point is that from what we can see, the government is loosening controls on immigrants, legal or otherwise, mainly to placate business. Those guys want the labourers, see? Botha has been in Moçambique and Malawi quite a bit this past year. De Klerk looks set to begin negotiations with the ANC. There could be an election within five months. That's the optimists' card. It may be a matter of a year. Not two. Then, so long as your friend's friend can prove that she has lived in the country for five years, she should be eligible for citizenship automatically, same as anywhere in the world. I think it will be easier for her once this

has happened. If she talks to them now, she may land in jail. But hold on, I'll just," Dave disappeared, ruffling through papers. He returned with the number of a lawyer in Constantia and the address of the refugee clinic in Green Point in case Doya decided to consult someone personally.

"Hey Les?"

"Yes?"

"Are you still planning to move into digs?"

"Yes. I'm not even staying at home now, either."

"Really?"

"No, I'm staying down the road at Number One."

"Well, I'm moving to Rosebank in March, I've got a cottage there. I don't know, I was thinking, do you want a room with us?"

Rosebank was posh, leafy and cutesy. "Us?"

"Ruandre is also moving in. There are three smallish bedrooms. It's quite comfy-cosy. The lounge has a built in wall-to-wall bookcase!"

Lesley giggled, Dave knew that was one of her biggest dreams. "Sure, Dave, that sounds brilliant. I haven't really got a job, but I'll figure out something by March."

"Haven't you? I thought you'd be loaded at this stage of season."

"Season! Sure, Dave. Season. Maybe next season I'll be loaded at this stage of season."

"Really?"

"Yip. But I'll get a job, and it will be cool."

"Okay, well that's done then. What's your new number? I'll keep in contact with you."

Lesley explained Dave's strange advice for Doya to Doya and Rita. They remained straight-faced until Doya commented, "So, just do the same things, the same way, some more?"

"That's right."

"Unbelievable," said Rita.

"I'm supposed to get a job today."

"Why?"

"It's the third. Plus Dave offered me a room and I said I'd take it."

"The pizza place needed a waitress."

"The pizza place?"

"La Lanterna. Let's go up there for supper and see. And will you stay with me until you move into your new house? I'm so used to Doya here, the house seems so big now that Doya's gone."

Chapter Thirty

New Year in Cape Town is not speedy but two weeks can fly by. Lesley started working at La Lanterna and one evening Rita walked up and ordered a takeaway lasagne for supper. She read the brochures for art and music on the wall while waiting for her meal. One brochure in particular caught her interest. Lesley brought Rita's food to find Rita scribbling details onto the back of her bank slip.

"What's that?"

"Nothing. Everything!" Rita hugged Lesley and left to 'phone Doya straight away.

"Doya, remember you told me you wanted to study drama?"

"Yes."

"You want to do a course?"

"Hmm? Maybe."

"I think I have found a place."

"Really?"

"The Community Arts Project at Community House, in Salt River."

"Community House!"

Rita, Lesley and Doya piled into the bakkie and drove to Community House, where they were redirected to the Chapel Street Campus in Woodstock for performing arts courses.

"Oh, look. The Devil's Peak nose," Lesley pointed at the mountain immediately behind them. Rita smiled.

"It's not called that, though. It's just called Devil's Peak," Lesley said as Doya looked confused.

A blonde woman with bouncing curls greeted them and checked the register. She smiled at Doya with great pleasure.

"There's one place left in the Drama class! I knew it would go today."

"What's this?" A tall thin man stood beside Doya. Her pushed her hair from her face and examined her facial structure. "A new recruit for the Drama class? Welcome! I'm Patrick. Ooh, darling, let me warn you, you are going to love us! There are some brilliant people on that course; instructors, dancers, you know. You'll love it."

"Doya," Doya shook Patrick's hand, smiling. "I hope so, I've been waiting so long."

"Don't you worry, Dolly!"

Doya, Lesley and Rita strolled around the premises, taking in the various print, drama and lecture halls. As soon as Doya saw the "MAPP" posters, she knew it was the right place. A large mural was painted across two walls in the courtyard.

~ EVERY ACT OF STRUGGLE IS AN ACT OF CULTURE ~
THE PEOPLE SHALL GOVERN!

There were mums with small children, people dressed in leotards holding conversations about Brecht, playwrights, props while stretching their bodies into seemingly impossible contortions. "Shall we go in out of the shade?" Lesley was hot.

"You mean the sun?"

"Huh?"

"Ja," Doya agreed. "Let's get a drink."

The three women sat down for a cool drink in the canteen. As they sat down, a woman at a table close to them began shrieking with laughter. A second woman holding a tomato sauce bottle and a third woman with a pile of documents covered in tomato sauce were evidently not as amused as their laughing companion, who tried repeatedly to stop herself from giggling.

"I tried to warn you," she squeezed out.

The woman with the documents blotted the mess with her hamburger serviette, spreading the red further. The laughing woman, noticing this, pitched over her chair in a renewed fit, clutching Doya's chair as she turned.

"I've got to go. I'll see you guys," she said.

Lesley, Rita and Doya could hear her laughter from outside. Doya sat beside deep sash windows, ticking different boxes. The drama class for adult amateurs had voice, movement, costume and make-up, film, set and prop design and building, characterisation, improv. Aiysh, not just lines, the whole thing.

She registered for a course in less than an hour, her manual and curriculum tucked beneath her arm.

"Saturday classes, a full day until 3pm. It's quite a demanding course, so don't say we didn't warn you."

"Oh, you have textile classes. Do you have karate classes?" Rita asked.

The woman checked her register again. "Beginners? Yes, we have a class starting in the last week of January."

"Now you know, there is only one reason why you simply must take that course, and it is not for the fact that karate teaches you power of the mind, body and spirit, although that is what we will be concentrating on, for the most part, for your money. Guess what the real reason is?" Patrick returned to the reception desk, hands clapped together across his chest, eyes sparkling with energy. "I teach that course!"

"Ha!" Lesley, Rita and Doya shrieked with laughter.

Patrick pretended to blush with modesty, and half bowed to them. "Ag, it's nothing, really. We learn about the power of the mind, the body and the spirit. And we'll keep you fit too! Black belt!"

The woman who had laughed so much in the canteen entered the room as Patrick did a kata for Rita, Doya and Lesley.

“Ha!” Patrick shouted, while they laughed and applauded.

“Ha!” The laughing woman also gave a kata. Lesley and Doya signed up with Rita, convinced.

University of Cape Town

Chapter Thirty One

For days the January winds tore and heaved through the city's streets. Sand blew into everyone's food on the beaches and the grit stung their skin. Margot came home from Citrusdal. Doya helped her unpack her luggage and admired the beautiful presents Margot's family had given her. Doya and Margot were invited to Rita's for supper but Margot was too tired to move. She would take a rain check. Doya caught the train and wandered up to her old house.

"PW is out!" Lesley threw the door wide open and ran back to the lounge to watch the television.

"What?"

"PW's had a second stroke. He's been ousted. The cabinet are sorting out a new president!"

"What does that mean? Who is he?"

"He was the president, and owing to his bad health he's now a nobody. C'est la vie," Lesley said, wisely.

Rita laughed at Lesley.

"Rita, you are turning into one big giggle!"

Rita and Lesley had both the television and the radio on. Doya watched in the lounge, Rita listened in the kitchen, Lesley alternated positions between them. There are always more ways to the future than one person can imagine at any given time and paths can be changed fairly effortlessly if the will is there. Lesley took Doya and Rita to The Joint that night. She knew they would love the people. Judy was there when they arrived, soon Daniel and Dirk pitched up, Cindi too. Dave and Ruandre arrived at midnight from Johannesburg. There was much celebration and jubilation at Botha's ousting, even with the nervousness around FW's negotiation style.

How come Lesley, Rita and Doya were together at The Joint at the same time as the rest of the country changed? How had they come to be drinking with people they truly loved in that moment?

Rita sipped her beer from the bottle.

"It's a state of emergency! An urgent emergency!"