

Self-Consciousness

A Novel Story

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COMPULSORY DECLARATION

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.

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Note to the Reader

This work, while confessional in appearance, is entirely fictional. Any likeness to persons, places, or events is coincidental. This confession is false.

Prefatory

This document is the result of work probably better suited to a psychologist than a literary scholar, so I make my apologies in advance if what follows seems at times inappropriately confessional, but I'm afraid that my interest in the subject is less academic than it is personal.

Though it was never included as part of his academic work, the attached typescript for a graphic novel, *Kariba*, is the work of James C—, for a time one of my most promising students. Under my supervision for the MA within the Department of Language and Communication, he was engaged in writing a novel (the traditional kind, sans illustrations) of which, tragically, only fragments remain. James took his own life in late 2019 after a long struggle with depression. As his supervisor, I saw first-hand the progress of this terrible disease. Despite the encouragement I gave, James suffered from a lack of self-belief that many will recognise as symptomatic of our age—in which the good lack all conviction, while the worst are full of passionate intensity.

On hearing of his death, I was naturally devastated. The university can be a suffocating environment for students, not least because, as he told me many times, it gives you a false sense of community: you are surrounded by people and yet utterly alone. Immediately, I was reminded of the Dropbox folder that we shared, whose frequent updating—reported to me via little animated banners that would slip on and off my screen—was, whether he knew it or not, to me a kind of smoke signal indicating his well-being. Sometimes I wouldn't hear from him for weeks, and then I'd see a notification sidle up to my browser telling me that he was uploading articles on Freud, or books by Turgenev. *Keep it up!* I'd think. *So long as you're reading.* Of course, this now seems naïve: after all, most books borrowed from a library are never read beyond the contents page; why should it be any different with digital ones? It seems that in truth this gathering of new reading material, this 'research', was in fact only a procrastination exercise, a desperate attempt to convince himself after months without writing a word that he was still progressing.

In my role as supervisor I felt I had failed him. A degree in Creative Media is perhaps the only context within the University nowadays in which true creative freedom is permitted. To that end it is supposed to liberate young minds from the strictures imposed by academic work. In some cases, too much freedom can have the opposite effect. James, it saddens me to admit, was one of those cases. I would suggest he undertake a small task—writing a short story set somewhere he'd been and concerning the sorts of people he knew and understood.

Encouraged at first by this sensible advice, he would seem to have found his stride, beginning right away on a new story within the parameters I'd given. But in every case it would not be long before he lost confidence. How, he would ask, could he tell a 'straight' story about a subject like this or that? It was boring and added nothing to the already overflowing repository of 'bad fiction' available everywhere. I watched several stories begin, grow, and before blooming, be destroyed by his overthinking them: an editorial disease, the backspace button stuck, like him, in a depressed mode.

A deep sadness came over me. I had lost a student; a family had lost a son; the world had lost someone who had promised to grow into an insightful and generous mind. Only after many long hours of introspection did I realise what had been bothering me. James had said in our conversations that he never sent his writing to anyone. Sharing unfinished work can be dangerous, as one can easily be dissuaded from pursuing a good idea by criticism that fails to see what one is attempting; but I had encouraged him to distribute his writing among at least two or three trusted readers as early as he felt possible. Without some encouragement, I knew, he would become trapped inside his own negative (and often inaccurate) perceptions. A healthy bit of support from readers would keep him going. But as with so much of my advice, he agreed to it desultorily and then ignored every word. So it was that I realised nobody except myself had read anything (apart from *Kariba* itself, which anyway later became available publicly) that he had written.

According to his family, James left no note.¹ It is therefore impossible to tell (in respect of his work) what his wishes might have been. It is not difficult for me to imagine him in my office, or seated across from me at a café in Rondebosch where we used occasionally to meet, describing how he would never let his writing see the light of day. 'Who on earth would want to read this schlock!' —he loved that word, 'schlock'— 'how can I perpetrate another short story in which the events move toward a climactic moment of "internal drama" providing the protagonist (or the reader) with the requisite epiphany. It's too much. If I can't do better than that I have no business writing fiction.'

Perhaps I am dramatizing, but I can hear these words coming out of his mouth as though it were my own. Because of the close relationship we had, I am confident when I say that every writer who hides their work away is in secret desperate that it will one day be

¹ This was confirmed by James's brother, Daniel.

found. Borges said knowingly of Kafka, 'No writer wishing that his work be consigned to oblivion entrusts the task to someone else.' Had James wanted his writing to be burned with him (he was cremated), he would either have destroyed it before taking his own life, or instructed someone close to him to do it. He would certainly not have done what he did, which was to share with me, a nosy professor and inveterate fictionist, the folder containing not only his work, but his research notes and work diary.

Born from my distress began what I have since called 'literary mourning', a process of deep reading, of a sort of psychological archaeology by which I have been able, using the pieces he left behind, to begin to assemble a life from his work, and his work from his life. Maybe I will be accused of puppeteering, of vandalising the otherwise unspoiled memory of a young man. I hope not. What I have tried to do is an act of creative solidarity. I have tried to give a fair account of things, to write up and introduce each thing in a way I believe he would have approved of. As much as possible, I have quoted him directly. In other places, I have allowed my own reading and research to enter upon the discussion. In short I have tried to piece together from the fragments a collage which, although not a complete portrait, will I hope provide at least some sense of who he was, where he was going, and the reflections and thoughts that he had on his way there.

Juvenilia

By way of introduction, let me quote for illustrative purposes the first fiction I received into my hands as James's teacher.

Waiting Man

THERE IS A MAN who sleeps outside the station office. At night, from my window, I can see him lying beneath the hedge, head propped against a stone, regarding the stars; or perhaps his eyes are closed. Smoke curls slowly upward from his face as if somewhere inside he is burning.

He visits the office and asks whether his call-up has arrived. He has no address, he says. 'Sorry, nothing today,' my father tells him. Politely, he smiles. He will come again tomorrow.

His face, though leathered from the sun, seems never to age. He does not look a day older than when I first saw him lying beneath the hedge outside the station office. I have passed, in that time, from my seventh to my seventeenth year.

When he arrived in the town, he caused a stir. Where is he from? they asked. What does he want? Nobody stops here but travellers on their way to somewhere else. He was from the South, he said. He was waiting for his call-up. Why it should be sent here, nobody could guess, but he did not bother anybody, caught his food in the river, and slept under the stars. Eventually the town ignored him, accepted him as one accepts a weed that does not spread, and is not very ugly.

I have an elder brother. Until he came of age he lived with us, here at the station office. As children we would watch the trains pass through on their way to the city. People with red faces wearing hats disembarked, and suitcases with labels were transferred from one train to another. Thousands of letters, items of strange shape wrapped in paper, stored in wooden boxes and steel trunks, all passed through on their way somewhere. Here was a window onto the world's chattel, disguised as it was beneath paper and wood, migrating incessantly.

Occasionally, somebody would stop here for a few days. My mother has a room in our house, which for a small sum she rented, supplementing my father's meagre wage. At our dining table, mother and father attempted to make conversation, but after rehearsing the same stories (their meeting, marriage, and so on), came to feel inadequate, and soon they fell to asking endless

questions about the traveller's life, which, they said, must be more interesting than ours, lived as it was here on this fringe of the world.

They were drilling in the desert in those times, and many tradesmen and engineers passed through our house. My brother and I looked forward to these visits, and sometimes were lucky enough to be given little presents, or, as more than once happened, shown some trick by which to improve our fishing.

Every year there is the Leaving Ceremony. When my brother and his friends turned eighteen, they climbed aboard the Northbound train, kissed mothers and waved goodbye to fathers. The ones who stayed behind looked on, persuading themselves that their turn would soon come. Before he left, he gave me his fishing tackle and rod. 'You will have more use for these than I will now,' he said. In the North there would be no fishing, no river.

It is Friday. Under the hedge when I turn off the main street onto ours, I see the man lying, waiting. For ten years he has watched the trains go North. Next year if I am ready, if I pass the tests, I too will board the train. In the meantime, I wake, go to my classes, and pore over my books in the evenings. Only since my brother's leaving has my mind turned ever more to the waiting man. In these ten years, I realize, I have not spoken a word to him. What must it be like to wait endlessly? After so many years, what can he possibly hold hope for? I would like to ask him, but merely nod as I pass.

With the long hours of work, the days stretch out interminably and I worry more and more that I will not be ready for the tests. Will I ever go North? It is simply expected by the town that it will happen as the seasons happen, but to me it is no longer so clear. The future becomes indefinite as a dream, opaque like the haze into which the trains disappear during the summer months. Even if I pass, where will I go?

The following morning, I wake early and take my brother's fishing rod and some tackle and head to the river. On the banks I dig into the sand, searching for a worm. It is too dry, and I must use whatever insects I can find in the dust, skewered onto my barbed hook. The sun beats down upon my cap; the day ripples blue above the water as I wait. Hours pass and nothing bites. It is too shallow here. I move downstream. But though I wait hours more, still nothing, not even a nibble. It is as if there is no longer a fish in this river to catch. I remember there being many, but I wonder if I remember correctly. I tell myself it is the fault of the poor bait, but I know it is a lie. Annoyed, I pack up my tackle, fill my water bottle, and head homeward.

Again I pass him, but this time I stop so that my shadow, falling across his eyes, stirs him from sleep. He squints lazily at me, waiting for me to speak. His limp, sacklike body causes something like irritation to boil at the back of my neck where the sun is doing its best to make me sweat. 'I see there are no fish in the river,' I say.

His eyes open wider and he sits upright, but he does not seem to have heard me. I want to get out of the sun, but something makes me stay.

'I'm the station master's son,' I say.

There is a long pause in which not a word passes between us. I hope that he will speak, but he does not; instead he looks expectantly at me. Eventually I burst out, as if I have been holding the words back, 'Why do you wait here? Why don't you go home? Don't you have something to do with your life?'

Immediately I wish I had not said it. But when the blood has drained from my cheeks, I see that he is as expressionless as he was before; I cannot be sure, but it seems the faint trace of a smile draws an arc across his lips.

'I'm waiting for my call-up,' he says.

My expression of disbelief is evidently written on my face, for he smiles, 'It may still come,' he says. 'In the meantime, I will wait.'

The reply is so precisely what I have expected that I am left dumb. Why has he no better answer than this? I have the urge to kick him where he lies, kick him in the ribs until, howling, he runs for the platform and catches the next train out of the town. Instead I turn and begin to walk, and then sprint, home.

WHEN I HEAD OUT the following day, I take the long route, making certain to avoid him. At night I eat my supper in silence. My mother and father approve of my seriousness—silence is the sign of a deeply focused mind, father says. I wash; return my clothes neatly to the cupboard. I open my books and read and read until my eyes burn. I know that, across the way, there is a small curl of smoke rising, but do not get up to confirm it. I keep the curtains closed, and think only of the tests. I must be prepared.

You'll Still Believe In Me

We were in the seminar room with the class assembled when I asked, as I usually do at the start of a meeting, whether anybody would volunteer to begin the reading; and we—for I believe in this case that I can speak for the others—were surprised to hear James's voice from the end of the table, announcing that he had written something he wanted to share. This was the only of James's stories that I heard him read aloud, and he read it in way that left an impression.

There are those for whom reading aloud is as natural as singing is for the musically gifted; James was one of them, and it was perhaps for this reason that it became immediately evident that a certain tone, a certain timbre and measured cadence had entered his voice which, to my ear at least, was immediately recognisable. It took a few paragraphs before I'd placed it, but once I'd landed upon the reference, there was no mistaking it: the voice we were hearing was that of our Nobel laureate, J.M. Coetzee.

When he was finished reading his story, the class was rather impressed. They liked the tone, the style, and the somewhat mysterious setting. It is usually my hope that when a student makes a blatant imitation of another's work he or she will be called out by a classmate; but when this is not the case, I allow myself a word or two. In this case, I was perhaps, by being too accurate in my critique, a little insensitive. I said, 'There's a flavour of Coetzee here, wouldn't you say? The strange power of the powerless over the narrator.'

This comment, it seemed from his rather well-suppressed shock, cut him to the quick. He said nothing, and once a few others had said what they thought of it, we moved on. I did not fail to notice, though, that James did not utter another word for the remainder of the discussion. Now, years later, I see in his diary what was *really* going on.

Is the Novel Novel Today?

In Coetzee's speech at the Weekly Mail Book Week in 1987, entitled 'The Novel Today', he said,

A story is not a message with a covering, a rhetorical or aesthetic covering. It is not a message plus a residue, the residue, the art with which the message is coated with the residue, forming the subject matter of rhetoric or aesthetics or literary interpretation [...] In reading [allegorically] you may have missed something. You may have missed not just something, you may have missed everything.

Not exactly an example of Coetzee's finest phrasing, but of precisely this speech, James writes in his diary:

Allegory is always a simplification and a missed opportunity. To read allegorically is to create a meta-narrative in which, as in Freud, everything possesses a discoverable symbolic meaning. But if this were so, what would have been the purpose of the campfire story? Why, as an evolutionary event, would story have come into being? If it were possible to say by other means what is said in a good story, why bother with the story at all?

Perhaps because of his writerly aspirations, James came away from his encounter with Coetzee with more anxieties than insights. A notebook entry to illustrate:

The novels are at once puzzles and the tools to interpret them. But the puzzle is not a puzzle with a 'solution', and the tools are therefore not the tools we want: the tools foreground the puzzle, the puzzle foregrounds the tools. The effect? We become hyper-aware of our interpretative activity, of our role as meaning-makers, of our natural human desire to find the ultimate signified. The novels exist *on their own terms*; they are fetching because they *seem* self-contained. They anticipate and contain and frustrate all the possibilities for their own simple interpretation as allegories, or as allegories of allegory itself.

Coetzee talks about History (the discourse, narratives, etc. that we agree are the story that represents a collective past) and its status as infrangible and monolithic. One thinks of Gordimer, now barely read by anybody, who wrote mostly ‘within’ the discourse of history. That is to say, accepting the modes of the novel, and the novel-within-history. Lukács is behind this preference, I’m sure, but one wonders whether their (her novels’) diminishing interest to modern readers lies in the fact that they do not (as in Coetzee) simultaneously interpret their subjects and themselves. That is to say, her novels are *about* something in a way that Coetzee’s never are. As their *about-ness* loses relevance (how much, really, do we still have to learn from a book like *July’s People* in 2016?), so do the novels. They become “sub-discourses within the discourse of History”.

The overwhelming feeling is (though I’m sure Coetzee would be disappointed to know it) one of being trapped. How, without either imitating his methods or ignoring his insights, does one write in, on, or about South Africa? That is to say, when Coetzee (“Coetzee”) has written on a subject and in the same breath crystallised the problems of writing on that subject (the word ‘subject’ shows the difficulty of discussing this without a better equipped critical vocabulary than I possess), how does one *get past* him? There have been various forays into fruitless territory (Cf. ‘the novel of hybridity’ et al). Alternatively, the writers who show his influence (but not his insights) are left with an unfortunate residue. A sort of anxiously reflexive (read: self-absorbed) style. In Coetzee this comes off as fussy but forgivable, but without the intellect to sustain this intellectual game playing, in others it smacks of nothing but pretentiousness.

This entry goes on for another page. What I have selected for quotation illuminates the following pieces of work that I have taken from the shared folder. After the early feedback I gave on his Coetzee-influenced writing, James’s anxiety to find a way around or through the trouble that Coetzee represented became intense. Nevertheless, as the creation dates on the Word files show, he continued to produce fiction in a Coetzean mode right up until the end. I therefore include another example below.

Nativity

Though sport means very little in your family, you have never seen your father so happy as when Nelson Mandela walks onto the field after the Springboks win against the All Blacks. Together with your brothers and your neighbour, Philip, you run up and down the garden pretending to be Joel Stransky, making the winning kick. The national anthem is played incessantly and proudly you sing along. For these months, these years, everything has an immediacy, a promise to it—the very leaves of the trees are friendly hands, waving at you. Whenever you come indoors from play it seems to be teatime, and your mother and your granny have made you and your brothers peanut butter balls or Rice Krispies squares. You are five years old, you are six, the years bloom green as grass.

*

It is time to be put into teams. For nearly a week now fires have been tearing through the forests above the school. Smoke has turned the sky a waxen yellow, the air heavy. Everything makes you feel uneasy, even the news that Mandela will soon no longer be president strikes something deep within you. Why, when things were going so well, is the world restless for things to be different?

Passing the teacher that morning, you heard him talking with the school secretary about homes being burned down, animals fleeing. She is the woman who used to administer 'rescue' drops and bandages when you stubbed your toe or scraped your knee on the jungle-gym. Now her caregiving has taken on a new shape; she has been up all night helping the firefighters and in her eyes there is a look of tiredness and panic that terrifies you. After hearing these words whispered between adults it is impossible to concentrate. Everywhere is an air of unease and fear, interrupted here and there by screams and laughter. Eventually the lessons end and it is time for cricket, a game which today you have no desire to play.

Waiting to be chosen you watch ash falling in flakes as big as leaves and find yourself feeling for the first time in your life as if your soul—for you then believed in the soul—has left you, has floated off somewhere. I am empty, the voice within you says, after which you listen as though an echo might come. A piece of ash catches your arm and you press it with your thumb, leaving there in grey the fine whorls that you have learned are completely unique. Looking at the print, the image that comes to you is of the small cardboard box in

which granny's ashes had been deposited before they were given to your mother. It is hard to accept that seventy years of life should've been reduced to something so light.

James, says a voice. It is Uhuru, the son of the Xhosa teacher and the best batsman in the class. Uhuru kindly continues to pretend that you are equals, and you were the year before, but recently you have grown jealous of him, jealous of his skill on the sports field, which meanly you attribute to natural ability. That you are no longer enthusiastic about sport does not diminish this jealousy, in fact you must work hard to continue to feign indifference. And your class has begun to notice. You disparage everything, which many of them, though you don't realise it, have taken for arrogance.

You walk over and join the line. Slowly, amid jumping and shouting, most of your friends end up on the opposing side until eventually only the very worst players remain, a trial which to jeering and laughter is painfully repeated every week. You are glad you are never picked last.

Batting is not your strong suit, but against your complaints you are put out to bat first. The object feels foreign, more like the lump of wood that it is than something one could ever manoeuvre easily. Your whole body as you make your way to the crease feels heavy, unfamiliar. From a height you see yourself walking; a scene from a long and plotless film, the protagonist, a boy who looks like you and has your name, discovers that he has no soul, though even as you think this the thought is swallowed by another: this moment that you have chosen, that you have elevated into a scene in the film, is it not only another moment like the rest?

Though everything moves slowly, or you imagine it does, you sense too late that your feet are misplaced, are not the right distance from the crease or from one another. But when it comes, the ball does not fly with the slowness of this dream but passes between the bat and your leg, uprooting the middle stump with a hollow crack. The cheers and high-fives of the opposing side wouldn't hurt you so much had they not come from your closest friends, the boys with whom you used to play cricket every day. To you this feels unnatural, like a betrayal.

What's wrong? asks one of the girls from your team as you reach the ropes, Nothing, you say, turning away. She grabs your shoulder, You're crying, she says. In the meantime, another girl has come, and now another. No I'm not it's just the smoke, Don't be a sore loser, she says bitterly. I'm not crying! But as the words leave your mouth something takes hold of

you, you cannot control yourself and the tears come forth hot and copious to the sounds of your drawn-out sobs. Something changes, and you feel an arm around your shoulder, but the possibility that beneath this facade of meanness your classmates may actually care about you only brings on further gasping sobs. You are embarrassed, you want to escape, hide, but there is nowhere to go. Before long the teacher, who is also umpire, halts play to investigate the cause of the commotion. James is crying, someone says. Tell him to stop being a spoilsport, says another. Shut up! says the first girl. What's wrong? I don't know! you say, I don't know.

You are walking away from the group along the embankment, but the others follow. You sit down on the grass and through your tears you watch the ash falling. For a moment you wonder what the field will be like once the fire has done its work. A black sandpit, like a graveyard of scattered remains, the dead raining down upon the living, turning their laughter into rasping coughs. Yes, this is how it will be, you think, and the thought is almost thrilling: Before long everything will turn to ash! And yet this too, the sadness of your own desire to see the world burnt brings up yet more tears. Now the teacher asks the class to leave you. There there, he says when they have gone, It will be okay. My father left when I was your age. It gets better.

*

You are thirteen and you are cycling home from school, swaying from side to side as you push down on the pedals; the effort sends through your body a satisfying sensation of hot strain. In these years, movement has taken on a new meaning, and each action seems to signify something. When walking you place your weight on the outside edges of your shoes, thinking that this will somehow make you look stronger, stand taller. An increased awareness extends to every aspect of your life. Nothing must appear unintentional: It is not that you don't listen to music because it so easily reaches into your heart, but because listening to music is a waste of time, passive and stupid. In addition to music, many other things are stupid too. Afrikaans and Xhosa lessons are stupid because they waste time on pipsqueak languages that become useless the minute one sets foot outside South Africa, something which you wholeheartedly plan on doing as soon as you can. You have fantasies of living in Italy, baking bread while your beautiful Italian wife sleeps upstairs in a house you built with your own hands. You do not share these embarrassing fantasies with anyone; keeping things to yourself has become a new way of repelling sadness, which will often come unexpectedly and linger for weeks on

end. During these moments the world of fantasy, stimulated by the hundreds of transporting pictures in the copies of National Geographic that lie about your house, is where you find greatest consolation.

Since you realised that thirteen was the age that one becomes a man, you have taken to watching the news on TV. South Africa, with its endless stream of stories of murder and rape and shady deals, makes you feel utterly helpless. And while the violence is mostly remote, it is around this time you have a first-hand taste of it when a girl from school is raped and murdered along with her mother while they are on a family holiday. In this world you cannot see a place where you will be happy, and it surprises you that your parents ever decided to live here. Two of your friends have emigrated. A month afterward you received a postcard carrying a picture of the Sydney opera house from your best friend and were intensely jealous of him, of his new life filled with motorboats and bicycle lanes and freedom to roam where you pleased and everything else it seemed South Africa didn't have. You decide some months after the postcard comes that in a new country, with new friends, he has most probably forgotten all about you.

Why can't we move to Australia? you ask your mother. Because our life is here, she says, And besides, how could we ever afford it? The only reason you can imagine that a white person would want a life in South Africa is out of guilt, out of a conviction that they must stay in order to right the wrongs of their parents. And yet as far as you can tell your parents do nothing but sigh and shake their heads, It's terrible, terrible, they say, We can only hope.

The cycle home is just fifteen minutes but it seems to take forever. Into your body there flows a stream of sensations, each one simultaneously distinct and yet inextricable from the whole form of experience. As you crest the bridge with a final surge of effort, an image of Emma comes. She is not the prettiest in the class, but unlike most girls you are able to talk to her, and this seems to carry a relief and a promise of things. You've imagined a future in which she is your wife and there is a tall house and a fireplace and children. These far-off images of your life, these projections, are almost constant, and they form a relief from the hard facts of the outside world.

You have been developing the film of Emma for weeks, each time splicing in further images, but now a new dimension has entered the picture. You have begun to imagine your future self looking back upon yourself in the present. What does this future self, the one who lives with his wife in Italy, think of the present self? It dawns on you that this future self's

very possibility relies upon every action you take in the present. The teacher once told a story about a butterfly's wings causing a hurricane in China. The moral did not escape you: small actions can have a great effect. But which small actions? Surely not all of them will affect your future as a happy man in Tuscany? Trucks pass by on the road and you foresee how the tiniest turn of your wrist would in a second put your body in their way, ending your life. A shiver goes down your spine. Death is around every corner, and yet somehow you continue to live.

By the time you are home your father is already waiting outside in his car, singing to himself. You told him to meet you at your mother's house because you like cycling, but in truth it is because his car is an embarrassment, its ceiling cloth sagging, rust spots around the windows. You hurry inside, gather your things, and clamber into the car.

On the drive to Uhuru's house he asks about school and you tell him you hate it. At length he asks what's wrong, but you are unable to tell him. How could he ever understand? He has told you about his childhood, how all his friends had the same houses, went to the same church, and did not go on family holidays. How everybody in his neighbourhood knew one another and played in each other's back gardens. Parents at your school live too far apart to know one another, their cars are German and new, and after every school holiday, during which you stayed at home, you must endure the endless class reports about their experiences in England, France, Italy, Argentina—or worse, the Kruger National Park. The Kruger National Park has been reported on so many times and with so many photographs and exciting tales of lions and leopards that you develop a hatred for the very idea of wildlife, the wilderness, and the South African myth of the outdoors.

Are you ready for your presentation? asks your father. You tell him you don't know and he leaves it at that.

The suburbs that you recognise recede and the places through which you now pass are flat and dusty, the trees stunted. There are plastic packets in the fences and people walking along the roadside. Uhuru and his mother live in Langa, an area you have never been before, and as you head further down the road you begin to wonder whether it too will look like this.

Uhuru has been in class with you since you were little boys of six. He plays the same games, speaks the same way as everyone else. Only, unlike all but one other boy, Eric, he is black. Vaguely you are aware that he occupies a place in the school that is different from yours.

This is Langa, says your father as you pass a cafe plastered with shocks of yellow and red that form the names of MTN and Coca Cola. He tells you that Pinelands, where he grew up, is just across the freeway. You have been to Pinelands and it is green and full of trees, and there are sidewalks and lawns and thatched roofs. It looks nothing like Langa. But you are not stupid, you know why these places do not look alike. Perhaps trees cover Pinelands because those responsible for apartheid had insisted that white skins couldn't withstand the sun. In any event, the result is the same: in Langa there is no shade.

For once you are glad of the condition of your father's car, which in this frightening place does not attract stares. Only when the fierce-looking children playing in the street must part for it to come through do they stop and laugh at the little white boy in his tie and jacket sitting in the front seat. As they jeer there is a crack against the back of the car. It is only a short, sharp sound, but you have no doubt about what has happened: someone has thrown a rock at you.

What the fuck! you shout. I don't want to hear you talk like that, not in my car, They just threw a rock at us! Yes, So what are you going to do about it, I'm not going to do anything, They're just naughty children, They should be given a hiding and thrown in jail, Listen, if you want to carry on like this you can climb out of the car and shout at yourself, but I don't want to hear any more of it, Why aren't you angry? What good would it do to get angry? This is *your* car, just because it's old they think they can throw rocks at it! It was one rock, only one of them threw it, enough now.

There is silence. The car crackles over the gravel in the street. You just don't want to shout at them because they're black and you feel guilty, you say finally. James, you are in a foul mood, he says. And as I recall, your brother was caught only last year firing his BB gun at the neighbour's car. Was he thrown in jail for it?

To this you have no reply, and though you pretend his defence is pathetic, it strikes you as somehow right. Thankfully Uhuru's house is on a quieter side road, away from the crowd. As you stop, a front door drags open behind a low, crumbling brick wall and Uhuru comes outside walking quickly, dressed as smartly as you are, but with his head lowered. Your father begins to climb out of the car. What are you doing? you ask, but either he has not heard you or chooses not to respond.

Ms. Mbatha, Uhuru's mother, fills the doorway. She is a big woman, taller than your father, and from what your brothers in high school have told you, a very tough teacher.

David! she bellows, smiling and extending her hand. How are you Mandiswa? Your father speaks more loudly than normal, as if she were deaf.

Reluctantly you too climb from the car. Uhuru nods at you and you see something in his face you do not recognise, a look that is neither one of anger nor embarrassment but contains both. The parents continue to talk outside, apparently about something funny, because interspersed between their pantomime of friendliness come sharp bursts of laughter. To you it seems forced and awkward, but they are not the only ones who feel an awkwardness growing. Seeing Uhuru in this place, in his home, you are aware that any reaction of yours, any suggestion that you are uncomfortable here, will be noticed. Despite your awareness of this, against his silence you are unable to produce even a word, and to make matters worse it feels as if your thoughts are written on your face. These fears slowly become unbearable, and almost without thought you blurt the first thing that enters your head: What do you think of my dad's Ferrari? you say, kicking the tyre.

Uhuru laughs from beneath his lowered head, and for a moment you are relieved to see the friend you know. You are desperate to remove his shame—for though you haven't the word for it, that is what it is. And though you wish to communicate to him that you do not care about these things, you know deep down that it would be a lie. You are helpless, and you begin to see a gap growing between you that you fear no amount of humour or goodwill can ever close.

Mandiswa is waving goodbye to your father, and in a moment you are together again in the car, now with Uhuru in the back seat, leaving Langa behind and heading toward a hall where with representatives of several other schools you will present yourselves as ambassadors. The event goes well, and you and Uhuru find yourselves laughing together, though for better or worse, you know something between you has changed. Later, when your father drops you at home that night you will apologise to him for what you said, and when you unlock the front door and loosen your tie, you will feel as if years have passed since that afternoon on your bicycle.

*

It is the first day of your Matric year, you are seventeen and still a virgin. While boys in your class have sniffed out the details of each other's sexual history, you have studiously avoided

the subject, created suggestions, hints, and false rumours that long ago, when they were still trading Pokémon cards, you had slept with a girl. Yet when the topic of sex is brought up an anxiety enters your body and you begin to panic, trying to find a way out of the conversation that will not draw attention. But now, on the first day of the new year, everyone is nervous, at least for the moment.

Someone new has entered the group, a boy who has been kept back a year, Jabu. Jabu is tall and heavy-set with a strong frown and a deep, quiet voice. You know nothing about him except that last year, when he was still in the grade above, he was caught stealing a classmate's cell phone. Theft is uncommon in your school and the story spread rapidly, many speculating that he'd done it purposely to see if he could get expelled. Clearly it has not worked, since today he sits at the back of the class, his face unsmiling as the teacher calls out names from the register.

Drama is a subject that you only recently decided to take for Matric and when you arrive for the first class, Jabu is sitting on one of the plastic chairs which have been set out in a circle in the hall. The teacher performs the introductions before handing out copies of sonnets. As he assigns each of you a number you realise with dread that you have been paired with Jabu. Slowly you approach each other and shake hands. Do you want to go first? you ask. To your surprise, you see a smile flash across his face and he begins to laugh. No no, I think you should go first, you can do the first half, this thing is difficult. You nod your head, It really is. You have been given sonnet sixty, and falteringly you begin:

Like as the waves make toward the pebbled shore,

So do our minutes hasten to their end,

Each changing place with that which goes before,

In sequent toil all forward do contend.

You pause, and he takes over:

Nativity once in the main of light,

Crawls to maturity, wherewith being crowned,

Crooked, eclipses 'gainst his glory fight,

And Time that gave, doth now his gift confound.

For some moments after he has finished you are unsure what to say. His voice, his reading, is not only good but—the accurate word is one you can never say to him—beautiful. The angry thief you had imagined Jabu to be has vanished in a flourish of animation and clarity, and

suddenly you perceive that what you had taken for hardness was in fact only the outward appearance of someone profoundly withdrawn.

Unlikely as this moment of intimacy is, it opens something, and before long a friendship grows between you and Jabu. It is clear to you that something happened to him the year before, from which he is only now emerging. You are surprised at how wrong you were about him, and begin to wonder what people must think of you, having only such cursory impressions as the outer projection of yourself can give. You choose to act in the same plays, and rehearse your lines together. At one point Jabu even stands up to defend you against an accusation of having bunked a class. In fact, you did bunk the class, but since you were going to get detention, Jabu chooses to be your alibi.

Then, around the time of the June exams, he begins growing more aloof, more inward. You ask him what is wrong and he tells you, Nothing. But the following day, during a conversation about exams, he tells you that he is going to the bush in two months. You try not to show your surprise, but nevertheless you are taken aback; you hadn't realised that Jabu's family still adhered to the old customs. Do you not want to go? No, he says. Why not? To this question he only shrugs his shoulders, as if to say, How do you expect me to explain?

Over the next few weeks neither of you talk about it. Then one afternoon you are telling him about how crazy it is that in only a few months you will be out of school when he says, Come with me? What? Come with me, Where? To the bush. For a moment you think he must be joking but quickly you suppress the short chuckle you've let escape and look at him earnestly. Jesus, but I can barely even speak Xhosa, It doesn't matter, I will help you, you must also become a man, they can't discriminate. But Jabu, I'll be a total outsider, Who cares?

Only by speaking vaguely of your lack of money for such a trip are you able to bring the conversation to an end.

That evening as you are going through lists of *trappe van vergelyking*, degrees of comparison, which you must learn by heart for a test the following day, you think about the conversation with Jabu, and it embarrasses you to remember that you chose Afrikaans not because it appealed most to your heart but because it was easier than Xhosa. If you choose the easy route throughout your life, you ask yourself, where will you end up?

A knock on the bedroom door, Someone is on the phone for you.

The shortlist of students who applied for a scholarship last year has been announced and you are requested to appear for an interview in two days' time. When the application

advert came around some months ago you thought there was little hope of being chosen, but applied all the same. The scholarship would extend schooling by a year, but the possibility of living in Italy was so appealing that it didn't matter. You would finally be able to escape South Africa, to see something of the world.

Along with the reality that you have made it through the first round comes an anxiety that there has been a mistake, that you are not the one they want to interview. After all, what will you tell them? Over the next day you make lists of questions you imagine they might ask and try as best you can to answer them. Your answers seem forced and silly, and soon you give it up. Better to be yourself, you think, and if they don't like it, then it isn't meant to be.

The interview is held in Newlands in an old, expensive-looking house with many trees in the garden. Standing on the lawn there is a group of nervous and over-friendly people making small talk with one another. To your surprise, very few of these people are black. Several interviewers, all of them certainly younger than thirty, begin by suggesting the group play a game. Whatever the games are, during each one you are terrified that inadvertently you will reveal some fatal disqualifying flaw. Miraculously this doesn't happen, and instead the interminable series of absurd activities, whose purpose you cannot guess at, does eventually end and together you are seated in a lounge while one by one candidates are invited into an adjacent room and interviewed. To ease the awkwardness of waiting, art supplies have been laid out on a long, low table. As you sit down on a beanbag and try to think of something to draw that will be interpreted favourably by the eyes all around you, you feel as if you are again in kindergarten. Even the little baskets of crayons are there, sitting in rows. All that is missing is a cup of hot chocolate and your teacher to reassure you that yes, everything is perfect, keep drawing, it doesn't matter, there is no right or wrong way.

Eventually your name is called. Seated in a row in the interview room are three interviewers, who graciously welcome you from behind their notepads. Nothing stands between you and them but your empty hands, which carefully you place in your lap in a way that you imagine looks both attentive and casual.

After only two questions, you begin regretting that you did not prepare better. They have read your application and absorbed every aspect, every cloaked nuance of it, and are ready to uncover all. I see you have written here that you are interested in South Africa socially, could you expand on that? I want to make documentaries..., About South Africa? Well, yes..., Could you tell us about some of your ideas?

You would tell them about your ideas, but the truth is that documentary making is something that you tagged onto your application at the last minute, and you have not thought of any. With a growing sense of dread, you see that your stated interest in documentary was the aspect of your case that interested them, and your apparent inability to answer this simple question has taken them by surprise. You can see it: they had envisaged a young man of seventeen who is sure of himself, who is aware of politics and the social injustices of South Africa, and is ready—not only ready, but adamant, to correct them. They have instead been given a boy who does not know what he wants to do with his life, who is more concerned with the vague feelings and ideas that pass through his head than with the outside world, and who has already at this early age of seventeen grown weary of South Africa and its stereotypes, especially the stereotype that they seem to want you to play, the stereotype of the white person who wants to be saviour. They were hoping for an idealist, and instead they have chosen a cynic.

On the face of the one seated at the far left, you think you detect a look of pity growing. I have one idea, you begin. Go on, Well I've got a friend, he's Xhosa, and he invited me to join him for his initiation ceremony. Their interest is immediate and strong, as is your feeling that you have given yourself up, that you have betrayed Jabu.

One of them leans forward slightly. Really, Yes, and I've decided to go with him, I think I would like to make a documentary about... our experiences, That's fascinating, have you already made plans, No, not yet, When do you think you will go, Well, I'm not really sure. When they realise you are extemporising, their interest dwindles. Well, good luck, I think that's all we need for now, could you please send the next number through on your way out?

*

You never do accompany Jabu on his initiation, and when some months later he comes back from it your friendship begins to falter. The world that he now occupies has its own language and responsibilities, the language and responsibilities of a Xhosa manhood, which you are sure you could never understand. Before long you will write exams, and school, which had held fast onto you all your life, will finally loosen its grip, shoving you unceremoniously a world of uncertainty.

You have neither the money nor the inclination to go to university, and instead get a job at a small-fry publishing company, selling advertising that is worthless, but which you must pretend will deliver great returns. Every morning on the way to work, and in the evening on the way home, you sit on the train and think to yourself that you must get a move on and do something with your life. You have lost contact with people, you drift aimlessly, avoiding your friends, wondering what you ever had in common with them in the first place. From loneliness you begin riding third-class, taking comfort in being packed close with hundreds of others going to and from their jobs. You are the only white person, and somehow this is a comfort. But one afternoon, a woman stares at you in disgust, How dare you sit here, her face seems to say, How dare you think that you can take up our space when you can afford the first-class ticket? The shock of this minor confrontation is too much, and the following day you sit alone again.

Not only do you cease to take an interest in people, but you cease to take an interest in the future, in any possibility that you may have something to give. In flashes you see the possibilities of other paths to take, of ways to make an escape, but even as these arise they seem already to have vanished, leaving only the mundane reality, which every day grows more and more fixed. You will stay in South Africa. It holds onto you like a jealous mother, or worse, a drunk who has not finished telling you his sad and endless story. Somewhere along the line you have taken a wrong turn and lost your way. But where? Which small action was the wrong action? Or was it no fault of your own but just the impersonal forces of the world, driving you, like ash on the wind, this way and that?

The image comes to you clear as day as the train whines to a halt at your station one Friday evening: you are a leech, feeding off the country and giving nothing in return. And if you cannot give, if you do not know how to give, if you have nothing to give, what left is there to do but give up?

Notes on 'Nativity'

If 'Waiting Man' was James's answer to *Life & Times of Michael K*, 'Nativity' was his answer to *Boyhood*. This is particularly evident in his use of the second person, a highly unusual choice that seems a clear reference to Coetzee's use in the autobiographical fiction of the third person. Something of Coetzee's thinking in respect of this choice is illuminated in *Doubling the Point*: 'all autobiography is *autre*biography' (i.e. all autobiography is biography of another, of 'an other'). James appears both to be acquiescing to this idea at the same time as taking issue with the authorial distance implied by the remoteness of the third-person. If (he seems to want to say) a subject is present to an utterance, the correct form of address would be 'you' and not 'he' or 'she'. Thus, while Coetzee seems to suggest by his use of the third person that the narrating 'I' (ever-present but never invoked) is distant from the events described, James suggests that 'you' is in fact the more appropriate mode of address, since the 'he' that is addressed is indeed, in a very real sense *present to the self*. I, for one, disagree (how present *really* is our ten-year-old self to our fifty-year-old self?) but it is an interesting contestation of Coetzee's choice nonetheless.

Questions of grammar and syntax and epistemology aside, it is of particular interest to me that while involved with these (auto)biographical explorations, he was at the same time being drawn into another project, *Kariba*, the graphic novel to which I alluded in my prefatory remarks.

Kariba: the facts, gathered and recomposed for coherence

In 1950, having recently immigrated to Rhodesia, their grandfather found himself a job as junior architect in firm employed to design and oversee the construction of several outbuildings, labourer dwellings, and even a hospital at Kariba. The project necessitated weekly flights from his office in Salisbury to the Gwembe valley, where he could assess and report on the implementation of the plans. It was on these visits that he witnessed first-hand the building of the dam wall at Kariba.

While not a natural raconteur, their grandfather's stories of Kariba were in themselves so fascinating that the manner of the telling didn't much matter. It was from him that they first heard about Nyaminyami, the river god whose rage against the importunate Europeans was believed by 'the blacks' to be the cause of the Zambezi's hugely improbable flooding two years in a row. They heard also of Italian labourers—given in their grandfather's stories the treatment of somewhat superstitious and backward characters—who had fallen in the way of pouring concrete and whose bodies, irretrievable except by dynamite, to this day remain encased in the wall. The picture of Kariba that he painted was something of a frontier town, a place too small to have evolved the orderliness of a city and too large to be ordered in the neighbourly way of a close-knit village. There were men on the make, prostitutes, migrant labourers from all parts and of all sorts.

A rescue mission to relocate the wildlife from the floodplain to outlying areas named Operation Noah was also much discussed. A documentary had been made on the subject that in a sort of PR exercise was screened for years afterwards in Rhodesia. The effect of the operation was exaggerated, but its existence at a time when conservation was in its infancy was evidently notable. Parts of the original are available on YouTube (I found links to it in the dropbox folder) and one watches these clips with their dated style and narration sensible of the typically British understatement that belies an attitude of quietly assured triumph—something all too familiar in colonial era material.

While the stories that they were told no doubt gave them a distinct flavour of the time and place, it wasn't until a research trip in 2016 that the brothers visited Zimbabwe and Kariba. In the earlier notebooks James expresses some anxieties about this trip, particularly his concerns surrounding authenticity and authorship. Coetzee had influenced his ideas around the ethical consequences of pronouns. When seen in the context of the events of 2016, a time during which questions of identity and authorship were front-and-centre in

academic discourse, such anxieties are unsurprising. Exposed to these views on campus every day, he seemed to equivocate between two approaches, the details of which I will attempt to outline.

Kariba was originally conceived as a work of pseudo-fantasy. Most of the names and much of the historical setting and circumstances in the book have been drawn directly from history. In certain respects, especially in the illustration, great attention was given to achieving a believably 'real' 1950s Rhodesia (e.g. the architectural accuracy of the illustrations of the Salisbury city hall, photographs of which resemble the illustrations with remarkable fidelity). And yet into this recognisable history many ahistorical or fantasised places, people, and ideas were interwoven, creating at once a familiar and yet strange picture of a past that never was. In his diaries, James refers frequently to the problems that the mixture of the real and the fantasised created for him as he worked. In particular, he was concerned that by having set the story in an historical place and period they had acquired authorial responsibilities in respect of the recorded events that they simply could not meet. For example, when the dam was built, the Rhodesian government required the Tonga people living on the banks of the Zambezi to relocate their villages to areas outside the floodplain. Unsurprisingly, the relocations were met with resistance. In one case many Tonga were shot while resisting—effectively a massacre. To include an event like this in a children's book would be inappropriate, but the broader question of history remained: what were his obligations to it?

The first approach was to write a story set 'not in history but against it', thus 'providing by the story's disagreement with History a sort of counter-history' [capitals in original]. An approach such as this might profitably be compared to the imagined Cape Town or Petersburg in Coetzee's novels *Life & Times of Michael K* and *The Master of Petersburg*, but on the much more modest scale of the children's book script. The basic question is, however, the same: how can monolithic notions of history and identity be undermined, and how can reductionist tendencies of the reader be subverted?

Another approach would be to try to include the historical reality to a greater degree (this he soon dismissed as impossible given his constraints). Yet another would be to

completely disguise the source of the story's inspiration. But this approach, especially after the Kickstarter campaign² had taken place, seemed to him 'disingenuous and cowardly'. So the first of his anxieties was truth to 'History'. The second—related but perhaps more political—concerned the question of their 'rights' to the story he was in the process of inventing. The question that he believed would be asked was why they had felt they had the right to tell a story about a young black girl from a different culture and a different time? Wouldn't this be 'cultural appropriation'? What direct experience did they have that made them feel it was their story to tell? How could they hope without direct experience to do justice to the subject? Shouldn't they in fact rather be telling the story of young white, middle-class English boys growing up in the suburbs of Cape Town? (*vide* 'Nativity')

It is clear from his diaries that James responded at first quite bitterly to the idea that this was a valid critique:

Would anyone have suggested that in writing his entire world of characters Shakespeare was engaging unwittingly in heinous crimes of so-called "cultural appropriation"? The concept is flawed at its base. Since the Romantics it has been understood that the imagination is humankind's greatest power and that this power can be put to use in the service of deeper human understanding. To take what is not yours and pervert it is a crime, but to take what you see and hear and feel in the world (including from history) and attempt to turn it into something that will produce in your readers new and perhaps deeper understanding is an act which, far from being condemned, should be lauded as brave—as anyone who has tried to imagine themselves out of their otherwise quite narrow experience can attest.

There is an anxiety and defensiveness in the tone of these entries, a desire to put the questions aside and get on with the work. Several of the ideas he proposed were rejected out of hand by his brother as 'too academic' and 'not entertaining':

² Those readers unfamiliar with the Kickstarter platform may take comfort in knowing that before being enlightened by Google, I too was in the dark. It is a 'crowdfunding' platform on which ordinary citizens may pledge money to support a proposed project (books, devices, inventions, toys, etc.) and receive in return when the project is completed a version of the product that accords with their contribution.

Why has he chosen me to write this book? What about me has given him any indication whatsoever that I am the right person for the job? I have no interest in graphic novels or comics or animated films or even children's books. There are any number of brilliant storytellers in South Africa (or in Zimbabwe for that matter) better able to tell a 'tale', with its tiresome plot, its turns and counter turns, its character development and satisfying denouement. I suspect I have the answer, but to confront him with it would piss him off: it's that I am not the best writer he could get for the job, but the cheapest and easiest to control. Who but family can be kept on such a short leash?

The reality of the Kickstarter was that they had to fulfil certain obligations to backers who had already paid money for a product. One such obligation was that the book resemble the illustrations and promotional material put out before the script had been written. After several weeks of rejected ideas and dead ends, he began to feel that he'd been trapped on the one hand by these restrictions, and on the other by 'a gang of proscriptive left-wing fundamentalists' who he believed were in the process of 'taking over' the entertainment industry.

It is interesting to contrast these tirades with what his notes show he was engaged in daily: research. He combed the university libraries for every bit of information he could find on the building of the Kariba dam, the displacement of the Tonga, and mythologies relating to rivers. In addition, and rather contrasting the anger in the notebooks, the Dropbox file contains some forty research papers, many of which concern questions of identity and authorship. Whether any insights were derived from these is unclear; but that he was mindful of the dangerous territory he was entering cannot be doubted.

Besides these perhaps more academic questions of history and identity there were also commercial concerns to be considered: how could the story be made at once truthful and entertaining to children? What, really, made a story entertaining in the first place? Into this subject also he began to do research, procuring several 'How to' -style books marketed at would-be screenwriters and graphic novelists. Of these, he didn't on the whole have much to say that was favourable:

All these fucking books say the same thing and not one of them bothers to question the foundations of their argument: if telling a good story were as simple as following a “mythological structure” with all the story “beats” in the right places, the ratio of gold to schlock at the movies would be infinitely better than it is (provided, of course, that the dummies using these cheatsheets were able to follow the rules). Here’s an idea: rather than mindlessly follow a dictum like “everything reverses at the midpoint”, why not find out why it is that, in many (but not all) cases, audiences respond to this pattern approbatively? Are we optimising our stories to win in a game where most pleasure equals most meaning (equals most money)? Or are we trying to write stories that ask why it is that we, as story-obsessed creatures, are so partial to certain story patterns? The real question is: what does our desire that stories conform to these patterns tell us about ourselves?

From these entries the mounting frustrations of being hemmed in by formal obligations are clear. In the early weeks his brother Daniel had refused to use a frame narrative, which James had seen as a means to add an interpretive layer that would set them at a remove from the tale being recounted, making the book ‘dialogic’ and ‘heteroglossic’.³ It is hard to tell from the notebooks alone precisely how he envisaged this, but it seems that the idea was to frame the *Kariba* tale (much as it is presented in the attached typescript) within a story that brings us to the current time. His narrator? An unnamed character from the book whose identity and significance would gradually be revealed in the telling of the tale in a sort of Conradesque fashion. The idea was rejected, I fancy, for the obvious reason that a narrative frame is something of a cliché in these times, and puts the reader at a remove from the story—something one would wish to avoid when trying to open the eyes of young children to a fantastic world.

So the first approach, to write into the book the critical tools to interpret its processes, was if not altogether out of the question, then simply too difficult a task, while the second approach (a frame narrative) was rejected from the start.

³ These terms, taken from Mikhail Bakhtin, arrived in his critical vocabulary thanks to Coetzee, whose work has been said to eschew ‘monologic’ discourse. I have other ideas.

The question remained. How could Siku's story be told while respecting historical truth? It is not clear that the question was resolved or even consciously put aside. The diary entries grow irregular over time. There are countless angry entries referring to feeling trapped:

Nothing of truth or value can be written under these circumstances. If you know in advance where you are going, the journey there is dreary labour. It is the artist's state of *unknowing* that makes the art worth something if it is worth anything. Perhaps my delusion was to believe that writing this book could result in anything more than moral commonplaces. If the 'woke-brigade' wish to lash me for the sin of having written about a black girl, they may as well lash me for my other sins too; namely, having perpetrated this book.

Whatever we may say about *Kariba*, its merits and flaws, or indeed the difficulties that writing it entailed, I have appended to this essay the most recent typescript I could find in the Dropbox folder (there were several, not always logically labelled, and this one, like the rest, contains plenty of passionate errors in spelling and grammar). The illustrated book can be found at Clarke's Bookshop on Long Street, as well as the Book Lounge, cnr Buitenkant and Roeland street, for R395 (paperback, full colour).

The picture emerges from the developing fluid... a writer distressed by his being drawn into a genre in which he does not feel at home, a writer with increasing frequency delving into his biography for the keys to free him from the traps of fiction, but finding instead only new traps....

It was about the time of his writing the first drafts of *Kariba* that James produced a short story, 'Old Iron'. Though little is written about the story itself in his diary, there is an essay fragment that I find illuminating. I believe 'Old Iron' was his attempt to write 'without style'. It seems very often that young writers fall under the influence of this or that hero and struggle to find their own voice. Having read reams of short stories, he set out once again to write 'straight' fiction. That is to say, fiction in the realist tradition.

I can't bear the thought of writing postmodern (post-mortem) fiction. I swore years ago that I would never succumb to the disease that is self-reflexivity. How many times do we need to hear (in thin fictional guise) the writer's screams, "I'M MAKING THIS UP! IT'S ALL MADE UP! LOOK AT ME!" as they fuss over the corpse of the canon. For heaven's sake, it's been done before. It hasn't only been done before, it's been done *to death*. If, as Horace said, our job is to delight and to instruct, whence the delight? The novel has been taken apart and put back together a thousand times. We *know* it's all made up. Those who buy novels that aren't already sadists buy them to see justice done to the complexities and wonders of a life of feeling. The postmodernists will grudgingly oblige only to undermine everything by setting off all manner of fireworks in the middle of a death scene. They'll draw you in, then slap you in the face, 'HAZAAA! GOT YOU AGAIN! You were believing all this, weren't you?' The novel has never been very good as a vehicle for philosophy. Coetzee's early books are testament to this. Very interesting *texts*, very thought-provoking, but as novels, *failures*.

Along the way, this diary entry evolves into what appears to be the fragment of an undeveloped (and rather chatty) essay:

This brings me to an important question: what place does the novel, which is, properly speaking, a European form, have in South Africa? It is essentially a bourgeois literary product; and in South Africa the concept of a bourgeoisie doesn't apply, our social divisions being (still) hitched stubbornly to racial divisions. To write a novel in England is to work within a tradition, and one can try (if one is not a hack) to do this in a way that gives new relevance to the form. To write a novel in South Africa is a different story. If the novel is adapted to its material, then it must *as a form* contain traces of that material. In other words, the novel is not an empty form. Like anapaestic verse, or iambic pentameter, the novel is inextricably linked to what has been done with it in the past. One cannot when writing those meters easily avoid imitation of, in the first instance, Swinburne, and in the second, Shakespeare. Sound and rhythm invite sense before sense has been made. (If you were wondering why Plato thought the

poets rogues, now you know.) The same applies to the novel form: it invites a submerged *weltanschauung*. This is why the most interesting South African fictions are not good novels, but fictions that probe in their very structure what the novel is, or, as the jargon-stuffed academics like to say, the novel's 'episteme'. (cf. *Disgrace*, which is concerned throughout with the problems arising from Lurie's geographical/recent historical context in conflict with his cultural reference to Europe). Gordimer takes a step in the other direction. She treats the medium, after the views of Georg Lukács, as a form to be put in the service of social change, ~~choosing to insert into it a 'content' (story, narrative structure, style) that is time/place appropriate~~ [deletion in original]. This is perhaps too harsh, since she had merits as a literary artist (principally in her short stories). But taken as a whole, her work will not last. Great novels do not rely for their appreciation upon knowledge of the intricacies of a local politics. They rely upon our human interest in feeling. This is why we can today read Chekhov or Tolstoy with interest; it is a kind of perpetual immediacy. In the end, no matter how much the novel is beaten out of shape, it will either perish or survive on its own terms.

And again, a few days later:

In South Africa there is a trend, especially among white writers, away from social realism popular during the apartheid years (among authors like Gordimer, La Guma, Rive, writers of the Drum decade, and much of Brink and the Afrikaans cohort) and toward science fiction, and, to a lesser extent, detective fiction. Some might suggest that this is simply a reflection of the changes in the global fiction market, and I'm sure that this constitutes part of an answer. The other part, that part that interests me, is why science fiction and not, say, the romance novel (also experiencing a horrid global boom) should have been taken up so eagerly by the local fictionists. Good science fiction, of which there is pitifully little, is written to *say* something about the present time that cannot be said with straight realism. Bad science fiction uses the tropes of the genre with no greater purpose than to entertain and is favoured by the sort of reader

fascinated with space ships, or the robots and gizmos we might in the distant future be foolish enough to develop. Both the good and bad employ in majority almost every fictional technique available to realism, producing such atrocities as this:

Scintil addressed B2, whose face sank. 'Have you prepped the hyper-drive?'

'No,' said B2, gazing out of the fracto-portal into the abyss. 'I have been meaning to tell you, I'm going to move ship. Creyon, my largo planet, has sent me a grammograph requesting I return at once.'

Scintil looked beyond the nebulas and could see a future coming in which she would again be alone.

~~The good news is that most of the science fiction writers working in South Africa seem ostensibly to be motivated by the nobler intention of enriching our understanding of the present time. The bad news is that one suspects that in truth many choose the genre not because straight realism would be unsuitable to their purpose, but to avoid disclosing an embarrassingly marginal knowledge of South African society. Dickens couldn't write characters outside of his social class (*vide* Orwell's 'Charles Dickens'), although he tried, and it is no great shame to find as he did that writing about characters of a different culture, social class, or linguistic and cultural background is rather difficult. But living as we do in a country where social separation has been the common story of our past, we feel it incumbent upon ourselves, in fiction and elsewhere, to right this imbalance, and are consequently left with fewer options than we should like. Nadine Gordimer solved this problem by changing her life, a decision Camus would have commended. She made a point of being politically active, of socialising with members of different races and social classes, and for her efforts was rewarded with an endless supply of material. (I do not mean to imply that a search for material was her motivation.) Without underestimating her powers of imagination, which were great, Gordimer commanded a view of a much broader swath of the population than could many of her white contemporaries, or indeed the subsequent generations. Had she remained ensconced in the suburbs of~~

Johannesburg all her life it is doubtful whether she would have written much of interest. This may seem trite, but writers are oftentimes precisely the sorts of people who would like nothing better than to lead just such lives. Housman had the right idea and knew that when writers get too political, too vatic and proscriptive, that they are usually very far away from art. In South Africa today there is a tension between the desire to remain separate, to 'keep to one's self', and the social injunction to participate, to live an exemplary life, motivated by the 'right' political principles. One wonders what the local literati would have said of a South African Emily Dickinson or Richard Wilbur. Probably something about the 'irrelevance' of their art, given our political moment. It sounds as if I am bitter about this state of affairs, but that is quite far from the truth. What I am trying to illustrate is that writers in this country are caught on a knife edge.

Who can say honestly that, looking for something to read, they relish the thought of perusing the South African fiction aisle? It is from some half-suppressed sense of political duty that we read our contemporaries ('support local', 'stop being euro-centric' etc.), but certainly not because we get the same excitement and energy that someone like, say, Franzen is able to engender in his readers. Writers are created by their readers. Silence invites sound. Can we really say that without his readership, Franzen would have come into existence? Why is it then that South African novels either seem to be addressed to themselves or to an undefined 'international' readership? It is a problem with a single root: in South Africa one hasn't an average reader to address. There is no *we* to speak of, no *us*, only *you* and *me*. And today, at a time when it is widely believed that our perceptions and attitudes are ineluctably conditioned by our racial heritage, making us epistemologically *incapable* of understanding the 'lived experience' of other races, how can we sustain the idea of a society? How do we 'rediscover the ordinary' (Ndebele) when we do not even agree that the most basic facts of South African life constitute a shared experience? Those that hold this view seem to wish to retain by force a sort of privilege of difference: *You cannot know me*. For several hundred years this has been understood in philosophy (*vide* the problem of other minds). Its logical conclusion? If members of one race cannot

~~understand the lived experience of another, why should members of the *same* race be capable of understanding the lived experience of other individuals within it? They cannot. They can only understand their own, private experiences.... And we have arrived at the concept of the *individual*, an idea the Enlightenment thinkers banged on about until slavery was ended. The fact is, we are social creatures and we are creatures of belief. Whether we like to admit it or not, we *need* to believe in certain things to sustain ourselves and to work toward a common goal. If that goal is democracy and peace, we had better settle on some foundational stuff, such as, Do we agree that tolerance and understanding are paramount? Do we agree that, while we can never fully understand the 'lived experience' (the pain, or indeed the joy) of another individual, that we should *endeavour* to do so?~~

Silly, unsubtle, a thorough mass of oversimplifications. How about showing your forebears and contemporaries a little understanding?

[deletions all in original]

I quote at such length (with his deletions included, odious as they are) to show the vicissitudes of a mind trying to come to grips with its problem. Were *you* able to pay attention to this?

Let us now turn to more fruitful territory with the short story 'Old Iron'.

The Proper Presentation of the Problem

Old Iron

‘Ou ysters! Ou ysters!’ he shouted, as they came clip-clop down the street. The horse brought the buggy to a standstill alongside us. We were in the driveway, Willie’s nose in his satchel, looking for the Vernier callipers.

‘Damn it,’ he said. It was early and still cold and he was already wheezing before we’d even left.

‘Should I go look?’ I said. ‘Maybe you left them on the board?’

I peered into the back of the bakkie to see if it might be there.

The horse snorted, switched its tail as the cars drove past. ‘*Ou ysters, Meneer?* Nothing for us this morning?’

He had on a dirty white cap that sat lightly on his head, as if underneath it he was hiding an apple.

Willie pulled his head out and scowled at the man. ‘*Niks nie*. Same as yesterday and the day before. I gave you everything last week. Go ask someone else.’

I pretended to cough. It always embarrassed me when Willie was rude to people.

‘No offcuts maybe, *Meneer?*’

‘*Niks beteken niks*. You want to take my bakkie? Here, come, take my bakkie you can melt that down get yourself a five rand.’

The man looked surprised. Slowly he began to laugh—a long wheezing cackle like you hear from the drunks by the Drop-In. He flicked his stick and the horse heaved away the buggy in a long, slow rattle that merged with his laughter.

For the last few weeks while we’d been clearing the workshop, the carhorse man had been coming. The closure, the clean-out, the whole thing was out of the blue: one morning Willie had come in to work and said that he was dying. ‘You’re going to be unemployed soon. If you want to leave now to find a new job, that’s fine.’ He needed some kind of treatment and it was going to cost. I thought he was joking—Willie likes strange jokes sometimes—but he insisted it was the truth. ‘I’m a sick old bugger, but not like that. I wouldn’t joke about something like that.’ And then when he got serious I believed him because he knew what had happened to my parents—that was why four years ago he’d given me this job.

But the sale had him the *moer* in. Sometimes he'd look at a tool he'd owned and used for fifty years, fiddle with it, heft it as if its weight would give him a clue to what it was worth. When eventually he set down a price in his 'bible', a notebook he carried around with the prices of everything, he'd curse like a man defeated in a bargain.

Willie had always been a kind of solid substance, cold but reliable—like a piece of old iron. Every Christmas he'd give me a couple of hundred extra to buy something for my grandma and little brother Chris. 'Between you and me, I don't believe in God,' he said one year. 'But Christmas happens either way and you're going to need money.' That was how he was, matter-of-fact, no bullshit.

To sell up the workshop he'd called some people—'resellers'. The way they swaggered around the workshop and made jokes to one another, they looked to me more like a bunch of school bullies. First they'd come for the big machines. The machinery was old but good, but they kept using the age to beat Willie down on price. The Schaublins were expensive, everyone knew that, but they fetched very little anyway, and Willie clenched his jaw. 'So if it's old it's worth nothing? They know it's cheap at the price. No bloody decency is the bloody problem.' I could tell he was furious, and by the time they'd worked their way down to the Emcos he'd been worn thin. 'If you can't offer me a fair amount, get out.' Evidently the buyer thought Willie was pretty funny, because he only smiled and told his 'boys' to reverse up the trucks. Even if Willie hadn't given up and let the stuff go, already more than half the workshop was gone.

Then Willie came in one morning and said, 'No more.' No more clearing out. His eyes were shining, like when you've been sharpening drill bits under the fluorescent lights too long, except he hadn't been sharpening drill bits. Maybe you'll say it's selfish, but I was relieved. Willie always used to tell stories about his days as an apprentice and tell me what a damn shame it was that the tradition was dying out. I was one of the few who was willing to stick it out, and he was one of the last of the old timers, and without him I didn't know where I'd go or what I'd do.

*

Against my fingers the padlocks were like blocks of ice. The fluorescents flickered as I passed the drill presses to the board where the Vernier was kept. Unfinished jobs lay on the bench. The order book was almost empty and we both knew why: people had started going to Aubrey Isaacs up the road where you could buy a whole replacement gear for nearly the same

price we charged to repair one. Isaacs drove past the workshop every morning, first in his Toyota, then later his Mercedes, but Willie didn't seem to notice, or, if he did notice, didn't seem to care. He arrived at seven every morning, had his coffee break and Danish at eleven, lunch at one, and left at five—every single day. Even as we were emptying out the old iron, the bits-and-bobs Willie had kept, he had me doing the last jobs in the book, brazing in new blanks to be toothed later in the gear cutter.

There it was – the Vernier. He'd left it next to the job-cards and a half-drunk cup of coffee. I put it in my pocket and hurried back. Willie already had the bakkie started and the heater on full blast.

'Where was it?'

'By the job-cards'

He shook his head as though to say, 'And now I'm losing my mind too?'

A few minutes later the wheezing started. I didn't know what was killing him exactly; he hadn't told me. The first time he'd spoken about it was also the last time. Whatever it was, I was sure he'd got worse in the last month. For example, right then, when he tried to turn his neck to see out the back, I heard him make a groaning sound. Quite a pathetic sound, and hard to ignore. But that was what I was supposed to do: ignore it. Once, I'd made a comment about his breathing, but I learned fast not to do it again – he wasn't shy about letting you know when you'd crossed the line. I remember he had this huge drive gear in the vice and was hand-filing a tooth in it, *squeak squeak squeak*. It's tiring work, let me tell you. Anyway, what happened was, he was out of breath and I saw him rest against the vice, pale like he might faint or something. I switched off the lathe and offered to help.

'See that lathe over there?' he said.

'Ja,' I said.

'Well it's not going to run by itself.'

After that I just let him wheeze and wheeze until finally he'd pretend he needed the toilet and go off to catch his breath. After all, I was just an employee, and it was 'none of my bloody business'.

We drove in silence along the N1, the sun coming up on our right above the factories, then Brackenfell, Kraaifontein. The auction was being held on a farm in Joostenbergvlakte. He'd seen the ad and called me the night before. When the phone rang, grandma was helping

Chris with his homework—‘Adverbs are?’ ‘I know this one,’ he said, but I could tell he was lying. Little shit had been out behind the car park with his catapult shooting squirrels.

‘Jacob. Can you be here early tomorrow?’ Willie said.

‘Okay. How come?’

‘We’re going to an auction.’

‘For what?’

‘I want to see how much I’ll get for your organs on the black market,’ he said, deadpan as ever. Then, ‘We’re going to buy some tools.’

That was all he’d told me. I’d never pretended to understand Willie. Maybe that’s why I’m the only apprentice left. Even Quentin got an offer for a job from Aubrey and came in one morning embarrassed to tell Willie he’d accepted, even though he hadn’t finished his first year as an appy. But despite everything, I couldn’t leave him—even then as I knew he’d finally gone crazy.

My breath had made a patch of steam on the window, but I was still creaking with the cold like an old robot. I rubbed my hands together and sniffed. We’d turned off the highway into farmland. There were cows alongside the road. The smell of grass that’s just been mowed came in through the window. Fog was floating over the road and as we passed through it I heard his wheezing again, this time louder. Eventually it grew so bad that he had to pull over.

‘This weather. Man. Fucks the breathing.’ He coughed, hands still hanging on the wheel. I waited, not sure what to do, hoping it would stop. He lifted his hand and pointed into the back.

‘What?’

Something I couldn’t hear. In a hurry now, I went around, opened up. Under his old army sleeping bag, which he used as a tarp, he’d hidden a gym bag (as if he ever visited the gym!). There wasn’t a pair of Nikes inside it, but an oxygen tank.

‘Here.’ I held out the mask. ‘How much?’

He plugged the mask onto his face and opened the tap. It hissed into him. After a few minutes he was breathing slower, steaming up the little see-through cup. As I watched this happen I felt the urge to shake him and punch him right in his face. He’d thought to bring an oxygen tank—when had he gotten it?—but hadn’t bothered to tell me.

‘Let’s go back,’ I said. ‘You need to be in a hospital.’

Above the mask his eyebrows raised. I went to his door and looked in through the window.

‘No,’ he said, face straight ahead, stock-still. ‘We’re going to this bloody auction.’

‘Alright. But there’s no way you’re driving us.’ My voice surprised me. It sounded sharp, loud. He breathed heavily into the mask and for a second I thought he was going to put foot and drive away without me.

*

‘I’m sorry, those are the rules.’ She had bleached hair, rough as Labrador fur, and blue nails which just then she was tapping on the melamine desk that supported her massive tits. We were in what I guessed had once been a *voorkamer*, now empty except for two bookcases stacked with files, her desk, and five different-shaped and -sized office chairs against the wall. Two men were staring at me and Willie as he argued with the girl.

‘Yes, I know, you just said. But I don’t *have* the money, and I’m here, so what now?’

She cleared her throat. ‘That’s the rules. I’m sorry. I don’t make them.’ The rule was that you had to put down five grand just to bid, but Willie didn’t know this and we hadn’t drawn the cash. We most probably had maximum five hundred between us.

‘Apparently...’ said Willie. He looked me in the eye for the first time since I’d forced him out of the driver’s seat, then quickly looked back at her. ‘Maybe you can tell me who *does* make the rules?’

‘I do.’ The voice came from behind us. It was a short man in a polar neck and mirror-black shoes that clicked on the tiles as he came over. He looked more like he was about to measure you for a suit than to sell you machinery. As he came close I could smell the stink of his deodorant. He stank almost as bad as the bleached woman.

‘Who are you?’ said Willie.

‘I’m the auctioneer. What’s the problem?’

Willie explained. I wasn’t listening to his words but his breathing. Slowly it had returned to normal.

One of the men in the corner lit a cigarette and watched. The thing I remember about him, he had a parrot—at least I think it was a parrot—perched on his shoulder. Every so often it would nibble on his ear and, without evening flinching, he’d turn his head just enough that it would let go.

‘Here’s what I’m going to do for you,’ the auctioneer was saying to Willie. Willie was told to find ‘collateral’ in place of the cash. Having nothing else, he suggested the Opel bakkie. They peered at it through the window and the man cleared his throat. ‘Ja. That’ll be alright.’

A huge warehouse stood at the end of the path, the doors open and men milling around inside. A Mercedes 4x4 pulled up and parked. It had a custom number plate, 'CA DUMILE'. Two men climbed out. One was small and carried a clipboard and the other was big. The big one wore a suit.

Willie coughed weakly. 'I *hate* bloody auctions.'

As for me, I'd never been to an auction before, but the face of each person in the warehouse had its own expression of concentration, nervousness. All except the big man. His head was like a glazed clay pot, shiny and expressionless.

We passed through the warehouse, looking at everything—everything in it, all the objects, were so weird that it was like being in a museum. At the front was a machine for making toilet paper, and a roller with guillotines to separate the long roll into the familiar size; bandsaws for cutting meat, several chests of tool-drawers, generators, modular shelving, a pneumatic twenty-ton press, several arbor presses, and there, right at the back, Willie's Colchester Chipmaster, Emco 10, and Schaublin 12 inch lathes—everything that only two weeks ago he'd sold. I looked at him and I saw the corners of his mouth turn up slightly at my surprise. We crossed to the opposite side of the warehouse where the machines were standing. There, alongside the lathes, was his tool cabinet, Willie's initials engraved in the parallel clamps hanging on the board, W.M.F..

'I don't get it,' I said. Voices on the other side of the warehouse went loud, then soft.

Willie smiled, became serious. He cleared his throat. 'Listen here, Jacob. I want you to understand something. You get to a certain age, people start telling you to do things. It's not like when you're young. When you're young you do what you like. If you feel like bunking school to go fishing, to go the movies and kiss your girlfriend or whatever, you go. But when you're old, people want you in a home. You know? Not just your children—everyone. It doesn't matter who you are, to them you start to look like something that shouldn't exist anymore. So they try to pretend you *don't* exist.' He paused to catch his breath, but I didn't interrupt.

'Maybe this makes no sense at your age, I don't know. What I'm saying is, is that this is not just stuff.' He pointed at the Colchester and then sort of petted it. 'It's not just stuff. It's not just business. Maybe it is to them,'—he pointed in the direction of the door—'But not to me.'

With his thumbnail he scraped a streak of dry grease from the tailstock barrel. He looked disappointed, and I could tell he felt he hadn't said what he'd wanted to. One side of his moustache curled up as he smiled at me, as though to say he'd given up talking. 'Let's go see about the bidding,' he said.

*

What did it mean? I didn't know, and I didn't have the time to ask him what he planned to do with the machines if he won the auction. We only had a month left on the lease at the workshop and Willie couldn't even lift a hammer. But somehow—I don't know why—somehow it didn't matter. To him this was his chance to fix something that he'd allowed to break, to make repairs, to put everything in order.

The auctioneer carried a portable amplifier, which looked like our workshop fan, and a gold microphone. Several men stood by the toilet paper machine. The big man, I saw, had found (or brought?) a chair and had sat himself on it, his assistant next to him looking with a frown at something written on his clipboard. The auctioneer looked at his watch, fiddled with the microphone. It crackled on. 'Welcome to Coetzee Auctioneers at our Joostenbergvlakte premises. We will now begin the bidding starting with lot 1a.'

Before Willie could even look at the list, the auctioneer had launched into a stuttering banjo riff of prices that settled, stayed, then flew on again at the nod of a head or the flick of a finger. In any case, it was twenty minutes before the bidding on Willie's machines began. During that time this happened: on the items like the toilet-paper roller, there were two bidders, and it went after only a few seconds. On the machine tools like the arbor presses, the big man's assistant did the bidding, always checking first before raising the price. Why he didn't do his own bidding I couldn't say, but when he bid, he won.

Eventually lot 34c arrived. The auctioneer started and everybody was nodding like crazy. Not thirty seconds later I realised we'd already reached the price Willie had sold the stuff for. I nudged him but he waved me away. What was going through his head? Everyone but the big man had dropped out. I felt I had to do something, to stop the man from bidding Willie into bankruptcy. But everything happened so fast, it was like watching something galloping off a cliff. By the time the auctioneer had yelled 'Sold!' into the mic and Willie had won, the price was more than twice what the machines were worth.

*

We were silent as we drove. When I'd gone for the driver's door Willie hadn't even made a comment. He'd reclined his seat all the way, opened the oxygen and fallen asleep, limp as if he'd been knocked out flat by a fist.

The forms he'd signed sat on the dashboard. What was he going to do? I felt scared, as though something terrible was just around the corner. I was angry and desperate at the same time. I thought about going to the flat, picking grandma and Chris up, and driving the four of us until we got out of South Africa, across the border into Botswana or somewhere. I wanted to escape this whole crazy place, get out, get away from greedy men and their fucking money. We could plant seeds and grow vegetables, live off the land... Ridiculous! I slammed my hands against the steering wheel.

Willie woke up.

'Where should we go?' I asked.

He coughed. 'To the workshop,' he said. 'Take the route along the M5. There's still work to do.'

I said nothing. We always drove that way and I thought I knew why. Either for my sake or his, he wanted to avoid driving past the corner where my parents had been killed.

'Stop,' he said. We were just past the station. 'You get out here. I'm going home now.'

'My wallet's in the workshop,' I lied. I didn't want to leave him. He was pale, thin.

He pulled out forty rand from his breast pocket and shoved it into my hand. 'That'll do you for a couple of Danishes and tomorrows ticket too,' he said.

*

Chris had turned a corner of the lounge into a sandpit. We live in a small flat without even a communal garden. The parks are dangerous, so Grandma sometimes lets him do this when the weather is bad. But this time it'd spilled over and my boots crunched as I walked to the kitchen. 'Christopher!' I shouted. I found him in grandma's room in front of the TV. 'If you haven't done your homework,' I said, 'I swear... you're not going to watch any more TV for the whole month.'

He stared at me.

'Where's grandma?' I asked.

'At the shop,' he said. A dribble of snot was running from his nose. I went over to grandma's bedside table and pulled a tissue from the box. 'Come here,' I said. He squirmed as I wiped away the snot. 'I'm sorry,' I said.

He spent ages cleaning away the sand. I watched him over the top of the newspaper that gets delivered free on Thursdays. I never read it, but today I needed a distraction and TV wasn't going to do it. Anyway, there he was on page five, the man from the auction. 'Local Business Wins Employee Award,' the headline read. The article stated that Mr Dumile Vika had recently been nominated for the Development Award. It listed growth figures of his company and featured words from an employee: 'Mr Vika is good to us. He looks after us.'

*

With the side of my sleeve I rubbed the window and peered inside. Willie had never been late before, but it was already eight and he hadn't come. The Danishes in my bag were still warm from the bakery and my stomach rumbled, but I was not going to eat without Willie. It was cold and I folded myself up against the wall, sort of hugging my knees.

After a while I found myself for some reason thinking of a night, years ago, when Willie was over at my parents' house for dinner. It must have been just after his wife had divorced him because he came around alone. Willie was older than my father but they'd worked together at some point, I don't know where, and my parents had invited him around. Anyway, Garlick, our cat, had climbed up the curtain during supper and pulled the rail right off its hooks, and my father and Willie were on chairs putting it back up when Willie made this drawn-out fart. Chris was still small at the time and I remember looking at him and both of us trying not to laugh. We thought it was the most hilarious thing, but my father didn't seem to have heard. Willie pretended like nothing had happened. We went back to the table and ate our suppers. Then my mother, who I was sure had heard, started talking about her church group or something, and all I can remember thinking was how stupid it was that we all hadn't just laughed about it.

My hands wouldn't warm even as I rubbed them. Then I heard him coming, clip-clop down the street. Like a sign in front of the sun, he looked down on me. My knees were stiff with the cold and I imagined how sore it must be for the horse to trot on tar all day. I waited for him to ask me what I knew he was going to ask, but he didn't. 'Where's the old man?' he said instead.

'He's late.'

He looked ahead, coughed loudly and spat over his shoulder into the street. It was disgusting.

'I've got nothing for you,' I said. 'No iron. *Geen yster.*'

He nodded slowly. With his stick he flicked the horse. I watched the old thing drag the buggy into the traffic, cars driving wide to overtake.

'Hey,' I shouted after him. 'Come back tomorrow!'

(Not So) Novel Ambitions

What can be said about ‘Old Iron’? It is by far the most coherent piece of fiction that James produced during his time as my student and represents a concerted effort to work within a narrative structure, traditional to the point of being Chekhovian. The earlier pieces evince signs of an incipient talent for textural description and scene construction, but with ‘Old Iron’ he showed himself capable of putting these to work in a story.

While reading this piece, my curiosity got the better of me, and I began wondering to what extent his fiction had drawn on fact. Why did I care? All fiction draws on reality to some extent, and, like wishing to know the dietary preferences of one’s favourite writer, trying to establish biographical details of this kind seems vulgar. Had the young man addressed in Shakespeare’s sonnets really been his lover, would it matter? Of course not, but speculation continues. I confess that my interest *was* vulgar. I *did*, if only from prurient interest, want to know these details. Had James modelled this young apprentice after himself?

My question took me to Joostenbergvlakte. It turns out that while there is no company by the name of Coetzee Auctioneers, there is indeed a warehouse in which auctions are held. I watched one take place, noticing for instance that the portable speaker used by the auctioneer looked rather fan-like; but I learned little more than this, except perhaps that the types who visit auctions (at least ones in Joostenbergvlakte) are promising material for fictionists of a Chekhovian bent.

Ensnared in my little office, I will sometimes stare from the window for hours, hiding from students. I do not wish to be bothered. Why am I engaged in writing this? I weave and weave and weave... to what end? Occasionally someone comes knocking, but I pretend not to be here: I do not wish to be disturbed by whatever characters wait on the other side of that door; I am here, but not here. What am I to do? What, really, am I? His supervisor. His *supervisor*: overseer, shepherd. I have printed out every word and still am no closer to forming a picture of who he was. I think of our meetings, our discussions: they seem remote, like dreams after waking. As I read and read, I fail to make sense of things. I feel his eye upon me. He is gone, but I, the guilty, am left to finish his work: interminable work!

In his diary:

‘The year my parents died
one that summer one that fall

three months and three days apart
 I moved into the house
 where they had lived their last years
 it had never been theirs
 and was still theirs in that way
 for a while
 echoes in every room
 without a sound
 all the things that we
 had never been able to say
 I could not remember
 doll collection
 in a china cabinet
 plates stacked on shelves
 lace on drop-leaf tables
 a dried branch of bittersweet
 before a hall mirror
 were all planning to wait
 the glass doors of the house
 remained closed
 the days had turned cold
 and out in the tall hickories
 ...'

The fragment ends. Where is it from? I seem to recall...

The lamps in my flat have begun to flicker again. There is something wrong with the electricity here. Every few weeks I must replace them. Pop! They burst one by one and I am in darkness; or if there is battery left in my laptop, I am lit in its malevolent blue like a demented chemist brewing up who-knows-what.

I am getting nowhere. I feel as if I have been here forever. I go to the street. The wind blows, the rain falls, the sun shines. Cloud. Evening comes. Today is the first Thursday of

the month and the streets are awash with lipsticked girls in sheaths of denim, out for the art. A denim sheath. Where do these words come from?

I stumble into a gallery and, free vinegar in my fist, peer into the photographs hanging there: young bodies! When did I grow so old? I recognise a student. In the photograph she is completely nude. I blanch or blush; but who is to say, for there is no mirror. Those around me seem not to have noticed, so I look again. Ravishing!

Dizzy with wine I return like Odysseus. Why Odysseus? Dizzy Odysseus, did he see us?

Coffee. I must return to sense, to form, to the shopping list! God praise the shopping list, its certainties, its promise, like the gaping mouth of a baby, of *life!*

I have high hopes of discovering whose dolt I am.

He would return to the Chekhovian mode several times over the following year as he attempted to bring characters in a novel to life, so to speak. About this work, which remains unfinished, he made many notes, sometimes only suggestions for scenes, sometimes outlines for a character he wanted to work into the book. As you will notice from the sections quoted (whose original dated divisions I have for the sake of interest let remain) he would write in short bursts of a few days before his inspiration or ideas abandoned him. This was always something of a mystery to me, since it seemed from the notebook entries about his vision for the novel, and indeed from the scenes themselves, that he had material rich enough to warrant further development. Before the sections themselves, I have quoted for context pages from his diary that are, so far as I am able to tell, coeval with the novel fragments:

[Diary]

A masters (?) student in Amsterdam, writing his thesis on photography. Obsessed with Cartier-Bresson and the European and American moment in photography happening in the 60s (the mythos surrounding Magnum etc.). Talks about Sontag, Barthes, Berger, Benjamin. These ideas, his attachment to them, an indication of something unresolved within him. Himself an avid but talentless photographer, a collector. Anxieties about his remoteness from the world. His whole being a kind of photograph, possessing the essential qualities of the photograph: vagueness of meaning, sentimentality, morbidity. He has never loved, does not believe himself capable of it. Experience, he feels, does not happen to him, but passes him by.

Amsterdam. Attachment to and detachment from place. In moving towards it, in capturing it on celluloid, he grows ever further away from it. The Zen arrow that will only hit its target when the archer gives herself over to something, is at the mercy of something. Control = death.

Scenes from fantasies turn into life, scenes from life that turn gradually into fantasy: bicycles floating above the city.

Photographs. The photographer mentor travels for twenty years, sending negatives by post back to an office in Amsterdam: a man trying to remember a forgotten fact.

Meaning

When I die, I will see the lining of the world.

The other side, beyond bird, mountain, sunset.

The true meaning, ready to be decoded.

What never added up will add Up,

What was incomprehensible will be comprehended.

- And if there is no lining to the world?

If a thrush on a branch is not a sign,

But just a thrush on the branch? If night and day

Make no sense following each other?

And on this earth there is nothing except this earth?

- Even if that is so, there will remain

A word wakened by lips that perish,

A tireless messenger who runs and runs

Through interstellar fields, through the revolving galaxies,

And calls out, protests, screams.

[note: Czeslaw Milosz]

Rome-Florence-Luca-Pisa-Sienna-Amsterdam-Morocco-Paris-Krakow?-Krakow-Paris?-
Amsterdam-Cape Town.

Shifts in the universe of one's ideas as quick sometimes as the change of landscape.

A mythical structure to support or deconstruct the work?

To have one's bicycle rudely directed by a tram track.

Crashing world, indifferent to our desires.

How the imagining of what is absent can be used to evoke a sense of place much more successfully than by bald description. A vision of something gone....

Looking out over the Dutch sea—the coast of England is almost visible. Turning my back on a world, a world to come.

I sit in the airport like a sinner, waiting to hear my number called.

After winter rain in cape town: blank ease as after sex. How could memory persist in such cleanness? The criminal in us makes history.

A search for causes—the folly of it, and yet the significance it imparts.... Will knowing who our ancestors were change us? Will knowing where we were defeated change us? Will knowing change us? To judge by our actions, even the path that leads nowhere is better than no path at all.

The existential horror: to believe that you are in control and therefore already dead.

No joy taken

But what is given.

The job of the writer: to make things truer than if they had happened. The meaninglessness of history like crushing stones—the tiny call from within it that meaning must be found.

Why the experience itself insufficient? Because without the mediating analyst, without the nascent Freud of the imagination, life is images without apparent meaning—a process of collection, a trying-to-see but never seeing: the partial vision before the infinite forgetting.

experience vs. 'Experience': the polished toe at St. Pauls.

The truth of essentials vs. the shoring up of knowledge.

The camera a device promising knowledge. Paradox: to fulfil the promise it nullifies the experience by removing one from it. To know = to kill.

Time: to be 'in' or 'outside' of a moment. The selfie a trace that one *was* and therefore must in fact *be*. But to see it confirmed in this way is the confirmation of time and death.

Ghosts of ourselves inhabiting places we've been. The idea of the ancestor.

Vermeer: the light itself seems perpetually new, the span of years a lie separating it from the present. Vermeer's women. Do they walk among us? Might the girl that pours milk from her jug—milk that pours now and now and now—have only been in fancy dress? In truth she lives down the road and works as a cashier in the Albert Heijn.

The old routes between the houses, old habits, not ours. A map overlaying an older; their intersection revealing other destinations. The patterns of your home, the lift wailing in its shaft, the routes, the towns, the names, the shapes, the shades. Experience, too old to be yours, directing. Restless sediment of years; we tramp together through ash and smoke.

Desire to alter the object indicates a false love; a desire to possess is a desire to alter: the photographer no lover.

She, the poet, alluring for what she is that he is not and fears he will never be. The poem passes through the poet. True art a dissolution of ego; to get out of the way, to let the language work upon you. This an act of love. Love invites, fear prevents.

Brute reality, onslaught of dull fact. Imagination cowers before terrors of History.

The order of self the map to which the world corresponds: so long as we, quick as mercury, remain dark to ourselves, the world's order imperceptible to us.

Being in Amsterdam as a South African—I am the mirror, not the one who looks.

Poetry, like a good joke, relies on the element of surprise.

Do you know what it's like to be treated like you're lost all the time because you're a different colour to your mom?

He was confronted with the shape of meaning, and yet meaning itself resisted him.

'Revolutionaries':

The thrill of seeing the world as a series of symbols whose meaning may be understood. The contingencies of reality circumvented as unequivocal meaning suddenly pours forth from everything, every offending brick a new term in my own endless suffering.

What if the master's tools are all we have left?

How long before those being told they are the villains accept the part? Once swallowed, a lie has a way of repeating on you.

Our university a cargo cult.

Google Earth: the convergence of two maps. 2010/2016. I zoom and swoop down streets I know when suddenly whole buildings disappear. Site of our affair, condemned, 25/05/2015.

Alexander McCall – Different qualities of light at different times of one's life.

Whence meaning? Not individual memory. To truly experience, self-awareness must be given up. We must give ourselves over to Not-I.

Experience, for him, never wants to be more than itself, does not permit him the transcendent moments he so longs for.

The artist's fearful instinct: to clutch at the intellectual, to seek out some unshakable foundation upon which the creative work can be built. Rules for a game that has not yet been invented.

Who but saints would rejoice in the success of their peers? Who but sadists would confront their own inadequacies?

What novelist of any worth can know the entire plot ahead of the writing? If nothing surprising is to be discovered by the author, of what interest can the whole business be to a reader?

The diary as embedded artefact, giving the whole its shape (?)

Beliefs, implicit in his actions:

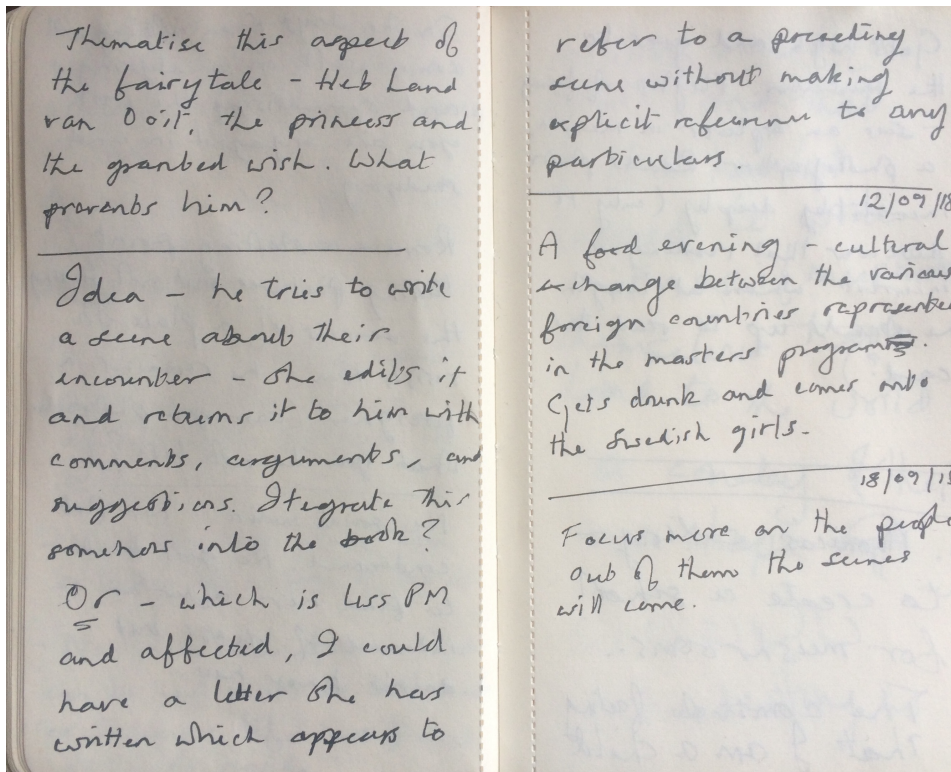
'True love', a belief about experience rather than experience itself. What one is not given can be taken by a force of the will. No faith in the future. The insufficiency of life. Nothing is provided but what is *taken*. Resentment from the fear that he will never love, and the fulfilment of this fear by the fear itself.

What he cannot accept:

'The Vision of Eros is probably a much rarer experience than most people in our culture suppose, but, when it is genuine, I do not think it makes any sense to apply it to terms like heterosexual or homosexual. Such terms can only be legitimately applied to the profane erotic experiences with which are all familiar, to lust, for example, an interest in another solely as sexual object, and that combination of sexual desire and *philia*, affection based upon mutual interests, values, and shared experiences which is the surest basis for a happy marriage.' — W.H. Auden.

'We are not permitted to choose the frame of our destiny. But what we put into it is ours. He who wills adventure will experience it – according to the measure of his courage. He who wills sacrifice will be sacrificed – according to the measure of his purity of heart.'—Dag Hammarskjöld

'Whosoever shall seek to save his life shall lose it; and whosoever shall lose his life shall preserve it.' Luke 17:33



[An example page of the diary, with entries transcribed below]

'Thematise this aspect of the fairytale—*Het Land Van Ooit*. The princess and the granted wish. What prevents him? Napoleon's sinking army.

Idea—he tries to write a scene about their encounter—she edits it and returns it to him with comments, arguments, and suggestions. Integrate this somehow into the book? Or which is less PM [postmodern?] and affected, I could have a letter she has written which appears to refer to a preceding scene without making explicit reference to any particulars.

12/09/18

A food evening—cultural exchange between the various foreign countries represented in the Masters program. Gets drunk and comes onto the Swedish girls.

18/09/18

Focus more on the people. Out of them the scenes will come.

The struggle to write. Feeling trapped. Voiceless. The strange powerlessness of the powerful. Leaving home. What is there but one's life to give to the world? The activity of fiction a way of giving it through a kaleidoscope (kalos = beautiful; eidos = form), transforming life into beautiful forms.

Separation

Your absence has gone through me

Like thread through a needle.

Everything I do is stitched with its color.

—W.S. Merwin

Depression = misery concatenated: I'm sick of being me. I'm sick of being sick of being me.

I'm sick of being sick of being sick of being me——etc.

Time to Myself

The year before he left, D fell from a tree and broke his arm. They shared a desk, and sometimes sat close, pretending they were a two-headed, ambidextrous being; and in a way, they were: they did everything together.

They did not have fathers. The big brown chair in which J's dad had used to sit every day after work remained empty; neutralising sunlight slowly stole from it the last traces of his smell. They ate dinner before the TV. After dinner it was quiet; on the table no open bottle of wine, no red stain on his mother's lips, the kitchen cold. Is this what it means to grow up? Does one just get used to misery? J did not ask this question; he asked: will Dad ever come back?

That year after school they would go in the afternoons to one another's houses to play. Because of D's broken arm, they kept to indoor games and soon grew bored. They made sarcastic jokes about kids in their class: the fatties, the nerds, the giants. They took comfort in their conspiracy. They felt older; they knew the truth in ways others didn't. During these festivals of scorn, D's arm would begin suddenly to ache. J had touched the cool plaster only once; it's hardness and dull, hollow sound when it was tapped was terrifying.

He scratched uselessly at his cast. J looked out the window and saw the tree from which he'd fallen, its leaves swivelling in the breeze. It had been their goal to climb as high as they could, as if some prize were up there in the highest branches. Now his palms grew sweaty, his feet like lumps of iron; the ground itself was magnetic. Was this why adults didn't climb trees?

*

There is a fairy tale we were told about a boy who traps himself in an iron stove. Only the princess with the key can rescue him. I don't know why, but it was this story that I remembered in the months after the news of D's death. At the bottom his garden, beneath a big eucalyptus tree, D dug a deep hole into the earth. The earth collapsed around him and he was trapped inside. I had lost my right hand.

With a stick I dug a small pocket into a wall at the back of the school. Then I took something from my pocket—a piece of paper with something written on it (I can't remember what)—and placed it into the hole before filling it in again with dirt. For many weeks afterwards I would go back to check that it had not been unearthed. In a thousand years, I thought, I will be found.

*

What can one say about time that does justice to one's experience of it? Recently I saw a sign for a travel product in one of our branches that read, 'Save for the future. Make better memories.' Among other things, I suppose this is an attempt to counteract what we all know to be true: that time in an ostensibly unchanging environment appears to pass more quickly than it does when we are on the tour bus. It's a bit like that trick with mirrors by which you're multiplied over and over but diminish with each multiplication. Filling time with small, seemingly distinct events, usually of little significance, we trick ourselves into thinking that somehow more 'life' has been lived.

Not long ago I took a week's leave and went with S, my wife, to Argentina. We had been through a very trying year together, and her health had taken a turn for the worse. She had quit her job, and sometimes when I came home after work I would find her sitting in bed, still in her cat-patterned pyjamas, or lying on the floor in the nursery, staring without recognition at the angels she had painted on the ceiling. She was seeing a therapist; she was taking medications—she was even attending a yoga class; but she didn't improve.

And it was not only she who was in the grip of something. Much as I tried to remain the man I felt I'd always been, my thought life began compulsively to range farther into regions I knew to be wrong, yet which somehow I couldn't resist. I would find her lying on the couch before some blaring reality show and would have the urge to throttle her until with a sudden gasp the woman I remembered would return to me.

This was only the beginning. Far worse was my sense that I was a victim of my own imagination, that she could not return because she had in truth always been this barren weakling, and that I had been tricked by the most guileless and foolish part of myself into marrying her. Words crept in unbidden; disgusting, hateful words spat out audibly by a voice which even determined concentration could not silence. In consequence I developed the habit of singing tunelessly to myself, and yet even then I would sometimes discover in those randomly chosen songs a hidden meaning that was really in sly accord with the evil voice. The more nervous I began to feel about its presence, the more the voice held command and the more wilfully I acted in opposition to it—which only caused it to turn against me.

S apologised for herself often; I felt guilty and angry. I made her snacks and endless cups of tea; I stroked her and asked if she wanted to talk, if she wanted to be taken to dinner,

for a walk, anything. On the single occasion that we had sex that year I was so gentle that she asked me if anything was wrong.

‘Nothing,’ I said. ‘Nothing at all. I love you.’

‘I love you too. You just seem far away.’

‘I’m sorry.’

Normality itself had become a drama of the will, a fight. Two lives existed, the one contaminating the other. I produced this formulation and repeated it to myself, but really how could I know for sure that it was so? The voice came from within me. Was it less a part of me only because it hadn’t yet won dominance? Which part of my conscience, I began to ask myself, is the true part? These thoughts frightened me: I was trapped by them. A drastic change was needed.

Since we’d met seven years before, S had spoken with such a sense of longing about South America that I knew if we were to take a trip, it would have to be there—especially to Argentina. Maybe it will help, I thought, if we go overseas together, see new things, have an opportunity to live life outside of our familiar situation.

The tickets, which I’d bought through the company, bore a picture of a healthy couple and the phrase ‘Make better memories’. When I produced them one evening after dinner, S at first made some feeble objections, but once I’d reassured her she soon gave in. In the past she would have put up more of a fight, but then once the fight was lost she also would have been more excited. What had I expected? That she would jump up from the table and throw her arms around me in joy? It was better to prepare soberly and hope that in some small way the holiday might reignite her old passions—for Tango or literature, for instance.

*

I picture us sitting in many airports, waiting travellers, our expressions empty, indistinguishable. In Sao Paulo S fell asleep with her head on my lap. It was early morning. The sun was rising slowly over the sombre forest, dimly green beyond the runway. I imagined us stranded there, refugees fleeing some unimaginable terror. Her breath smelled bad. I stroked her hair. Compulsively I looked again and again at the board, waiting for an announcement.

We were taken by taxi through the streets of Buenos Aires, a dark etched maze of sudden skyscrapers and neon signs, wavering smears of light in the warm air. Sitting in the

back, watching it all pass, not knowing one street from the next, we were like awed and overtired children.

‘Is it how you imagined it?’

‘I don’t know,’ she said. Then, after a long pause, ‘It’s bigger.’

‘You don’t like it.’

‘Would you please stop worrying? No, it’s just... the pictures I’ve seen. They’re all old. And you forget that places change so fast. They’re always renewing themselves.’

‘I’m sure there’ll be something you’ll like.’

All the way to the hotel she didn’t say a word.

My sleep that night was filled with strange dreams. I was in a hotel in Buenos Aires. A blind man knocked at the door. He wanted to speak to S., but when she opened the door and he saw me lying in the bed, he began to shudder, and then threw himself at me, his hands stretching toward my throat.... I couldn’t make head or tail of it, but nevertheless, I was horribly tired when the following morning we began on the tourist circuit in the heatwave that was passing through the city.

Is it necessary to say that we saw, and did not see, everything? The Plaza de Mayo, the Casa Rosada, the Teatro Colon: piles upon piles of bricks, all of it heavily physical and without any mysterious quality whatsoever; what I saw left no trace in the memory. It was a type of torture. For S. I tried as best I could to hide my distress, but it was clear that she too was elsewhere.

By noon we were tired and stopped at a cafe for a snack and some overpriced beer. I was thirsty, drank too fast, and grew sleepy. Our table was beside a metro exit that gave right onto the *avenida*, and I watched hundreds of people borne up out of the ground, one after another.

‘I think I need to head back to the hotel,’ I said. ‘That beer must have gone to my head.’

S nodded. ‘Don’t worry about me. I’ll find something to do.’

We parted. I gave up walking after only a few minutes and and hailed a cab, and without managing even a word of Spanish, simply pointed to the dot on the map that marked the hotel.

When I woke up it was dark. In the street below I watched people going from one place to another.

I went down to the lobby and was told S had left a note: 'Gone to dinner. Join me when you wake up.' Beneath she had written the address and drawn a rudimentary map.

She was sitting at a table on the far side of the restaurant, by the bar. There was an open bottle of wine on the table and by the crumbs on her plate it looked as if she had already finished her meal.

'You're burnt,' I said, as I drew back a chair.

'Am I?' She lowered her head to catch her reflection in the angled mirror above the bar. A waiter arrived and I ordered empanadas.

'Where did you go?'

'Well, at first I wandered around a bit—that's probably when I got burnt. Then I went to this gallery. It's quite off the map and took me a while to find.'

She began looking in her bag, presumably for the gallery's brochure. Her voice, her face, even her movements appeared to me to have changed since that morning. And rather than share in her new happiness—was it happiness?—I began to feel sullen, almost angry.

'Sounds nice.'

'It was! It was so nice. You should have seen. Some of the art in this gallery, it was just breathtaking... Now why can't I find the pamphlet.'

'Forget it. I won't have time to go anyway. We have quite a full schedule now.'

The waiter brought my empanadas, and before S could speak, I'd taken a bite and burned my tongue. I spat out the steaming mouthful into my napkin and quickly took a long drink of water.

'Sorry, I should've warned you sooner.'

'Why didn't you wake me up?'

'You needed to sleep! Is that why you're in a bad mood?'

My tongue was still raw, and the taste of the greasy cheese had left me feeling sick. 'I don't think I want these. Are you still hungry?'

'No,' she said, folding her napkin and setting it aside.

A long pause.

I stood up. 'Listen, I think I need to go for a walk. I'll see you at the hotel.'

'Fine,' she said.

I left all the pesos I had in my wallet on the table and before she could raise a fuss I left. As I reached the door the waiter smiled at me inscrutably, as if to suggest... what? That he was familiar with these situations? That we were neither the first nor the last tourists who had parted after a spat? That I was a fool and would pay later for leaving my wife behind? I didn't know, but I would have liked to hit him in the face—knocked out a few of those too-large Spanish teeth, bruised one of those big, complacent eyes.

The air in the street was much hotter than it had been in the restaurant and as I walked I began to sweat. Until I came to a crossing I barely lifted my eyes from the ground, mesmerised by those tiny squares of smooth stone that cover the sidewalks in Buenos Aires, so easy to slip and fall on. Then I picked a new direction and with my head down again continued walking. This went on for what felt like hours. I had no idea where I was going. After a while I did not even know what neighbourhood I was in. I suppose I should say that my mind went over the scene in the restaurant, trying to piece together what had made me behave the way I had, or that I began to feel contrition, sympathy, a sense of guilt. But this would be a lie. I felt nothing. A blankness came over me as I walked, and not a single thought entered my mind that I can remember.

Slowly the sound of my shoes on the pathway rose above the dry lick of tyres along the streets outside—outside because I now discovered I had entered a park. Here and there, almost invisible in the dark, stone monuments towered in commemoration of one thing or another. I had just concluded that the park was empty when I heard the sound of an accordion. My feet took me in the direction it seemed to be coming from.

People were gathered in a circle. I could see two figures dancing in the centre. Everybody was wearing waistcoats, and I guessed that it must be some sort of Tango club. Tango had always struck me as a melodramatic and silly dance, but something gave me reason to pause here a while. Rapt faces stared inward at the dancers, who as I came closer I noticed were both men. Not that I have much to compare it to—I know nothing about dancing—but what I saw struck me as truly exceptional. Each dancer moved with an almost clairvoyant sense of an invisible whole, never revealed except in the imagination, as when two unlikely terms come together to produce a metaphor. And yet it was with a growing sense of unease that I watched the dance progress. Streetlamps, their beams broken by the ghostly green of the trees in the park, cast upon the assembly a lurid light. Each figure danced with another, and after each foot there staggered three ravenous shadows. In that place we were at

once multiplied and diminished. I was not one of the gathering, but an outsider, I thought. And then, with dread, I saw it was not only I, but others too, deluding themselves with this thought.

Something in my peripheral vision was drawing me to look away. You will recognise this feeling; it is that inexplicable sense, even when immersed in some activity, that we are watched. The face—for there was a face—was on the opposite side of the circle, floating among the others with similarly intense focus—yet its focus was not directed at the dancers but *through* them, at me. I looked away in panic, returning my eyes to the dancers. They danced as they had before, but interrupted only by these few seconds, the effect of their movements on me was broken, and impatiently I looked up again; but the space where he had been was empty.

To whose face did those eyes belong? I fancied I recognised it.

I drew back silently from the circle and nervously began to retrace my steps. How far back would I need to go to find a clue?

I walked quickly, but no sooner was the large iron gate within view than I saw a silhouette of someone sitting on one of the benches near the exit and stopped. A tall tree grew beside the bench and kept the man in darkness. He sat absolutely still and only when I drew near did he stand up and quickly leave the park. At the gate I saw his back gliding up the *Avenida de Brazil*, the street down which I must have come earlier. Without a thought in my mind I walked after him.

How do I explain what followed? To say ‘I’ walked at a steady pace until the distance between us closed would not be the truth, or at least only part of it: I was not only ‘I’, but also ‘he’. In the dark streets of that barrio, even the weeds that nudge apart the cracked stones speak time’s secret. And so when I say now that he walked and walked and at last came to an entranceway and climbed a set of stairs and passed through an unlocked door and there, in unfathomable darkness, kissed, you will recognise that this cannot be explained as we explain the breaking of a bone by impact.

We two met as one, ‘two’ being a concept inadmissible there. I say I have never been with a man before, but have I not always been with a man? Has not our long-believed separation been the sole fact of life? I have grieved for him, have longed for him. He who abandoned me; he who never left.

*

Not long after they returned S found that she was pregnant. On the therapist's recommendation they had printed the pictures and put them in an album, and looking through them together they relived their memories of Argentina. Sometimes he wouldn't remember a picture, and in the moment of looking his imagination created a world corresponding to the photograph, rather than the photograph as an index for a memory that already exists and has only to be recalled.

The news of her pregnancy changed S in ways it was hard for him to describe, even to himself. For everything she suffered there was once again a reason.

'What shall we call him?' asked S one evening. He was pouring glasses of wine.

'I don't know,' he said. He realised that since she had become pregnant he hadn't thought much about names. It was as if somehow a name would just come when it was needed.

'I was thinking we could name him after your friend.'

'My friend?'

'Remember when we met? Ages ago, you told me about your best friend. When you were a boy. The one—so sad—who dug a hole into the earth beneath a tree and was trapped by the...'

She went to him and put her arms around his waist. 'I'm sorry! It's a *terrible* idea! I never should've suggested it.'

But he knew that there had never been such a friend.

Months passed. As the day of their son's birth drew near, he began to suffer from sudden rushes of terror. Sitting in his office overlooking the bay, the quiet sounds of traffic twenty stories below, he would see something in the corner of the room, but when he turned to catch sight of it it would be gone.

He began seeing a therapist, who in no time had prescribed a medication. During these first weeks of therapy, following the therapist's instruction, he began to write in a journal. 'Write what seems significant,' he was told. 'But really think about it. What do you remember from childhood? When you begin to think about it, what enters your mind? Why do you think you remember these things and not others?'

He devoted time to writing, and yet often seemingly trivial things would surprise him, odd scraps of memory that bore no relation to anything: stolen car; a tree; a buried cat. He would be walking from the underground parking garage to the elevators when suddenly a picture would come to him. For a second it was as if this picture had been made up. But on reflection—yes, it was a memory from his own life; and yet the one described was ‘he’. Was this the same as looking at photographs he had forgotten? It was impossible to tell. They were at the same time foreign and deeply familiar. He carried a notebook in his pocket, and soon learned during these moments that the memory would be lost again unless he wrote it down immediately.

Pages and pages of notes accumulated, until eventually he had something that resembled a story. But a story of what? Apart from a few anecdotes, scenes that he had set down from the common stock of memories he shared with his brothers, what he had written was a disconnected jumble of words, repeated images. He wanted to make some sense of it before taking it to the therapist, but was there sense to be made? And if meaning could be found in his story, was he to suppose that others beside himself could find it? It seemed unlikely.

‘What are you writing?’ S. asked. She had made him a cup of tea and set it down on the desk.

‘It’s something for the therapist.’

‘Am I in it?’ She smiled and peered over his shoulder.

‘Not yet.’

‘Will you tell me when I am? I’d like to check you’ve caught my best side.’

They laughed.

What side, he wondered, had he caught of himself?

Novel Fragments

[While the foregoing piece—puzzling as it is—was not, so far as I am able to tell, any part of the novel James envisaged, the following entries, taken from the sole undeleted file, entitled ‘Self-Consciousness’, were indeed destined, in one shape or another, to form part of the book.]

The horizon lifts as the ferry’s back crashes softly on the crestless grey waves of the IJ. Amsterdam Noord. Passengers, their bicycles held close, are huddled between the gunwales like frostbitten shepherds. Below the engine thudding, remote evocation of warmth. A plane passing silently overhead draws its passage in gold. They watch the diminishing shape of Central Station, its lights blooming in the twilight, and the long, wavering apex of white trailing on the water. It is November. She is taking him somewhere; she won’t say where. ‘A surprise. Have you been to the North before?’

‘Never.’

‘It used to be cheap to live there. First the artists came, now the restaurants, then the people with money. It will be a long time before the artists go somewhere else, but it will happen.’

‘Why?’

‘Too much money suffocates art.’

The ferry empties. They float in silver, the sun gone, the light dim and sourceless, as if emanating from things themselves. A sound of goodbyes, bicycle chains. They set out. The streets in the North at this hour are quiet. Amsterdam, narrow and introspective, has spread out here, fallen into freedom and ease. The heath alongside the road is uncut, fragrant with rain. Their tyres peel water off the sodden tar. His nose is damp like a dog’s. After a few minutes and many turns he realises that without her he could not find his way back and this feeling of helpless reliance, of having given over responsibilities, causes a wave of happiness to break over him. He presses down on the pedals and rides quickly ahead.

‘Where are you going!’ She shouts.

He takes out his camera and wildly aims it behind him.

‘You’re a terrible photographer!’ She laughs.

He presses the shutter. A dense lake of improbable green dots overlays the frame. Only faintly can I make out the rear wheel, a boot.

She took him to a bench that looked back over the IJ toward the city. There in the growing cold they sat together as the sun bled away. The wind in the marsh grass, the remote chug of the ferries, the ache in the bones of his hands. Her face, slightly raised, inured to the cold, proprietorial like a royal. He wanted to kiss her, but it was as though some arbitrary law prevented it. Instead he raised his camera.

‘No, please don’t,’ she said. ‘I want to talk to you.’

‘But if you could see yourself...’

She smiled weakly. ‘I never look good in pictures. Unless I pose like a statue. The moment when I look like myself is always just before or after the picture is made.’

‘It’s not possible.’

‘Maybe not. But it’s true anyway.’

A long moment passed. He could sense that she was about to say something he didn’t want to hear and raised the collar of his jacket, clearing his throat as if to steal the moment away from her.

‘I can show you around this city,’ she said. ‘I would love to keep showing you around. But I’m afraid you want more than that.’

He felt the blood bounce against his cheeks. Something told him that he’d be disarmed of his reply by the look on her face and he stared straight ahead. An uncommon recklessness had recently come into him, and between what he believed he would say or do, and what in the end he said or did, it seemed anything could happen. Now was just such a moment. Since they’d met the week before he’d made a show of his interest that by his standards qualified as wantonly obvious—but by anybody else’s, he acknowledged, might still have been interpreted as indecipherably vague. It had begun with the brazenness of sitting right beside her in the lecture theatre (four days in a row), the limply witty remarks on *Don Quixote* during class, the offers of coffee while she smoked her cigarette at mid-lecture breaks, and then his unsubtle requests that she show him around, since, after all, he was new to the town and she probably knew ‘the best places’. She took it with a calmness altogether foreign to him, a behaviour he nervously attributed to tired experience with fawning advances of this type. Now, having foreseen she might say this or something like it, he believed that, with plummy nonchalance, he would brush aside her concerns as unfounded, reassuring her that he really did only want to see the insides of small Dutch art galleries, cafes, bars, and the like, and was more than happy to have made another Dutch friend. But his belief proved not to be

true. When he opened his mouth, he found himself saying, ‘Yes, I do. I really do want more than that,’ while staring straight into her—sea-green, he noticed for the first time—eyes.

‘I knew it!’ She said, and laughed, looking out once again at the Ij. She held her mouth in the bemused but interested way one might after solving a small but nevertheless interesting puzzle.

He had expected awkwardness, perhaps concealed pity. Instead it felt as if they had become party to a joke whose humour only they could perceive. He too began to laugh.

‘It’s true,’ he said.

‘I know. I believe it. Now what?’

‘What do you mean, “now what”?’

‘What happens next? What do we say? In the story where I take you to a bench in the Noord and you tell me that you want more than friendship, what do we say next?’

They caught the train to Den Bosch, town of her girlhood. It was a Sunday morning, the street hushed, the hours ahead blank as pleasure. She was waiting outside the station, her bike already chained, a map open between her pink, ungloved hands. He watched her reading, unaware of him, this woman who might have been a beautiful stranger, and felt a sudden triumphant joy pass through him at the thought that he had won her. She was his, his girl. It was like seeing the lighted windows of home through a thick darkness.

‘You’re here,’ she said.

‘Yes,’ he said. He was still out of breath from the ride. ‘Did you think I wouldn’t come?’

‘I wasn’t sure. It’s such a nice day. I thought you might want to spend it with your friends.’ She said it flatly, but beneath the words was a tone of hurt.

‘I wouldn’t miss this.’

‘You should park your bike,’ she said, folding the map. ‘The train’s coming soon.’

The light through the ironwork ran in quickening slivers across her face as they left the station. She sat opposite him. He noticed she had cut her fringe. From her bag she drew a brown leather box and handed it to him.

‘Here. I bought film for it.’

‘This must be a hundred years old.’

‘The man in the camera shop actually wanted to buy it.’

‘I’m not surprised. It’s really beautiful.’

‘I think he would’ve offered to buy me if I’d stayed any longer.’

‘That doesn’t surprise me either.’

She laughed and leaned her head against the seat. From the window they watched the city’s detail dissolve, fall into broad lots, windowless factories concealing imponderable stores. Yesterday the trip had seemed unlikely and today it was happening: that was her way. She had planned everything, bought the tickets, the little map which she didn’t need and would later give him with all the places marked that they had been together. A conductress, the elements of her world ordered into a more pleasing arrangement, even if it all turned out to be more chaotic. It was a hidden aesthetic, mysterious in its effects.

‘She cheats,’ she said. We were talking about her parents. ‘But he won’t leave her. He always takes her back. She’d come home after a weekend away with her artist friends and she would say, “Aren’t you going to ask where I’ve been?” And he’d say, “Do you want to tell me?” And she’d get furious. She was so mad, you know, she would throw things.’

‘She threw things at him?’

‘Yes! At him!’

‘Perhaps she was furious with herself for what she’d done and didn’t know how else to express it?’

‘No. No, you’re being a psychologist again. She was just mad.’

‘It seems unlikely, doesn’t it?’

‘She is unlikely,’ she said, and smirked. They were in cafe on the Prinzegracht. At a little table that stretched the length of the window they sat and stared brazenly through the glass at passersby, the street a play put on for their amusement.

‘It must have been difficult. Growing up in a situation like that, I mean.’

‘I feel older than she is. She’s like a child that I love.’

‘Are you still angry with her?’

‘No. How can you be angry with a child that doesn’t know better? I’m just sorry for my father. It causes him so much pain. But he will never leave her.’

He was a biologist. The art had all come through the mother, the passion, slight recklessness with words. Her grandmother had studied under one of Wittgenstein’s more

influential disciples and was still at eighty-four the hostess of a philosophy society, old colleagues mostly, its meetings held in the large parlour living room where as a toddler Iris had played on the floor.

[4th September]

Her room. Could it have looked any different? Weren't those dry flowers in the tiny vase atop her table a necessary element in the canvas? Or the melodica that sat coiled upon the piano stool, its mouthpiece and transparent windpipe vaguely medical, as though notes played on the keyboard fed music to the mouth. Nabokov's stories, Flaubert, Baudelaire, velvet-bound books whose titles I couldn't make out but which must have been poetry, probably old Dutch. The photographs of all but forgotten French artists, conceptual grotesqueries of meat cuts resembling genitalia that had been stuck against the bathroom wall as if to prompt occupants to peer down and perceive for an unsettling moment the true coarseness of things. Spices kept in unlabelled jars. They were ranged in rows along the kitchen shelves. There was barely room to move. Between the overflowing dirt bin and the stained stovetop a square foot of linoleum showed. This was where she stood, everything within arm's reach. Maybe because Iris lived there with Rosanne, maybe because it was always dark and the old roaring gas burner lent the bedroom a cavelike glow, there was something witchy about the place. The mismatched clothes, the capes, old gowns. I learned one night that she'd rescued the stuff from a closed theme park.

[6th September]

The door opened before my knuckles had met it. It was hard to imagine the situation in which the outfit she had on was supposed to be worn. The dress, if that's the word for it, began below her collarbones and made its pearlescent blue way down and outwards over the swell of her breasts before tucking back against her ribs for the distance to her hips, where suddenly it flared out like a Chinese umbrella. It could only have been inspired by a tutu, and yet was nothing like a tutu; it was simultaneously more daring and less absurd.

'Do you like it?'

'Iris... I...'

'Come inside. You're probably freezing.'

She left me standing in the doorway and went to the kitchen.

'Do you want some glühwein?' I heard her ask.

‘Sure,’ I said. I listened to her ladle the wine as I wondered what she had planned. In her room I set down my bag and fidgeted with my scarf, taking it off and putting it on again. As she returned with the glühwein in a large goblet I noticed that in addition to the dress, she was wearing baby pink stockings. Also, she’d applied thick eyeliner, ending each stroke with a sort of oriental curlicue.

‘How’s your essay?’

‘I’m still not finished,’ I said. ‘It’s so difficult to work in the apartment when people are always drinking. Also, I just don’t see how I’m going to get Berger into the work. He’s said everything and said nothing about what I want to say. I...’—I took a gulp of the wine and its sweet warmth made my ears tingle—‘I wish I knew how to spin arguments better... so many of the books—’

She took back my glass and set it on the table beside the piano. Then she approached me, slid her hands around my hips and pulled herself against me. I heard a rustling and felt against my trousers the springiness of her dress as she kissed me. Beneath a punch of mint was the faint aftertaste of cigarettes.

‘Where did you get this?’ I asked, feeling through the dress’s shiny exterior the warmth of her slim body.

[7th September]

‘Do you remember the story I told you about *Die Land van Ooit*?’

‘The theme park?’

‘Yes. When it closed, they sold everything. For a few months at *ij halles* you could find parts of your childhood hanging at the second-hand stores between pairs of jeans and leather jackets. This was the dress the princess wore.’

I looked at it again, trying to picture it in its original setting ‘It’s quite something.’

‘Do you like it?’

[10th September]

The truth was that I *did* like it, and found it more appealing than I was ready to admit. Why was I afraid to tell her? Because she would think I was a weirdo and reject me for finding a fairy princess outfit from a children’s theme park arousing? I thought that preserving my reply would be enigmatic and at the same time quite dashing and instead leaned down to kiss her. She moved away.

‘No.’

I looked at her, surprised. She held up her hands in front of her in a regal sort of a way and I took them in mine. They were freezing.

‘They’re freezing,’ she said. ‘Sorry.’

‘I’ll warm them.’

‘Not yet. In the story, the prince has to sit in the throne.’

She pulled me over to the old leather chair by the furnace. ‘So,’ she said, coming up close. ‘He has to sit down and make three wishes.’ She pushed me backwards into the chair, which hissed and creaked in a way that made me want to laugh. She set her hands on her hips. ‘First wish.’

‘Could I at least get my glühwein first?’ My tone was arch, and I believed I’d set my eyebrows at their most foppishly innocent angle.

‘Adrian, I’m a fairy princess. I can do anything you want. You really want to waste a wish on *that*?’

Though I was trying to hide my fear, I could feel the blood bumping visibly at my throat. I leaned forward to stand up but she gently pushed me back; I would not be permitted to misinterpret what she was offering.

‘Tell me. What do you want?’

I felt as if I was being dangled over the edge of a balcony.

‘Iris... I...’ It seemed there would be no way out. She’d set her eyes on me and wouldn’t look away.

‘Okay,’ I said. ‘My first wish is that the princess tell me what *she* wants. There, that’s my wish.’

‘Oh my god. That’s pathetic. You’ve wasted a wish to find out what you already know. I want to know what your wishes are!’

‘There’s no escaping this, is there?’

‘What are you afraid of?’

‘I’m not afraid!’

‘Yes, you are. If you’re not, then tell me what you want. What have you never dared to ask another woman? This situation is not going to happen often. But you probably already know that.’

‘I don’t have anything unusual I want,’ I lied. ‘I want to fuck. I want to drink glühwein. I want to talk about your poems. What can I say, I’m boring.’

She looked exasperated. I stood up again. This time she made no effort to return me to my chair. I approached her, held her hands in mine. If it was possible, they were even colder than they'd been a minute ago. She wore a unique expression. I remember it clearly: It was the look of a woman who, without knowing how or when it will come, has glimpsed the end.

Again I leaned in to kiss her. She didn't resist. After a blank moment, she began to reciprocate, a sharp bite of her teeth against my lip, and then suddenly her hands slipping from mine and unfastening my belt.

[11th September]

With the naiveté of someone who hasn't yet discovered the adamant Dutch enthusiasm for practicing English, I believed for some time that I would learn the language and well into my second week in the city still fancied that my reading of Dutch poetry was steadily lodging phrases in memory which, while not exactly useful in the average conversation, might at key moments suggest erudition, depth of character, and a fondness for local antiques. I read and reread Gerrit Achterberg's poems. One in particular had been translated by a renowned South African author. Something of a pedant, he had drawn diagrams to explain all the pronoun allocations. I couldn't make head or tail of any of it, but the sounds bumped about in my head and rolled out of my mouth with euphonic effects.

[12th September]

From the Afrikaans I had learned in school I was able to guess at the meaning of words. In this way I could pick up the gist of a conversation and with a self-satisfied expression laugh gently at the appropriate moment, signalling nuanced understanding and my appreciation of life's tragic ironies. People rarely question someone who laughs like this, preferring to assume they've failed to see the humour than to call you out. It's astonishing what you'll be credited with if you have perfected this laugh. You become one of them, a sort of smiling Bill Murray in that film where he's caught up in a master plot and bumbles along, ignorant till the end. Of course in the film he succeeds miraculously and goes home a hero. The same can't be said for me. I was determined to be liked and thought I'd figured out a way to insinuate myself into a world I knew nothing about but wanted desperately to be a part of. My ignorance produced shame in direct proportion to the extent of my lies.

'Do you speak?'

'Een beetje, maar ik kan dit helemaal goed verstaan.'

‘That’s so cool.’

‘I speak a little Afrikaans. It makes it easier.’

‘Really? Say something in Afrikaans! Please.’

[13th September]

As part of the welcome activities a dinner had been organised requiring students from each country represented on the scholarship to prepare a buffet dinner and drinks more or less typical of their national cuisine. It had not until then occurred to me that South Africa possessed a national cuisine, unless basil pesto and spaghetti counted as South African, but when I aired my doubts at the supermarket where we had agreed to meet to purchase ingredients for our meal, Amy, Katherine, and Jarred hurried to correct this unpatriotic view by running off a long list of foods I couldn’t except as a distant memory recall having eaten. The list included things like deep-fried lumps of bread, various parts of animals cooked on a fire, and sausage. When I pointed out that these were typically Afrikaans, it was conceded that we should probably also prepare something like samp and beans or ‘pap’. This didn’t seem fair to me, and I argued that passing off any of these foods as dishes we actually consumed was about as honest as offering up deep fried sheep’s head and chicken feet. Since it was on average what I saw students like ourselves consume, I proposed to cook pesto pasta, but this suggestion was derided as obstructionist. I was outvoted. Reluctantly I agreed to help prepare the *vetkoek* and, since we couldn’t find any *boerewors*, plain Dutch pork and beef sausage with coriander sprinkled on top. These were certainly not going to impress anyone and I worried that the Dutch would spot their sausage and object to our thieving. Needless to say, if you had gluten intolerance, you were going to have problems at the South African table. Vegetarians were done for.

[14th September]

The hall in which the dinner was held had been or perhaps still was a theatre. It was decorated with bunting composed of the national flags. Serving tables were arranged in two concentric circles, the first running the circumference of the room, hosts looking inward, the second in the centre of the room facing outward. We were on the outer circle, where to our left and right were Austria and Estonia, respectively. When I suggested to the Austrians, who were also peddling some form of sausage, that this might be the only time in history that Austria had been to the left of anything, they didn’t seem to understand, and I didn’t hurry to explain the joke, poor as it was, instead turning the conversation to our national cuisine of

deep-fried bread, which I offered them and they politely nibbled, trying to disguise their disgust.

We had cooked the ‘meal’ at Katherine’s flat in the West and cycled to the hall with it in our bags. For days afterwards, whenever I zipped closed my backpack it would huff up into my face the faint reek of coriander sausage. Our table, which like all the others bore a national flag, was decorated with a plastic Protea that Amy had found at a Chinese store. Since the food itself was colourless, the Protea was our main attraction. We arranged the *vetkoek* around it in a semi-circle, and set the apricot jam alongside. I chopped the sausage and skewered the pieces on toothpicks. Since under the circumstances an open fire was impossible, we had cooked the sausage on a pan, making it even less like the *boerewors* we were trying to imitate. To drink we had at great expense bought possibly the worst bottle of South African wine I have ever tasted, which from thrift we served in plastic shot glasses. This caused some confusion about how wine is drunk in South Africa, but after the first sting of our plonk the mercifully small serving size was usually met with gratitude.

[17th September]

Although it was supposed to be an evening of cultural exchange, contiguous countries—especially France and Italy—were in direct competition.

Because I wasn’t much of a diplomat or a patriot, my absence at our table wasn’t so far as I could tell resented, and I took my time wandering around the hall, sampling the food and in my awkward way making conversation.

[18th September]

Patience.

[20th September]

Patience.

[21st September]

Patience.

[25th September]

As the Sparks Fly Upward

Why does a writer stop writing? There is no general answer to this question. Experience has taught me to be patient when I am working on a piece of fiction. On some days it will grow and on others it will not. My job is to show up like a gardener and tend it, water its roots; be patient. More often than not, a few days is enough for the subconscious to discover what needs to be done, and sitting before pages which had been all confusion, one sees emerge as if by magic a solution to one's difficulties. It is frustrating when this process takes longer than a few days, of course; but that is a frustration which must be endured. Here I believe lies the difficulty for many young writers: they are unaware that to write requires great forbearance.

And yet I would not want to imply that James's problem was a lack of it. It is something else that seems for him to have been the cause of the trouble, and I believe that this *something* later became the subject of his fiction, inasmuch as fiction may be said to have a subject. In other words, 'depression', which was all the time preventing him from working, became by an act of retaliation the object in his creative crosshairs.

How did this play itself out in the work? Not by making his 'characters' depressed people and chronicling their miserable lives. It was on a textual level that he wished to address himself to the problem. Nowhere in his notes does he state this explicitly, but it is everywhere apparent that beneath the philosophical and dramatic questions that he was addressing to himself in trying to write fiction were personal questions. To the diary entries already provided, I add another:

There is he that experiences and the one experiencing the experiencing he. A paradox: I am the experiencer *and* another (an other) observing the experiencing 'he'. Is it possible? Or does the one state cancel out the other in the moment of awareness?

This may look somewhat confused, but it is a real problem. If you eat a piece of cake, you have the sensation of eating the cake (the smell, texture, tastes, pleasure, etc.). But perhaps you are also *aware of yourself* eating that cake and having the experience of *those* sensations. The question is: does one participate in the primary experience as fully if one maintains this awareness of it *as experience*? (One might call this kind of awareness third-personal awareness.) Consciousness, in other words, puts us at a remove from the world. It

provides us the tools for understanding but also paradoxically forms a *barrier* to understanding. The more self-conscious we become, the less conscious we are. We may say something about an experience, or we may have the experience, but not both. Or, at the risk of being on the nose, we may have our cake but not eat it....

It is here I believe that James's preoccupation in his fiction with photography develops from the murk. The photographer is a sort of metaphor for this pseudo-Cartesian problem. It is a desire to draw closer to the world that motivates the photographer, and yet precisely this desire removes him from it. In this context I would like to quote another of James's fictions, which in fact predates the novel fragments, but which I believe provides some grounding in understanding the difficulties he ran into.

Frames

When I was seven or eight we were taken on a trip to the Tygerberg zoo, the name of which I remember clearly because I associated it, by the instinctual logic that only children possess, with the animal I expected to see there. It is so long ago that I recall very little of the trip except that I saw no tigers. Two images remain clear in my mind, or two facets of the same image, since it is difficult to be sure where memory terminates and imagination begins.

The first memory is less a memory than it is a sensation of unease that I have lately come to see was habitual in my childhood, and which I now associate with excitement which I felt all around me and yet could never seem fully to inhabit. Perhaps the memory really is one and not two, because the second image circumscribes the other, draws in the glare coming off the parching concrete walls of a giant pit that resembled an empty well which had stood at the bottom of our garden and into which our cat had once fallen so that my father had to retrieve her by lowering himself on a rope. But this pit was vast by comparison, so big and so deep and so hot that it struck me as something which should contain water, or had, yet somehow had dried out or been emptied and filled instead with sand and boulders and scraps of bush. A zoo guide shouted above the noise (we were, of course, not the only visitors that day) as she attempted with difficulty to hold the attention of my class, who were peering over the edge of the pit to see what we knew must be below.

It is curious that what one anticipates an experience to be and the experience itself are so consistently inconsistent. The sight of a brown bear emerging listlessly from its shade did not correspond with the pictures I remembered of them in books, but neither was it so different as to alter my understanding or reshape it completely. It rolled its thinning fur in the dust, scratched, and made no impressive noise despite the entreating jeers of one or two of the boys. Odours of excrement and crushed vegetation carried up on the warm air. A mother took her camera from her neck and handed it to her son, who had been nagging her for it since we had arrived. With the camera in his hands he became older than the rest of us and seemed to feel it, placing a confident elbow on the rail to still himself as he took the picture.

I knew that seeing the bear was the moment I was to enjoy and yet I found no enjoyment in it but an anxiety that stayed with me, a feeling that I have always found easy to remember and yet impossible to convey.

Many years later I was a student in Amsterdam and as one of the trips organized for newcomers to the university we were taken by a group of accommodating postgraduates to the *Natura Artis Magistra*. There we were guided through an aviary, insectarium and herpetarium, each of which mimicked some foreign climate so that when at length I come out into the open air again I felt as if I had been inside much longer than I in fact was. Time accords better with experience than the clock, and I came to feel that the *Plantage Middenlaan* onto which the *Artis's* white-and-gold gates opened, and past which I would later pedal every day to and from Anne's flat, had with the accumulation of months taken on the aspect of a familiar path, irreconcilable with the vagrant memories of that first visit.

But that overcast afternoon I was finally to meet the big cat whose reticence had been the disappointment of my class visit eighteen years before. Alone in his barred enclosure (which was built in 1838 and was one of the few galleries of the original zoo until it was recently taken down) the cat appeared from behind a leafy wall and walked in sleepy routine over a great arched branch of a fallen tree, installed as the sole decoration appropriate to his abbreviated world. Though I had not seen a jaguar before I knew it immediately. In moments a crowd had appeared at the railing and as if aware of what they wanted of him, he paced up and down the bars, blinking in what appeared to me to be comprehension, though this is, I am told, impossible. Several of the company took photographs and moved on and I soon found myself alone, the jaguar persisting in his rhythmical measuring.

Sein Blick ist vom Vorübergehn der Stäbe
so müd geworden, dass er nichts mehr hält.
Ihm ist, als ob es tausend Stäbe gäbe
und hinter tausend Stäben keine Welt.⁴

Rilke's words, which I have never been able to pronounce properly, and which have never adequately been translated, came to me as rhythm, abstracted as only words in a language still partially foreign can be, and again the feeling that I had felt as a boy returned, and remained with me as I drank coffee with a Hungarian student, whom I had met the day before and

⁴ His gaze is from the passing of bars
so exhausted, that it doesn't hold a thing anymore.
For him, it's as if there were thousands of bars
and behind the thousands of bars no world.

with whom I waited as the rest of the group assembled, discussing favourite writers common between us while children ran among parents slouched at the other tables.

Not long after that I acquired a camera that I began to carry with me wherever I went, documenting things that I felt I did not want to forget, taking pictures as if picking flowers that would never wilt. And yet, looking at many of these pictures now, I know that this is a lie, for the image is not changeless, but overwritten by things that modify it subtly, bury it so that while it appears as lifelike and as immediate as it ever was, it begins to look through invisible accumulations of time that are written not only on the world that has consigned it to history but that are written on oneself.

Beside the building in which we lived, just behind the Weesperplein metro, there is another part of the Amsterdam *Artis*, the *Hortus Botanicus*, which is not only a botanical garden containing a great number of plant species from around the world, but a lepidopterium, housing thousands of butterflies. Toward the end of autumn, some months after that day at *Artis*, Anne suggested we go to the *Hortus*, as she called it, since it was unbelievable that I had not yet been, especially given that it was only three minutes' walk from the flat, or four, if you counted the long trip down from the seventh floor in our impossibly slow elevator. Steeped as I was in Cartier-Bresson, Minor White, and Stieglitz, whose work I had seen at the Jewish Museum across the street, I was excited to see what picture opportunities there might be. But for the man at the front desk and an old couple (who, to our amusement, read with careful attention every information card for every species), the place was empty, and we went straight into the heated herbariums where soon, tired of wandering, we found a bench and huddled together, partly from the cold, partly because we wanted, I feel, to be closer to one another. We were in an area that was dedicated to tropical plants and had it not been for the clouds that could be seen hovering above the glass ceiling, or the condensation accumulated on it, I might have believed I was again in Africa, somewhere in the tropics of the Congo. We looked at the bars of the ceiling and I felt that somehow I must capture the wave-like patterns they made. I could feel Anne's eyes on me as I moved the camera here and there, trying to frame the bars.



Anne stood and I followed her outside along a path that led us to the lepidopterium, where one had to pass through two doors of stripped transparent plastic of the kind one used to see in the backs of supermarkets but which here were partitioned to ensure no butterflies escaped as visitors entered and exited. Inside it was bright and warm and everywhere we could see butterflies trembling in resting on leaves before taking again to their fragile flight. As Anne walked slowly through this living snow I knew that this moment would remain with me; and yet that in this flood of feeling I had somehow to make sense of it all, to enjoy it as the moment demanded. I lifted my camera and, despite knowing that she hated having her picture taken, brought her into my lens. When she noticed, she looked at me in a way I thought only people who had known each other their whole lives were able to look at one another. Then she smiled. A small orange butterfly had come to rest on her finger.



With my old camera I could not focus in time. If I look closely now I see that it is the leaves behind her that are clearest, leaving Anne an almost immaterial blur, as if superimposed. What I recall most clearly is my overwhelming regret when the clap of the shutter, exposing celluloid impatient to arrest its moment, sent the minutest shake through Anne's hand.

In a drawer in front of me there are bundles of negatives from those months, each frame a separate hope and a separate failure. From my bedroom window I could see all the way to the twin peaks of the Rijksmuseum and beyond and hear the bells of bicycles below as people passed along into the *Oost*. Time passed and as Christmas neared it seemed to me as though the days grew shorter because of my inability to appreciate them. I would go out on my bicycle and do nothing but look around and take pictures—pictures of bridges, buildings, construction workers, windows, people in windows, aged men reading newspapers, the young on their phones, lovers, garbage, trees, leaves, swans and anything else that I felt wished to be kept. There was no aim to this, but I felt then that it gave purpose to what was otherwise a meaningless outing. When I look at the pictures now I am reminded of the caged bears and the boy with the camera, the caged jaguar and the tourists with theirs.

My relationship with Anne ended when I left Europe; sometimes, when I look at the pictures, I do not remember having taken them.

More Trouble

To provide insight into why James was preoccupied with questions of consciousness is of far greater interest to me than insight into the questions themselves. (Whether or not 'Frames' smells of Sebald does not interest me.) In both this story and the novel fragments, the idea of the duality of experience undergirds the drama. The narrator is lovelorn, wishes to draw closer to the world, wishes to draw closer to *himself*, and yet is somehow repelled. The more he wishes to draw closer, the further away he finds himself. (I quote again in this context: 'Desire to alter the object indicates a false love; a desire to possess is a desire to alter: the photographer no lover.')

It seems to me that the problem is twofold:

- 1) Consciousness of Experience dilutes experience.
- 2) Desire to fully inhabit experience removes us into Experience.

In other words, to get what you desire, you must desire nothing (another paradox). We are in the realm of *Four Quartets*, also quoted in his diary:

You say I am repeating
 Something I have said before. I shall say it again.
 Shall I say it again? In order to arrive there,
 To arrive where you are, to get from where you are not,
 You must go by a way wherein there is no ecstasy.
 In order to arrive at what you do not know
 You must go by a way which is the way of ignorance.
 In order to possess what you do not possess
 You must go by the way of dispossession.
 In order to arrive at what you are not
 You must go through the way in which you are not.
 And what you do not know is the only thing you know
 And what you own is what you do not own
 And where you are is where you are not.

[T.S. Eliot, 'East Coker', from *Four Quartets*]

On this view, desire is implicitly entrapment; and yet without desire, James seems to wonder, how is one to live in the modern world? Every aspect of our lives is measured by it. If pockets of tradition remain in the world that do not value above all else the faculties of desire and determination and strength of will, it is only because they have not yet been contaminated by the forces of the market. The market debases what it cannot measure. To the rest, we grow steadily blind: those aspects of culture, once beyond the market's proper ambit, begin to collapse, are destroyed or simplified in the great reckoning of the newly dominant species, *Homo Economicus*.

It seems to me from the entries that James treated these ideas with great seriousness; and though he did not in the diary explicitly draw the connection between questions of consciousness, desire, and the state of the depression in which he so often found himself, I am inclined to believe, especially given this fictional writing, that the connection was nevertheless there. We are animals of pattern, and our own pattern of thought tends, I believe, though we ourselves can rarely perceive it, to possess a profound logic.

I began by asking the question: why does a writer stop writing? And in James's case, I believe we now are on our way towards an answer. The problem of self-consciousness, of its relationship to desire, and desire's relationship to possession and control, all intertwine in a picture that I believe looked something like this:

He begins, like every unfortunate writer, with some inspiration. He sees the completed work before him, and this vision draws him on. Having begun the task of writing, however, he soon finds that what he is capable of producing, or what he is inclined to write, or what he is *able* to write, does not quite square with what he believes he would *like* to write, or even what he *should* write. In other words, what he desired remained at a frustrating distance. Very well. So far I have described the experience of *every* writer. Yet at this point, his response begins to follow a different pattern. Instead of continuing in the belief that what he desired could still be discovered in the editing process, James would try and turn up volume on his amplifier to achieve greater effect. Take the extracts from the novel. Just before it collapses into silence (note the days on which all he wrote was a single, sad word: 'patience') a verbose, comical voice enters the prose, strangling off the essential drama with writerly effects. As the fiction moves further and further from his imagined ideal, as he feels his ability to steer it diminish, he attempts to reassert control through the use of a magnifying

glass. Everything slows. The language thickens, and we get nowhere. Eventually, seeing that this congestion has further removed him from his ideal, he grows completely despondent and ceases to write altogether.

The difficulty was one James might before the end have overcome had he allowed himself the time. There are, once again, clues to it in the diary. In his notes on Iris, the character from the unfinished novel:

She, the poet, alluring for what she is that he is not and fears he will never be.
The poem passes through the poet. True art is a dissolution of ego; to get out of the way, to let the language work upon you. This an act of love. Love invites, fear prevents.

Yet to know the answer as intellectual knowledge and to live it out in one's being are quite different things, as he well understood:

Anger with myself for being unable to let go—then realising that such a response is only further evidence of the problem, that I'm stuck in a pattern of thought/feeling, a mode of being. You cannot by the rules that exist within the mode you wish to escape escape the mode. You are entirely *in* one game, or you are playing another game altogether. Fiction is an activity that uses the rules of one game to suggest another, as a line drawn according to certain rules in two dimensions suggests to one's eye a third.

It is a dangerous line of thinking, as I'm sure you can already detect, not least because it requires that we admit for consideration any theory; after all, how can we not if we do not possess in our 'mode' the tools required to assess it? He is proposing entirely distinct ways of seeing. Tempting though it is to agree with him (how else to explain why stories, or religion for that matter, persist in these 'rationalistic' times), I am wary of his absolutism.

Nevertheless, this diary entry, a bare three lines of unrhymed verse that I for one find difficult to read, are so filled with anguish that that very idea of refutation is nullified.

I must let go. But how? *How?*
Deafening, the howl of my how.
Longing to love, I am loveless.

Interview (Daniel)

James's brother, Daniel, lives in Woodstock in a semi-detached house. When I arrived he was in the process of preparing for a solo exhibition. Several sizable oil portraits were leaned up against the wall (so that he could 'keep an eye on them' in case revisions suggested themselves). He agreed to this interview with reservations, mainly for its peculiar motive: namely, to produce a literary collage of a past student's life—a process which at first he could see little purpose in. The interview begins *in medias res* because I neglected, in our preliminaries, to switch on the recorder.

[...]

INT: You used the word 'teleological' a moment ago. Could you say a bit more about what you mean by it in this context?

DANIEL: Sure. James used that word quite a lot and I kind of adopted it from him. *Telos* is Greek for 'end', and he used to say that the problem with so much of the world today was that people performed the 'rites' not because they are impelled to, but because they desire a result. That's a bit of a roundabout way of saying that the things we do have by and large been emptied of their meaning.

INT: I'm not sure I follow...

DANIEL: Yeah, sorry, I'm not being very clear. So for instance I remember him reading from an article—I can't remember where it was published—but the point of the article my father had said was important. The writer was arguing that South Africa had become a moral wasteland. Corruption everywhere, etc. He claimed that the root of this lies in the family. Without strong family values, one cannot have strong national values, since the nation is a form of ideological family. To improve our family values was essential, he said, if we wanted to improve our national politics. So James reads out the important bits of this article and then says: 'Fine, but he's put the cart before the horse. If morality is only in service of an end, it loses its meaning. We are back to the Hobbesian nonsense, State of Nature, the wild animals who need the Social Contract in order not to murder one another.'

INT: I take it he didn't think much of Hobbes.

DANIEL: He didn't think much of the idea that without the threat of punishment, we would be unequivocally beastly. He believed in human values. The idea that you must believe there is something essentially true in morality, that it can't be wholly instrumental of culture

or power or whatever, that it simply cannot work to say, 'I am going to care for others because that will improve my lot' or whatever. You have to recognise the essential spark of divinity in each human. Everything gets built on that. On love, basically. I may not have agreed with him, but I agreed with the result of the thinking, which is to say, even if we believe that morality originates in self-interest, we must still behave morally. There are problems of logic here, but you take my point.

INT: Excuse me for saying it, but it sounds as if he was in religious territory.

DANIEL: I don't think he would've disagreed. He wasn't religious, but he had a lot of sympathy for people who were and took a keen interest in belief from a philosophical standpoint.

INT: Had he always had such an interest? Were there particular people that helped form these ideas or beliefs?

DANIEL: Hm. That's a good question. [the following, which was somewhat longer and more rambling, has been edited by the speaker for style and clarity] We had a teacher—I'll call him 'B'—that all of us brothers looked up to. He was famous for being a brilliant storyteller. There were two storylines. The first was about an invented character called 'Bubbles' and his escapades through mysterious lands, and the second was about B's childhood growing up on a farm in the Karoo in the 50s and 60s. Each of us had him as a class teacher, and James, being the youngest, had him last.

Perhaps to escape the house and its miseries, James was always in the garage, working on some project.

INT: Not writing, I take it?

DANIEL: No, certainly not. James didn't read much as a child. He would make all sorts of things. Eventually the idea came along to make a knife (I think a pupil in our school had done it in his matric year). James spent months preparing himself for the task, working out the details of how it could be done. It was clear that the knives he envisaged were not going to look like they'd been made by a thirteen-year-old. I remember Rowan, our older brother, tried to dissuade him. 'You're too young,' he said. 'Do something easier.' He was probably right. But of course saying this only steeled his resolve, excuse the pun. Within six months he'd worked out how to do it and was making them for sale.

INT: That's quite something.

DANIEL: It was and it wasn't. James liked to impress people, and we were used to that. Teased him for it in fact. Anyway, besides his teaching job, B was a motor mechanic and had a side business repairing Land Rovers in his workshop, which stood at the back of our school beside his cottage. He would drive his 'Landy' up country during the holidays, and enjoyed hunting. He wore a leather waistcoat and blue jeans and a greying beard and had about him a sort of mythical air. Maybe because he lived on the school property, it was as if he was a part of the school itself. In any event, when James arrived the following year in his class, B discovered his burgeoning knife-making business and commissioned a hunting knife, which they designed together. When it was finished the knife became the prototype for several further commissions, and B, quite taken with his new acquisitions, became James's best customer and greatest advocate. Almost obsessively, James was busy every school holiday in the workshop over a grinding wheel.

INT: Did the business flourish?

DANIEL: It wasn't a huge sum, but I think for a teenager it was good pocket money. There were many customers that followed over the years, but I doubt whether he found another that used his knives like B did. They were not used only for hunting but also in the kitchen and even the workshop. He carried one everywhere; you could see it in a leather sheath suspended from B's belt. Since most of his customers bought his knives as prize objects to be stored in display boxes in safes, B's rough and thorough use of them gave James great pleasure. B was a 'form follows function' kind of guy. As an artist, I can say that there is something elegant about an object so well-adapted to its function, and I think this period of design and refinement had an influence on James's thinking that in the long run extended beyond the workshop.

INT: To writing?

DANIEL: Yes, and elsewhere. To life. [a pause] It might strike you as an odd mixture of interests, but besides knives and Land Rovers, B was also a lover of poetry and taught a series of lessons on the subject to the class eights every year. It was during these lessons (around the same time James was making that first knife, I believe) that he encountered the work of T.S. Eliot and Ezra Pound, B's two favourite poets.

INT: That's quite a choice to give to a class of fourteen-year-olds.

DANIEL: They are. They're difficult. That's just the point, actually. I remember one afternoon finding James at his desk looking distressed. He'd been given an assignment, he

told me when I asked him what was wrong, that required him to critique Eliot's 'The Hollow Men'. I doubt whether B expected any of his thirteen- and fourteen-year-old students to produce a piece of high modernist critique, but the task had put James in a terrible mood. He was so affected by the poem that he'd become paralysed by it. How could he, without properly understanding what he was reading, and yet feeling it work upon him with such power, produce a single word of authentic criticism? Even the word 'critic' seemed to terrify him.

INT: Interesting.

DANIEL: It was the first moment that I saw James truly hate writing. And it is interesting to me that it should've come about because of his respect for Eliot.

INT: Yes.

DANIEL: He felt that he was somehow going to deface the poem by writing untruths about it, or by committing gross oversimplifications. These were not his words, of course. At fourteen, his lack of words was part of the problem. I remember that he couldn't bring himself to write that the poem was 'about' the First World War. It seemed to him that this wasn't quite true. He couldn't say why, but that's how he felt. It made sense that the feelings it evoked should have been inspired by a world in which such a war could happen, but he could not see how the poem was in fact 'about' anything.

INT: This is very interesting. It reminds me of something Paul Muldoon said. That the part of us that is adapted to poetry is probably at its very best at about the age of eight or nine. I have the sense sometimes that he is right.

DANIEL: I think I'd agree with Muldoon. We get stuffed up with so much school rhetoric about themes and whatnot that we forget you don't need a degree to be able to enjoy poetry. Anyway, the language and reading background he had at the time was obviously inadequate to make a formal critique of such a poem, so he went to my father to help, who I remember offered little advice (he didn't know too much about poetry himself) except that he should not lie and could not be expected to write anything but what he honestly felt and knew. To even attempt a piece of criticism, which implies putting oneself above it, would be false. Looking back now, I think this was good advice.

INT: It certainly was....

DANIEL: In any event, very late that night he finally wrote a few lines (the minimum required) and sheepishly took them to school. He was grateful, I remember, when the lesson

ended before he'd been picked to read his critique aloud before the class. This time with B always strikes me as significant somehow. B must have been aware of what he was doing. He was testing them, but not in a way that they could expect.

INT: Was that the end of their relationship? Was he taught further by this teacher?

DANIEL: Oh no. I mean, yes, yes he was taught further. Around the age of eighteen, James decided to take up the guitar. You might guess if you didn't know him that he'd have picked a Stratocaster or Les Paul knock-off and started playing punk rock, but his interest in the music began with Bach. He became, after hearing a performance of the Bourrée and Double on the guitar, obsessed with Bach and his music, especially transcriptions of it for stringed instruments.

INT: Interesting Coetzee connection there.

DANIEL: Pardon?

INT: J.M. Coetzee also fell in love with Bach as a teenager. Heard the *Well-Tempered Klavier* played by his neighbour and went crazy for it.

DANIEL: My father has always been into Bach and Beethoven. I'm inclined to think, since he didn't read Coetzee until some years later, that that's where the love developed.

INT: Aha.

DANIEL: Anyway, he borrowed an old Yamaha nylon-string and a music stand and began practicing every afternoon, trying to work out, bar by bar, how to play pieces far too complex for a beginner. Had my parents been able to afford it, they'd probably have sent him for lessons, but he made quick progress without any. To my mother's annoyance, in the months leading up to his mock exams, he'd more often be found practicing guitar than studying. His hatred of schoolwork went back to his earliest schooldays. Almost any time that he was required to do something, he struggled to find enjoyment in it. But so long as he was in the driver's seat, he would achieve wonderful results. I think this is why, until leaving school, he remained a mediocre student of English: reading and critique had the air of tedium and obligation. I think he also detested the simplistic way one was required to write about books in school. In any event, until he went into a panic over his poor marks in the mock exams and began studying in earnest, he was a guitarist and not a student.

INT: Would you say this was formative? His guitar period, I mean.

DANIEL: I think it was, but not because of the guitar per se. You see, B was also a talented guitarist and when he discovered James had taken up the guitar, he invited him over for coffee.

INT: I see. Another connection with the mentor.

DANIEL: Yeah. Every morning for two hours before the start of school and for another two in the afternoons B would practice his guitar. It was crazy, really. And he never taught music lessons in his entire teaching career. That time was sacrosanct. All these years the same routine, and yet none of us had known about it.

INT: How unusual. He was never co-opted into teaching?

DANIEL: I think he probably refused. James told me how astonished he was to discover just how good a musician B was. He played an electric Les Paul and a Gianini (an asymmetrical Brazilian guitar, lute-shaped on top but with a cutout below for the knee). Typically, he would play exercises for an hour and would then improvise. What is quite curious is that he never played for anyone, really. It was for the pleasure of it, for the spiritual aspect of it. The music was in service of nothing but itself, and I think this part of B quite captivated James. According to him, B seemed to draw music from another world rather than compose it in this one. I'm quoting from something he wrote, I think.

[Daniel kindly agreed to share some of the text of this work. Dated 20/08/2018]

The little gate squeaks and down the hill I go, strange music floating up to meet me, chords and arpeggios starting, ascending, coming down: swallows flocking.

At the kitchen door the dog claws. I enter and pass into his study. He does not stop playing but looks up, eyes like oil, as though woken from sleep. I set my guitar down and sit facing him on the cane chair. At my back French doors open onto a little *stoep* and through them passes the thick scent of summer flowers. Along the shelves are books: mystery novels, South African history. In the corner I spy Eliot and Pound—hardcovers, old, well-used. He did not “teach” us poetry; it was a sharing of his life; and each object in this private room adds a new colour to it.

He finds a place to pause and asks if I'll play, but I decline. I'm much too nervous even to try. I haven't memorised the chords and their changes, just a beginner. He does not push; it would not be his style. I listen as he takes off again.

By the receptivity of his expression, eyes closed, it is as though the music is not produced but comes through him, his hands midwives, he a glad listener. Bearlike god of my childhood, how delicate, how vulnerable you are now! With your eyes shut, I am ashamed to look at you.

DANIEL: It was the December he left school that James began writing. Initially he wanted to write screenplays, and I think he envisioned becoming a sort of *auteur*. He had fallen under the influence of Paul Thomas Anderson and the Coen brothers. They were his models.

Since my parents hadn't the money to send him to film school, he decided to improve upon writing, which is cheap. Yet writing screenplays was unsatisfying to him; it lacked the rewards of the finished product. Screenplays, you know, are a means to an end but not an end itself. Without the hope that the film script would ever be produced, he became despondent. But then he began to think of writing more generally. If he could become a good fiction writer, he realised he would probably also become a good screenwriter. Storytelling is, after all, a single art with different forms.

INT: True enough.

DANIEL: So he started reading and writing short stories. Little did he know.... Little did he know! Dramatic irony, it'll get you every time.... Soon he was immersed in Hemingway, who he'd learned somewhere was considered a master of the short story. That was a love affair that lasted three years. Then Updike, Faulkner, Fitzgerald, Salinger, Cheever, Murakami, Kafka, Borges.... It goes on and on. He was a slow reader and took his time, but each new author was like an obsession. It was as if he was trying to absorb what they knew. But before all of this, at the time when he had just discovered that old copy of Hemingway's short stories and *The Sun Also Rises* in the library, James began visiting B again. He hadn't stopped making knives, and I think it was on the pretext of a new knife commission that B had invited him over.

[Here, excerpted from a longer piece, the relevant passage, dated 26/08/2018]

'Have you read *Four Quartets*?

I confessed I hadn't. 'Then you'd better borrow a copy. And his essays? *To Criticise the Critic*? No? Better borrow that too.'

The recommendations sounded like commandments, or as though it had been written somewhere that having expressed the wish to write I would be required to follow this course in reading. And yet this wasn't said in the tone of a former English teacher but with the excitement you might expect from a contemporary wishing urgently to broadcast as widely as possible their delight with a new book. I was for weeks afterwards immersed in Eliot's poetry and criticism, which had a profound influence on my sense of what a writer really was or could be. 'Tradition and the Individual Talent' made such an impact on me that its residual influence lingered for years, and perhaps still lingers.

I had left three short stories with him that day and hoped I would receive some feedback on them during my next visit. But when I returned with the Eliot books in my hands and a swarm of ideas in my head, I was shocked to discover that he seemed to have forgotten all about the stories. We spoke about Eliot, we spoke about Pound, about Hemingway (B, it turned out, had been an avid Hemingway reader in his twenties), but the conversation never turned to my stories. At last, exasperated, I decided I would force the subject into conversation.

'Have you read the things I left with you?'

'Yes,' he said, 'I have.'

A long pause.

'What did you think?'

'Now. You have to understand, I don't lie and I don't flatter. I give the unvarnished truth or say nothing at all. Are you prepared for that?'

'Well, it sounds ominous. But I'd still like to know what you think.'

'I was put in mind while reading them of the work of a talented second-language speaker.'

I felt myself blushing with embarrassment. At length I asked whether he thought there was anything that might be improved upon. He seemed to dismiss the question. 'Don't be discouraged. I wrote four novels in my twenties and one day decided to burn them all. You must write if you must write.'

[The following is an excerpt from an unfinished autobiographical essay]

In those days, before I'd arrived at University, there was no one trustworthy to whom I could show my writing. Neither parents nor siblings can be trusted; and the few friends I had were alarmed if I put more than one 'and' in a sentence. This isn't quite true, but the point stands: I didn't feel I could get the sort of feedback I wanted from my own, or my parents', generation. The comment he'd given was harsher than I could have expected. When I was fourteen and had written poems for his English class, he'd never once delivered such savage criticism, neither to me nor to any other student. For several weeks I was in the bleakest of moods. What was the point in carrying on if at twenty I couldn't produce a sentence that read like it had been written by a native speaker? He had seemed to insinuate by mention of his own youthful attempts at writing that I was now merely in the throes of a passionate literary phase, which like all phases would eventually pass. The trouble was I had it in my head that this would be my career. I would not write only later to burn. I had visions of myself driving alone into Namibia and speaking to nomads in the desert in their own language, living a life, like Hemingway, of adventure, hardship, and heroism (of course Hemingway committed suicide, but he somehow made this too appear heroic). I had visions of intense research in libraries studying etymologies of local languages, of traveling through the Karoo, the Northern Province, the Free State, visiting vanishing towns and, like Faulkner and McCarthy, collecting yarns from oldsters that would later find their home in a long and violent historical novel in the style of *Blood Meridian*.

I looked into our storied history and saw the blood that had been visited upon the ranks of godless men and believers alike and knew that by nothing known or believed would flesh be spared its one fate. I sat. I gazed the barren wastes....

Then I reread my stories again, trying like Johnson recommends, to free my mind of cant (not, like the radicals nowadays recommend, of Kant). This was no easy task. I had been so close to them; they had, I felt, come from a place in me until then inaccessible, and for this reason I felt they should remain in their unedited state, the language a kind of free flowing expression of all that was *me*. Once I had been through all three again, I saw with a growing sense of despondency that B had in fact been rather perspicacious in his comments. But it was not because I couldn't write otherwise that my sentences had the flavour of the foreigner's awkward argot. On the contrary, it was because in trying to imitate McCarthy and Hemingway I had hobbled myself with a de-Latinised vocabulary and a dilettantish preference for 'spare' punctuation (read: no quotation marks or semi-colons). The stories

themselves weren't altogether awful, it was the style with which I had tried to tell them that was to blame for their failure.

If I was to improve my style I would need to read more. At that time, I didn't get my reading recommendations from people but the internet. Wikipedia told me that James Joyce was rather good, so I went to the nearest second-hand bookshop and bought a copy of *Dubliners*, whose opening stories I read in a state of puzzlement. What was all the fuss about? He had neither the submerged, icy aches of Hemingway, nor the high drama and verbal lustre of McCarthy. Something refined was going on, I could tell, but the refinement was lost on me. It was only when I read the last story, 'The Dead', that I got the idea. So commenced my *Dubliners* phase, during which I wrote nothing but rather sad stories lacking any sort of ending, believing in my ignorance that this was a signal of commitment to high aesthetic standards.

[end fragment]

INT: The biographical writing you've provided concerns itself in large part with the subject of literary influence. It is to this I would now like to turn in our conversation. As is normal with writing students, and I think quite proper, James's work bears the influence of the writers he most admired: Kafka, Coetzee, Sebald, Updike, Salter...But somewhat unlike his peers, he seems to have found this issue of influence intensely troubling, one might even say debilitating. Would it be too bold to say that it played a part in the difficulties of his last months?

DANIEL: Well, to answer the last part first, I think he was certainly troubled by it. But whether it was causal or merely symptomatic of his frame of mind, I don't know. Your question is really one about character, which you'll understand is difficult for me to discuss.... But let me try.

When James was younger we used to tease him a lot about trying to be a grown up. He was able to speak with adults in a way that we never were. He was a performer, and pretty precocious and charming. My mother's friends loved him, of course. As a natural ally of adults, he found it difficult to break rules. At eleven I was egging houses or getting drunk on peach schnapps with my friends; James at that age was trying to run a business making and selling poi to his friends.

INT: Poi?

DANIEL: It's a juggling thing. You swing them around like this.⁵ Anyway, I felt he took things seriously. For example, had I wanted to make a knife, I would've just drawn something that looked cool and started making it. I probably would've messed it up, but that didn't matter to me. He on the other hand would obsessively design and redesign his knives, planning every aspect to avoid failure. I remember there was a mentor of his whose designs he thought were the best. All James's knife designs tended to resemble the designs of this mentor. He was both bothered by this and insistent that it couldn't be otherwise. Bothered because he wanted to be original, insistent because the superiority of the mentor's designs prevented the use of his own.

INT: I see.

DANIEL: What I guess I'm trying to say is that James was trapped by something. I'm sure he could have made beautiful knives that were of his own design; he came pretty close. It was his own sense that there was an adult way to do things, a 'right' way and a 'wrong' way, that was his trap. A fear of putting a foot wrong, of making mistakes. So long as he believed this, I knew he would stay stuck.... That sounds unfair, but I think, really, when it comes down to it, James never quite accepted himself as he was. He saw himself as something insufficient. People say 'make something out of yourself', as though one isn't already perfectly well made. Well, James believed this. I used to as well. His death changed that.

[a long pause]

INT: I can see why you refer to this as a 'trap'. It would have been very difficult for someone possessed of that belief to find the place in themselves from which art comes.

DANIEL: Yes. Although to be clear, I think he did come near that place a few times. Similarly, with the knives. He'd sometimes make one on the side that was truly remarkable (though of course he himself never thought much of these). It was like he balked at his own reflection. He was blinded by his anxieties, couldn't see the best parts of himself for what they were. Some artifice or device must be used to disguise the inadequate self, to make it acceptable. Of course this is just the opposite of the truth: great art is always a disclosing of self.

⁵ Poi: a juggling apparatus of two strings or chains weighted on their ends with balls, beanbags, or burning cloth and swung around in various patterns for visual effect.

INT: From his journals it is clear that this trouble with influence was not at all invisible to him. In fact, it seemed to constitute one of the major problems for him in completing anything.

DANIEL: Exactly. Exactly. He knew that to make what was worthwhile would entail a kind of freeing of the energies, a letting loose. But as you yourself as a writer must know, there is nothing so terrifying as letting go; you are given no promises of what will happen.

INT: I suppose what comes as a surprise to me, given his nature, is that he should've chosen to enrol in the program at all. With such anxieties, one would assume that a long and quiet preparation would've been the right approach. But then again, that wasn't really his style, was it....

DANIEL: No, you're right. He recognised that he was his own worst enemy and believed that the MA would somehow, like the shock of an ice bath, cause him to wake up to his own bad habits, or to draw out by force what writing was living inside him. With a group expecting to see new work every week, there would be nothing for it but to write. He was operating under classical plumbing metaphors: with enough pressure, something would burst forth. This unfortunately doesn't quite work in psychology.

INT: What interests me in the writing is that he went right back to childhood. It wasn't the battle waged by all writers in their early twenties that carried his interest.

DANIEL: I suppose you're referring to the passages about B?

INT: Yes.

DANIEL: Well, the story behind those is probably more straightforward than you think. The truth is, B died of cancer last year, and James was one of the few friends that visited him right until the end. I think he felt guilty that he'd been so self-absorbed, so involved with his thesis, which in his mind had grown into this impossibly daunting and important task, and was quite shocked to discover that he occupied so important a place in B's life. There's a passage somewhere in the stuff I gave you that refers to this time.

INT: Why should he have been surprised?

DANIEL: B was not a demonstrative sort of person. He expected you to know things by intuition. This is at least how James described him. My memories are restricted to my years as his pupil when I was fourteen and fifteen.

INT: Are there examples you could suggest?

DANIEL: The most obvious is the book. I said earlier that he had a famous series of stories. Two generations of pupils had heard them and they'd become a sort of legend, as had B himself. Anyway, he was always being pestered to write them down, and always refused. But then, to everybody's surprise, he published them as a book just before he died. At the launch, which everybody knew was a sort of living memorial to B, and which packed out the school hall, he thanked James for being the 'midwife' of the book. James was taken aback.

INT: He hadn't told him before?

DANIEL: Not in so many words. About this I can't really say more as I wasn't there. I was in France trying to sell *Kariba* to a publisher. You'll have to ask Ingrid.

INT: Mentorship in general—particularly male mentorship—seems to come through in his writing as a primary theme, though it is unclear whether he himself recognised this. One feels while reading him that there was some unsettled question he was getting at. Would you be able to say anything about this?

DANIEL: I hesitate to open this can of worms, because it has bearing on my own life, but James's relationship with our father was difficult. Don't get me wrong, he is a wonderful, caring, loving man, who did his best to raise us. But unfortunately, we are all Jobs in this life, and everything is sometimes not enough. Anyway, when we were kids, we didn't get all that much attention from him. To tell the truth, he found us a bit boring. Young children in general. He confessed this to my mother, who after the divorce committed the heinous crime of telling us. In the end it didn't matter: we already knew it in our bones. It might seem minor. Some people are beaten by their parents, or abandoned forever. But to be slighted in this way... the effects run deep. It doesn't take a genius psychologist to work out what sort of effect this has on young boys.

INT: He looked for attention from other father figures?

DANIEL: I wouldn't say 'attention', no. 'Acknowledgement' might be a better word.

INT: Right.

DANIEL: He felt the need to be acknowledged. And if you are not given the attention you need as a child, just for *who you are*, you are pretty likely to believe that you must *do* something to get it. You must stand out in some way.

INT: Hence the precociousness.

DANIEL: Well, in his case, yes, I think so. It wasn't enough for him to just *be*, so he tried to *be something*. I don't want to reduce everything James did in his life to a single cause, but I do believe this dynamic, or whatever you want to call it, played a big role. It has for me.

INT: There is trouble with this view, of course. I mean, what if one is not acknowledged?

DANIEL: You've hit the nail on the head. James relied on a sense of progress to keep him going. When he felt he wasn't getting closer toward his goal (which you might call being acknowledged, in a broad sense), he became despondent.

INT: It's a dangerous path.

DANIEL: Yes, and the events have proven you right. If you are willing to sacrifice your life now in exchange for future success, starting to believe that success will never come is very dangerous, because it nullifies the sacrifice. You've endured hardship for nothing. You might as well have been a hedonist, and screw the rest.

INT: Was James aware of this dynamic, do you think?

DANIEL: Of course. That is what makes this story tragic.

[a pause]

INT: If you're willing, I'd like today to discuss *Kariba*.

DANIEL: Sure.

INT: In the diary, James made many entries while working on it, some of them quite... how should I say? ...passionate.

DANIEL: [laughing] There's no need to mince words. I know how he felt.

INT: Right. Well, I suppose I'd like to know more about how you navigated the process of the writing.

DANIEL: I had the idea for the book way back in 2013 and began making concept art for it a few months later. I'd been inspired by Miyazaki and 'The Piper at The Gates of Dawn'⁶ and stories of the building of Kariba we'd been told by our grandfather. I had a bunch of ideas swimming around in my head, but I was well aware that writing the book alone would be nearly impossible. I needed help. So I asked James. It was a natural decision. He was interested in writing and we understood each other pretty well. I respected his thinking. Frankly, I respected his seriousness. In my industry, people sometimes tend to talk about writing in rather mechanistic terms. James was almost religiously opposed to compromise.

⁶ A chapter title from *The Wind in the Willows*, by Kenneth Grahame.

INT: That didn't scare you off?

DANIEL: No. I believed we could work together. And, in the end, we did.

INT: Right. But not without conflict.

DANIEL: If you want me to say that we fought tooth and nail on every point, then I'm going to disappoint you. We agreed on many things. The problem was time. Perhaps naïvely, James believed he could produce a script within three months, working part time while doing the MA. Obviously it ended up taking a lot longer than that.

INT: In his diary he accuses you of having chosen him because as his older brother you could control him better than a more qualified writer.

DANIEL: Look, we had disagreements. And yes, he did say that. Do you want to know what I said in reply? I told him to grow the fuck up. I told him that he could at any moment have left the project, but that he hadn't. Then, when things started getting tough, when things weren't working and the plotlines weren't so much *lines* as squiggles, he wanted to start blaming *me* for having persuaded him to do it. Take some fucking responsibility, I said. Do you want to know how long *I* spent on *Kariba*? I worked on the illustrations from eight in the morning until ten in the evening for an entire year. Every day, Sundays included. He was not the only one having a hard time...

INT: Did you share his anxieties about representation? 'Identity politics' and so on?

DANIEL: We had arguments about that too. I like to think that we challenged each other. He painted a different picture. He believed that I'd forced my ideas upon him. But the fact was that we both had anxieties about writing a black character. Thing is, in 2013, the reports out of Hollywood animation world were that you *could not* even have a female as a film lead, let alone a black person. We were told that young white boys, which was the largest audience group, wanted to see themselves. I believed otherwise and when my employer wouldn't listen, I went ahead and came up with my own idea. It looks like I was right.

INT: How do you think James would feel about the reception of the book?

DANIEL: I don't know. He'd probably, like me, have mixed feelings. We spent a long time on it, but in the end, we had to let it go before it was 'finished'. It's a writing cliché that you never finish but stop. Well, it was true for us. I think James resented that. As you know, he struggled to finish anything. Hated the idea of showing stuff that wasn't perfect. It was a trap.

INT: Yes, I know that very well. What effects, if any, would you say that *Kariba* had on James's writing more generally?

DANIEL: It's difficult to say. One thing it did, I'd say, was to show him how fucking hard writing a book is, even if it isn't in literary prose. It's hard to write characters and plots and story arcs and all that. All the stuff he pooh-poohed as 'hack writer stuff', as the most 'artificial thing in fiction', he grew grudgingly to respect, if only because of how difficult it was to master. The truth is, James was talented in certain aspects of writing, but his weaknesses lay in this area, which I think is pretty common among young writers, but which I also think was a fact he struggled to accept. He was impatient.

INT: I wonder whether you might say something about the writing of his that I've shared with you. Were you surprised by it in any way?

DANIEL: Surprised? No, not surprised. In fact, quite the opposite. The writing reflects almost too accurately the turns of his mind over the last years. All of that self-probing; it's clearly the work of someone struggling—depressed and struggling to find meaning.

[a long pause] The truth is that reading that stuff... it makes me furious. You know why? Because it reminds me, it reminds me that there was so much I didn't know. Jesus, it reminds you that there was so much he was still learning about *himself*. I mean, you think you know a person, your brother, inside and out. How could it be different? You've spent most of your life together. But in the end, it's private. Life is private. Our private lives are the only real lives, and for the rest we are always trying to see through the smoke. You try to reveal yourself to others, sometimes you are even able to make yourself vulnerable. But in the end it's not enough. Something more is asked of us. And how many of us are really able to give it?

Fathers & Sons

The interviews with Daniel left me confused and bewildered. Are we born not only with limbs and organs but the *questions* that will later define our lives? I leave off. No ideas but in things....

Loving

‘Here silence
is turned into objects’
—Auden, ‘The Cave of Making’

Giorgio Agamben writes, in ‘Man Without Content’ (1996), that in our age, all forms of doing, that of the artist and the craftsman, are generally defined as ‘praxis’. Yet the Greeks, he says, maintained a clear distinction between praxis and poesis:

Central to praxis was the idea of the will that finds its immediate expression in an act, while, by contrast, central to poesis was the experience of production into presence, the fact that something passed from nonbeing into being, from concealment into the full light of the work.

Agamben argues that over time this emphasis on poesis as a ‘production into presence’ diminished and became fused with the idea of both praxis and ‘work’, to the extent that Locke, Smith, and Marx, (the latter most brutally) made work the fundamental of man’s humanity. Most important of all was the artist’s *operari*, ‘the creative genius and the particular *characteristics of the artistic process* in which it finds expression’ (my italics). In other words, *will* replaces poesis. The Greeks didn’t, however, see poesis as having anything at all to do with the expression of a will... How was it, I then wondered, that we have so successfully interposed will as the generative force between nonbeing and being? And what does this mean for art and the artist?

As I read on, Agamben’s analysis took hold of me and repelled me at the same time. Something was contained in it that drew me forward and yet, like a mountain path so faint that one treads neither as follower nor creator but something in between, I could not follow his argument, its impossibly long passages strewn with ancient Greek and quibbles over points of translation from Aristotle, its sometimes impenetrable self-reference and ouroboros-like dialectic.

Bogged down in his inextricable argument, I lay defeated on my bed, listening to the passing trains cry their lonesome iambic dimeter. His words became ever lighter, their significations hovering just beyond understanding. Though Agamben's skinny book was as light as a leaf, I felt it weigh down on me like a token of things never to be comprehended. And yet I was not unaware that this feeling, this egoism of the 'should', was eating away at the thing that could liberate me from the very idea of the possession of knowledge. Couldn't everything—all the hearty and sad business of living—be simplified to a principle?

As anguish can arrive unbidden, so too the heart's rebellions; and between thoughts or through them a memory had come which until that moment I had not realized was there to be remembered.

You are at home, standing at your bedroom desk with a backpack on, ready to leave. On the wall is a small square of paper bearing the words of a poem by Walt Whitman, and in these final minutes before leaving Cape Town you are reading them aloud to yourself.

O soul, repressless, I with thee and thou with me,
 Thy circumnavigation of the world begin,
 Of man, the voyage of his mind's return,
 To reason's early paradise,
 Back, back to wisdom's birth, to innocent intuitions,
 Again with fair creation.

O we can wait no longer,
 We too take ship O soul
 Joyous we too launch out on trackless seas,
 Fearless for unknown shores on waves of ecstasy to sail,
 Amid the wafting winds, (thou pressing me to thee, I thee to me, O soul,)
 Caroling free, singing our song of God,
 Chanting our chant of pleasant exploration.

...

Away O soul! hoist instantly the anchor!
 Cut the hawsers—haul out—shake out every sail!
 Have we not stood here like trees in the ground long enough?
 Have we not grovel'd here long enough, eating and drinking like mere brutes?
 Have we not darken'd and dazed ourselves with books long enough?
 Sail forth—steer for the deep waters only,
 Reckless, O soul, exploring, I with thee, and thou with me,

For we are bound where mariner has not yet dared to go,
And we will risk the ship, ourselves and all.

Six years ago and there you are. There you are in your bedroom, reading to yourself; standing before the desk where as a boy you wrote out Afrikaans spelling rules. This fragment of Whitman has meant something to you, if for no other reason than because it is a call you cannot answer. It was quoted to you by your father during one of your blackest months. You are not, as some people suggest, anguished because you do not know what you want out of life or because you do not know where you wish to go, but because you know too clearly the life you *do not* want to live, where you *do not* want to end up, and this certainty, which allows you to reject what seems impure and false becomes, without a governing belief to guide it, a very heavy burden indeed. Your family hasn't the money to send you to university. Who cares? You haven't the appetite anyway for the false thought and political obsession and theory that you know your friends have been swallowing whole. Wherever you are going, you've decided, it must be a place where what can be taught is subordinate to what must be learned in solitude.

When I heard the learn'd astronomer,
When the proofs, the figures, were ranged in columns before me,
When I was shown the charts and diagrams, to add, divide, and measure them,
When I sitting heard the astronomer where he lectured with much applause in the lecture-room,
How soon unaccountable I became tired and sick,
Till rising and gliding out I wander'd off by myself,
In the mystical moist night-air, and from time to time,
Look'd up in perfect silence at the stars.

You read a book on the mystics, you read Yeats, Eliot, Pound, and you are overawed by the mass of signification on the page. The world has gone to shit. That much is ominous. Pound in particular exerts the influence of a lost prophet, a soothsayer whose howl has been ignored but which you have recognized for what it is: the howl of a man who has read the signs' true meaning; in Pound are the answers to the whole miserable and misguided plot of things, which in order to reject, one must rise above, must perceive for its inherent vanity,

The ant's a centaur in his dragon world.
Pull down thy vanity

Of course this residuum of adolescent rage cannot burn without kindling, and soon your Self, punished at every turn for its failure to be equal to the geniuses who've *had the answers*, wants out. You would rather gorge on potato chips and watch Hollywood films about finding true love than confront the Great Task of Literature, so impossibly large that you are eventually repelled by it as by a sign that warns before every difficult passage of a novel, every difficult poem, 'You do not belong here'. Like a lure to mediocrity, the University beckons, the alleviations of verifiable achievement beckon, and the tall, unwritten story of your four-square life.

You are angry, yes, but above all you are afraid. Afraid of the uncertainties which literature multiplies and yet repelled by the banality of South Africa's petty certainties, you've steadily lost contact with your friends and in an uncontrollable fantasy, have driven yourself to fits of work, spending more and more time in the workshop, obsessing over the finest details of not only the knives which you produce but the tools you insist on making to produce them. Every aspect of this cave has an inexpressible importance to you. And yet perhaps it is all a distraction from a truer purpose. Do you really intend on spending your days over a vice, sanding a bit of steel until it shines pleasantly? And maybe you're right, maybe it *is* a distraction, but nevertheless one that opens a world within which you can impose order while everything outside it remains uncertain.

However much it is desired, the order you've imposed has a tendency to undermine itself. The very foundation of your obsession with order leads you into an emotional chaos from which the prospect of this short trip to visit the country's best knifemaker, a trip which you never would have taken had it not been for your friend Jenna, offers salvation, stands ahead with its promise of change like Whitman's ocean itself.

Rob Brown. Amongst the not inconsiderable number of craftsmen in the South African knifemakers' guild, this name is something magical, bringing to mind a man known to be incapable of letting an imperfect thing ever leave his workbench. Rob has agreed to have you over to his workshop for a few days, where you hope to learn something about perfection. After a night on the bus to Port Elizabeth you're exhausted, but the sight of him in his car at the old town centre is a shock. Not only because it means you've made him wait, but because somehow seeing him in a car like everyone else does not seem right, as though he belongs in

an apron before a grindstone. You fear that he will be gruff and annoyed that you have cost him an hour of his workday.

'James,' he says warmly, offering to take your bag. 'How was the drive?'

Rob lives in an old English-style house with a wide front lawn in Schoenmakerskop, 'Schoenies', a place within 'casting distance', as he puts it, of the Indian ocean. Port Elizabeth has been described to you as a town of car dealerships and miserable cafes, but this place looks like how you've imagined Cornwall.

He drops you off at a modest B&B where you've rented a room and tells you to visit whenever you're ready. After unpacking your bags, you make your way down the street to his house. To your surprise there is no fence, no wall, not even a gate.

'Welcome,' he says looking up from his bandsaw. 'I'm really not sure what to show you. Just doing some profiling and grinding this week, so it's all a bit boring at the moment.'

Aware that to an outsider this workshop would mean nothing, to you it is a place where perfection is brought into the world, though for a task as high as this it doesn't look like much—a converted garage with a few dusty tools and bits of steel and wood. Yet with its view of the sea not fifty yards away, it seems, unlike many other workshops, to keep things in perspective. Beyond the window, the lawn, the road, the bushes, waves, sea, and placed upon this all a ship floating its cargo northeast across the horizon. More striking than its view is its complete modesty. As you talk and watch him work, the sense you had that there must be some *trick* to it, to his skill, some technique that he's developed to achieve what you've seen he achieves, slowly disappears. At every step of the process his methods prove to be nothing short of basic. He has affordable materials, he has simple tools (many of which are simpler and cheaper even than your own).

'But how do you get the radius on this notch to be an exact semi-circle? Do you have a jig?'

'Oh. Here,' he says, moving over to the bench. 'I put it in the vise and then I file corners. Then I file those two new corners, then I file the four new corners and so on again until eventually I have a radius.'

He hands you the knife.

'It's perfect,' you say, holding it up to the light. 'Is there a benefit to doing it this way?'

He chuckles. 'Probably not. I just do it that way.'

On parts of the knife that will never be seen, parts that will be covered with steel guards or bolsters or haft wood, he takes as much care and as much time as he does elsewhere. All tasks

are performed with equal focus, a focus which looks as easy as his tuneful whistle that runs along in harmony with the radio.

Naturally his work seems slow and so, as you return to the workshop after a break it occurs to you to ask how many knives he produces a month. He looks surprised at the question.

‘Oh, I’m not really sure,’ he says, taking off his glasses and setting them on his forehead, ‘I just make as many as I make. Maybe four? I don’t know.’

You have always admired his knives, but over the following three days, without knowing why, you grow to admire something in the man himself. He has no militant principles as you have imagined the Japanese craftsmen must have, nor does he have interesting philosophical reflections on the nature of the craft. What you admire is his evenness.

Urbanity in externals, virtue in internals.
Some in a high style for the rites,
Some in humble;

You had believed that the making of a knife was an act of ordering the world around you, imposing structure where before there had been only chaos. To do this, you must make the environment pure, the tools must be ranged evenly in their places and the materials must lie ready. In Rob’s workshop this wilful organization and preparation disappears out of view, is eclipsed by the task at hand. And while principle at first seems lacking to his process, you soon see that in fact he does not *have* a ‘process’. Only principles. And all principles are subordinate to one: the principle of care.

Beside the workshop stands the house, in which they’ve been living since Rob began thirty years ago. Inside it is dark, the furniture of sombre dark wood and the walls hung with maps and pictures of the old Eastern Cape frontier. A stopped grandfather clock, a barometer forecasting nothing. In a stand with the walking sticks are several old fishing rods, and on the mantelpiece some finely made reels. It is a cold house, a quiet house. The rooms have the smell of a long emptiness.

Gail, Rob’s wife, works in the city every day and comes back after dark to make dinner. You are invited to eat with them. Together you sit in a small room off the side of the lounge and watch television, as if perhaps the old home, with its memories of a family, will whisper that the children have gone. America, New Zealand, the days of their absence bloodless.

After supper Rob brings out a cherished book and pages through it with you, showing you some of the designs that inspired him when he started out. You've seen the book before but you do not want to disturb the moment, so quietly watch his hands leaf through it.

'Haven't opened this book in years, actually... Another Loveless design there,' he says, pointing. 'And there S.R. Johnson. He's a great maker. Brilliant. Those yanks know a thing or two.'

His praise of these men surprises you. To you it seems obvious that Rob's work is superior, and yet you detect not a trace of false modesty in him. He turns the page. Rob's hands are swollen around the knuckles. At dinner he didn't put salt on his food. You learn that he has had bypass surgery and is on a diet. Sitting beside him now you see the signs of age more clearly, the pallid skin around the eyes, the hands. The hands of the craftsman. He scrubs them clean with Handy Andy, and the hard soap has cracked his skin. Scrub as he might, decades of sanding have left embedded in them a fine steel dust, darkly revealing the lines of his fingerprints. He turns the page. 'This looks a bit like my first knife. Sort of a hunter-skinner type thing.'

'Do you still have it?'

'No. I think I sold it to one of my fishing buddies.'

'Do you own any of your knives?'

'Well I made a breadknife for Gail. But I suppose I don't own any, really. Too damn busy making them to own them.'

He turns the page, remembering...

The following morning, a Saturday, Rob takes you to the train station. You arrive early and he insists he will wait to see you off. He buys cokes and you stand and drink in the public square by a fountain that has no water in it. Empty packets rattle inside it as the wind blows. There are bars over the windows on the storefronts. A group of teenagers sits on a bench nearby, chatting loudly in Xhosa. One of them has a suitcase. You will see him later on the train, sitting alone.

'This place has changed,' says Rob. 'You see that tower?' he says pointing at a tall watchtower that stands beside the station. 'As kids we used to race each other up the spiral staircase in that thing when we came to town on Saturdays.'

'Really? It was open to the public?'

‘Everything was open to the public. Used to spend the day in the library. And what a selection! The city library used to be damn good.’

‘And now?’

‘People have moved out. Nobody comes to town, really. That hotel there used to get all sorts of fancy types coming, but not today. These days it’s a dump. And the library. My God. I went in there a couple years ago—for the life of me can’t remember why—and woah. What a mess! Didn’t look like it had bought a new book in years. And the old ones looked as if they’d been used to wipe somebody’s nose.’

As you look at the dilapidated library, at the trash whirled up in the wind and the strange incoherence of the place, you think about his children living on opposite ends of the world, what that must be like for him. Why did they leave? He’s told you it was because of the poor job market. You wonder about his family. At what cost to them has he spent twenty-six years over a workbench? His quietness, his carefulness, his apparent ease—do they all mask something unassailable and resolute, something that perhaps only Gail and his children know about? Or are you wrong to assume that such absolute obsessiveness with the ideal is necessary to his achievement?

Eventually your train is announced and going so far as to carry your second bag for you, Rob sees you off with a wave. ‘Only a pleasure, James. All the best.’

Until Craddock you are alone in the compartment, and in this time you imagine him driving home alone, opening up the workshop, switching on the radio. Will anybody ever acknowledge this man, alone over the bandsaw, alone over the grinder, alone at the workbench? Or will he go unremarked in the story of our making?

*

You climb from the *chapa* and feel the blood bounce against the surface of your skin. The other passengers drift into the square, some of them waiting for the driver to remove stowed packages of fruit and clothes and cashews from the roof. It must be thirty-five degrees or more, or perhaps the antimalarials are making your blood simmer under the surface, for even under the shade of a nearby tree you feel exhausted, your eyes burning from the heat and the tiredness of the long bus ride to Inhambane. Inhambane, the Mughal slavers’ port, its empty face turned East as if waiting for the ships to return.

In Johannesburg you met your friend Jenna and caught another train north, by a series of *chapas* finally reaching Mozambique.

And now Inhambane, at whose centre life is as slow as in its suburbs. Time here does not pass by the clock but staggers, its rhythms ancient, geological. The slow flaking paint of empire. Dry trees grow from roofless rooms of abandoned houses, *dhow*s knock hollowly against one another in the harbour, and here and there walls stand skeletal and doorless, their wooden ruins sold, you imagine, to tourists as the centrepiece of a home in affluent South Africa.

Jenna climbs from the *chapa*, holding her bag and her camera.

'Do you have the map?' she asks.

'I thought you had it?'

For some minutes as you check your pockets a woman stands nearby, in her hand a bag of cashew nuts extended hopefully toward you.

'No thank you.'

She does not understand, but after some moments she loses patience and returns to the shade of a tree.

We find the map and through the stifling heat make our way Eastward toward the dot marked 'airport' which, given Inhambane's size, is only a landing strip and a prefabricated hut. We stop before we reach it and turn right into a dusty street where the house of the artist stands, the curtains drawn. We knock and wait.

The young American woman who has put us up for a few nights gave directions that morning. Jenna is a photographer, and in exchange for the favour of a place to sleep, we have been sent to take pictures of the artist's work for a catalogue the American is putting together under the auspices of the 'Casa del Cultura,' which will showcase young artists of small towns in Mozambique. The market at the time was almost exclusively geared toward the production of traditional crafts for sale to tourists, and she was trying to promote artists who worked outside of this traditional style. From a very 'cultural' family back home (her parents were arrested for protesting the Vietnam war, and, she mentions, knew Allan Ginsberg) she is interested in promoting art in 'parts of the world that have been ignored'.

Eventually he comes to the door. He is surprisingly tall and has a broad, tired smile. The American told us that he, the artist, 'Joaw,' (that is what it sounds like when he pronounces it) is twenty-two years old. And yet, despite the jauntiness of his clothes, the Manchester United 'AEG' on his t-shirt, and his floral shorts and flip-flops, to me he looks much older. You introduce yourselves.

'Are you from Inhambane originally?' Jenna asks.

'Yes. I have always been here,' he says, a note of pride in his voice. 'Always in this house.'

'How long have you been making art?'

'The paintings, I have been making them since sixteen. The sculptures since eighteen.'

For a moment it seems as if that is where the conversation will end. But eventually it occurs to him to ask you some questions too. 'And where are you from?'

'From South Africa. Cape Town. You know it?'

'Ah, Cape Town. Yes, I know it.'

'You've been there?'

'No, I know it from the soccer.'

At this you laugh together. You follow him to the shed where he works and see that this impression, the impression of age, is given not by his features but by his whole bearing, the soft collapse of his arm as he shook your hand, and now the slow shuffle of his feet across the yard. Beside the door of the shed a soccer ball lies half deflated. The weeds grow tall.

Inside the shed there are paintings, carvings and assemblages strewn here and there across the floor or piled in stacks against the walls. The place is so full with work upon work that you wonder whether he has ever sold anything. He picks up a hardened brush and tosses it toward a bucket nearby, but misses. I see indecision on his face as he wonders whether to pick it up.

'So,' says Jenna, 'What would you like us to photograph?'

Joaw scratches his chin. He goes and ruffles through a stack of paintings. As he does, you look around the place. The windows, broken through here and there, are dusted over with cobwebs. Paint has hardened on a nearby cardboard palette. You wonder when last he was at work.

'This one,' he says finally, pulling a painting out and handing it to you. 'And this one.'

You lean them against the wall of the shed and stand back. They do not strike you as the work of someone talented. There is something listless and sloppy about them.

'And any of the sculptures? Do you want any of them photographed?'

'Oh yes,' he says. 'This one is my favourite. You must please take a picture of this one.'

Again, the sculpture is too odd to be attractive, too insipid. Rather than pass judgement on the artworks, you discuss with Jenna how they might best be photographed, positioning the sculpture in the light of the window and trying to find a suitable background.

Rather arrogantly, you think, looking incredibly bored, Joaw excuses himself and goes indoors, leaving you and Jenna in the shed to photograph his work alone. After twenty minutes you are finished and once again knock at the door. When no answer comes, you knock again. Minutes pass. You decide to go round to a window and peer inside, but can see no-one. You wonder if he hasn't gone and fallen asleep.

'I've had enough of this,' you say. 'I'm going inside.'

Jenna stares at you. Her expression says that she will have no part in it but will not fault you for this indiscretion should things turn out well.

Inside it is quiet. Clearly this must be Joaw's mother's house, for there are doilies on the kitchen table and prints of flowers on the wall, along with a little iconic picture of Samora Machel. In the corner is a small television. Notably, none of Joaw's art hangs on the walls. Hesitating for a second, you stop at the exit of the small lounge, but strengthening your resolve you tell yourself that since you have made it this far, the indiscretion has already been committed and you may as well look everywhere. The thought has barely left your mind when you find him collapsed on the floor of the passage. You call for Jenna. After some minutes of reassurance from Joaw that nothing is wrong, you discover that he has malaria.

'Why are you not at the hospital?'

'I don't need the hospital.'

'Where are your parents?' you ask, as if they might have more sensible answers.

'My parents are dead,' he says.

To this you do not know what to say, and for some moments you simply look at one another, his eyes half closed as though he is about to faint again. Jenna goes over and puts her hand on his shoulder. 'Listen. I think maybe we should take you to the clinic. To the hospital. Just for a check-up.'

Her approach works and slowly he agrees, though not without reluctance. 'They cannot do anything there.'

Without a way of transporting him to the hospital, you must walk, and Joaw leans on your shoulder as slowly you shuffle along the dirt road away from the house. A hundred paces on you realise that a trip to the hospital is a mistake, but to turn back is to take him into your inept care again, and the hospital, Jenna says, is very close. At length you arrive and Joaw collapses onto a bench, his breathing short.

The hospital is built around an open courtyard with the wards leading off on all sides. It is single-storeyed and tropical in its atmosphere; the cement floors painted terracotta red, walls of the sombre corridors a dirty white. A tired place, and with so few patients and even fewer beeping objects one is accustomed to seeing in hospitals, almost noiseless. Nobody is at the reception and you must walk around the hospital peering into the wards to find someone. You find an old man standing by his bed.

'Nurse?' you ask.

He points exaggeratedly to his left, so you follow his finger leftward until two wards further on you find a woman in a nurse's uniform. By your suggestions of urgency, she is not at all hurried and you must force yourself not to show your annoyance. Perhaps something more is wrong with him than just malaria? Or perhaps his case is particularly bad? To know, he must be examined. When she sees him on the bench she greets him in Portuguese and they begin a discussion whose subject is certainly not his health. They seem to know each other. It is more probable, you think, that Joaw is explaining to her the presence and strange behaviour of the tourists who have brought him here. After a few minutes their conversation concludes and the nurse begins to walk away.

'Excuse me,' you call after her.

She turns.

'Will he be admitted?'

'No.'

'What must he do then?'

'He must rest. He must go home and rest. No more soccer,' she laughs.

Of course it is a joke. Joaw is in no condition to walk, let alone to kick a ball. You look at Joaw, you look at Jenna. The thought of walking him all the way back home is intolerable, especially given that the nurse's dismissiveness has made you both look like fools.

Joaw smiles. 'Do not look so worried. I will be fine.'

You are not convinced by his levity, but nevertheless respond to it with a smile.

'Did you take good pictures?' he asks, clearly wishing that his health take up no more of your conversation.

'I hope so,' says Jenna. 'Would you like to see?'

She sits down beside him and together they look through the pictures on the small LCD screen of her camera.

‘This one is very good,’ he says, laughing. ‘You have made it look better than in real life!’

Outside a boy sits on a bicycle, looking at you. You go to him and say that you will pay him to call a *chapa*. In a minute he returns and tells you that one is on its way. It will take about fifteen minutes to arrive. Joaw protests, but you and Jenna both insist it is better to drive home. You are afraid of what effect further exertion might have.

On the bench in the hospital courtyard you sit together, looking like three invalids out of their ward. You are too exhausted for conversation, but Jenna is interested in finding out more about Joaw and has asked him about his relationship with the American.

‘She is trying to help me sell. You see we Mozambican artists do not sell here. Mozambicans do not want it, and the others, the tourists, they want the traditional craft.’

‘So you want to sell all those paintings in your... studio?’

‘That would be fine.’

‘You don’t want to sell them?’

‘I don’t mind. She wants to sell them.’

‘Really? You wouldn’t mind if they don’t sell?’

‘I like to make the paintings. To sell them is something else. I like to make.’

Although you follow this conversation only half-heartedly, Joaw’s indifference to money seems to you like recklessness. But perhaps he has a job, or an inheritance?

When the *chapa* reaches Joaw’s place you pay out every last one of your meticals to the driver. With Joaw settled back in the house there is nothing left to do but head back into Inhambane to meet the American and tell her what has happened. Joaw thanks you for taking the photographs and asks that you send his regards to the American.

You drive back without speaking to one another. You have the sense that Jenna and you are both trying to sort out in your minds just what happened in Inhambane.

That night at the hostel as you lie down beneath the crowns of your nets you switch on Jenna’s camera and look through the photographs she has taken. As you scroll back and forth from one painting to another you realise that you had been wrong. Joaw’s paintings are not only good, they are very good. Those marks of undisciplined colour, those rough swipes across the canvas that you’d taken for listless brushwork from a lazy painter are in fact exactly what made the paintings so good. It is as if Joaw had allowed his disease into the work and the work had transformed it into something vital. The collapsing strokes, tiny inconsequential markings allotted a corner of one meagre umbered patch—all of it somehow

evoked Joaw. Joaw and Inhambane itself, that listless place that has not forgotten history but cannot remember it either.

When you get back to South Africa you wonder what happened to Joaw, but discover that you've lost the contact details of the American and have no way of contacting either of them. Perhaps the American used Jenna's photographs and represented Joaw's talent to an appreciative public abroad? Perhaps Joaw not only sold his paintings, perhaps he became a successful Mozambican artist? You will never know.

Before leaving you thanked the American, and she said that you were welcome back any time, although she would perhaps have to ask a friend to put you up instead—after a year and a half helping at the 'Casa del Cultura', she said, it was time to return to America.

*

Two years later, after a long bout of depression, I finally relented and sold the contents of my workshop. A decade of making knives had been enough, and I had come to the realisation that I was never going to make a career of it. It would be a clean break, and I needed the money from the sale to fund an upcoming exchange to Amsterdam. Not only the money, I needed also to be free of the obligations which uncertainty entails, and the workshop had begun to feel like an anchor, keeping me shorebound.

Selling all these things gave me occasion to think about what it was in me that had been unsuited to the work. Why had I never been satisfied with the prospect of a career as a craftsman? Perhaps because it was in the end a physical process, leading to a physical object, and this was not enough? That didn't seem to me an adequate answer, but I hadn't any other ideas.

Over a drink I told a friend that I'd sold the workshop and, surprised, she asked why.

'I don't know? I guess I was never suited to it.'

She seemed very puzzled and took another sip from her wine. 'You loved it,' she said.

'Did I? I don't know.'

'Yes. And now you've fallen out of love.'

Her comment passed and our conversation moved onto other topics, but as time has given distance I see that she was right. When I was thirteen years old and filing a piece of steel for the first time, nothing could have produced in me more excitement or a greater feeling of promise. And yet between that time and those later years of anguish when the world would

Mise en Abyme

Ingrid P— lives in her parents' home in Mowbray, an old Victorian double storey. When I arrived for the interview one late Sunday afternoon in December, the family had just finished their lunch. From the dark rooms I passed as I was led down the hall to the garden, I felt the still air of empty afternoon rest drowsily about me. The great age of Victorian homes, or the way of life and attitudes that gave rise to them, visible in every ancient wooden architrave, creates a mood of slowness and certainty that reminds me of the power exercised upon us by what we inherit. As she showed me to a little wrought iron table and chairs beneath the grapevine in her back garden, I wondered what will be said decades from now of that which we are making now?

INT: I'd like to begin by asking you how much James was able to talk to you about his experiences during the MA. The picture painted by his brother, Daniel, was that he was rather secretive.

INGRID: Well, I wouldn't say *secretive* exactly. He was private. He needed to know what he was doing was good enough to show to other people. Actually, that's not really it.... It would be more accurate to say that he was insecure about showing work to others because for him, writing was a sort of private exercise. To his own dismay, as you're of course already aware, his fiction often ended up being very autobiographical. Fictional, but autobiographical in style. And content, often. I knew about this, but he never showed it to me.

INT: Really? He never asked for your thoughts?

INGRID: No. It was a bit of a joke among our friends that even though we'd been dating for years I still had no idea what he was writing. I saw one story he wrote, called 'Old Iron', which I think was more traditional in style. I thought it was quite good, although he wasn't too happy with it. Anyway, I found it a bit upsetting that he wouldn't show me stuff. It felt like he was trying to keep me out, to hide from me. I was quite understanding about it, but after a certain point it becomes ridiculous. Even sort of embarrassing. People expect after three years that you know what your boyfriend does. *Kariba* was useful in that way; I could point people to it if they asked. But it wasn't really *him*.

INT: Yes. This question of the graphic novel comes up a lot in his writing diary. He struggled a lot while writing it.

INGRID: Yes, it was an obligation. What probably doesn't come through is that there were lots of times that he *did* enjoy working on it. You go to your diary when things aren't going well, not to say how cheerful you are. And he could be very cheerful. But you already know this.

INT: It's true that the picture one gets from his diaries is not of a sunny person, which he often was....

[a long pause]

INT: James's brother mentioned that part of what sent him into his last depression was the death of his former teacher. Would you agree?

INGRID: [inaudible] ... to say that. It was a mixture of things. There's never really a cause. There's a final stroke, yes, but is it the cause? Four of James's friends died during his Masters. All from cancer. It had a deep impact on him.

INT: Daniel also said that James blamed himself for not being present for them. For spending so much time working on his thesis, or worrying about it when he wasn't working. He mentioned a book that had been dedicated to him.

INGRID: They were mentors more than friends. Or a mixture of both. They weren't our age. But the book. Yes, B published his stories just before he died, though he had written them down years before. It was quite an interesting story in fact.

[This taken from an autobiographical piece, which up until the time of these interviews, made little sense to me]

The shrunken school.

Bench where you sat

Talking shit, hatching

For a half-dreamt future.

Now you're here and the old faces return. They come one by one through the gate, shapes disturbed with age. Where did you put the years? I'm sure you could recollect those hours, how you spent them, got this far into the red, with enough time, only I haven't enough to make the reckoning.

He is seated at the front of the hall, skin wasted around his face, pale and drawn, eyes enlarged like an alert child's, and for the same question: what will happen next?

I am here for you now but I am here too late.

When I was twenty I had a dream about a story you once told us. The little boy, your friend, who as a baby was given a bag of *doepa* by his grandmother for protection. Every hour of his life it hung around his neck until one day you were playing together and he lost it. For hours you searched without luck. That night, leaving his house for the toilet, he was bitten by snake and died. Later you found the medicine bag atop an anthill.

I tried to write the story. I couldn't do it. It held a secret; my words would be the bowl to carry it, but the bowl I made was full of holes and the secret poured out.

We sat beneath your fig tree like Buddha and I told you about my dream. It was summertime and your garden smelled of fallen figs; they fell thud, thud to the ground as we spoke. About my dream you said nothing but your eyes changed like oil, as when we were six years old and quiet, and you were staring from the window at the plane trees outside the classroom, waiting for a story.

That night you say, you say you wrote them? For thirty years nothing, and now every single one written in a week: all of them written; but you are no writer. Your bowl was your own cupped hands. We remember, but cannot drink from them now....

[end entry]

INGRID: The book launch was for me quite significant, because it was the first and only time I would meet B. James was terribly nervous. It was known that B would not recover. It was palliative, but the people at the event didn't seem to know that he was on morphine and had used every ounce of energy just to be there. Everyone wanted to talk to him, to catch up. When the time came for his speech, James had to stand beside him to hold him upright. He also agreed to be a stand-in for B's daughter, who did a reading from the book but was terrified she would break into tears. I think he was honestly surprised and overwhelmed at having been included in B's family in that way.

INT: Do *you* think he was oblivious to the way he was seen because of his absorption in the thesis?

INGRID: No. I don't. I think it was quite typical for him to blame himself for things like that. I mean, it was something to be glad about. But he felt it as some sort of responsibility that he had to honour. That was James's biggest blind spot: he never really quite understood that others cared about him and wanted him around... [a pause, crying] He was so fucking

obsessed, so hard on himself. He wanted so badly to be *good* at something, to be fucking *brilliant* at something. *Look at me! Look at me! See me! I'm worth something!* But even if he had given himself the time, had been patient enough to become brilliant, I doubt whether he would've accepted it, would've even been able to *see* it. And I don't think he could accept the other truth: that some of us just aren't destined to be great. Some of us are destined to live normal... normal and *meaningful* lives, and no amount of work and determination will change it. You work on what you love and that's it. That's it! You work, and if what you say resonates, then fame. If not, then you must be happy to have been able to say it at all, to have at least let your close friends and family hear it. But to him, especially when he was depressed, it became this awful binary game: either you are worth something, either you have something to say and are going to say it well, or you are an embarrassment, 'a fool making love to his own reflection'. You must have heard him say it?

INT: Yes...

INGRID: *Why can't I be normal? Why can't a normal life satisfy me? Why must I hanker after a petty desire to be seen? Why don't I have the faith to be anonymous?* These were the sorts of things he would say. And like everything one says, it is only true in a certain system.

INT: How do you mean?

INGRID: I mean that you can say ten things that contradict each other and yet they can be, all of them, true.

INT: Right.

INGRID: And saying his desire to write, or his duty to write, which is how it often looked, was just from a 'desire to be seen', is *true*. There *was* a part of him that was a performer. But what about the other part? You can't tell me 'Old Iron' comes *only* from a desire to perform. There is something in there!

INT: I agree. I suppose that is, at least in part, why we are here.

INGRID: And that was the problem. When he was depressed, that belief was under attack. He was being threatened. He was being told, by himself, or by a part of himself, that the thing he felt he had been put on earth to do, or to say, was in fact just a sad desire like any other, like the desire for money. That he was like all the other hopeful creatures that scribble endlessly to no effect. And then, as if from some desperate desire to prove himself right about *something*, he killed himself. *There! Now it will all come to nothing!*

[A long pause.]

INT: I have some ideas from my own conversations with him, but could you say something about what precipitated these episodes?

INGRID: Failure. Or what he perceived to be failure. When things weren't going well with work, they weren't going well with life, in our relationship.... It was hard to separate them. When we went on a break for a few months it was because I couldn't stand how he was when work wasn't going well. He just became despondent and emotionally unavailable. Heavy, like he had a sack of rocks on his heart all day. And irritable. So irritable and impatient and 'bored'. He used to say things 'bored' him, even said *I bored him*. That hurt. But it was the wrong word. He knew it, too. It wasn't boredom, it was anger and frustration. I made him mad. And he would blame himself and those around him. When he wasn't writing it was like he had betrayed himself. Like he had to permit a tap to be opened, no matter what it sent out, but sometimes couldn't do it, scared that he would get shit instead of gold. Basically that if he let himself say what he really had to say that he might not like it. It comes down to acceptance. And when he couldn't accept himself, he began not to accept others, not to love others. At the worst times, I just felt that no longer loved me. And part of me could see that it was true. He didn't. But another part knew that when he was depressed it was like there were two people inside him, with the tyrannical, self-hating person in charge, the person who couldn't love. After a while, I knew it would change. He knew these things, too. That's what gets me. He *knew* them and yet knowing them didn't help. Or it only helped a little before making him feel trapped again. *I'm sick of being me*, he used to say. *It's like being trapped in a computer game where you know all the maps and all the moves*. Just exhausting and frustrating. And there's only so long you can say to yourself, *This person is depressed. They have a disease and it isn't your fault, it doesn't have to do with you, you can't help them*. After a while you think, *Fuck you! You're doing this to yourself!* I wanted to kill him, to slap him around and kill him and then bring him back to life....

But these are just frustrated fantasies. You have to take care of yourself. I knew that if I didn't take care of myself, I wasn't going to be able to have the energy to take care of him when he needed me. So I left.

INT: You lived together?

INGRID: Yes. We lived in a run-down old flat in Gardens. I moved out. It was hard.

INT: Do you remember what was happening with his work at the time?

INGRID: Well, as I said, he didn't show me anything. But he had just finished *Kariba* and was working on the novel again, I think. The one about the photography student. It sounded quite autobiographical from the little he told me, but I didn't say it. I said nothing. I was shit scared that I'd jinx it by offering a thought or unwanted opinion.

INT: Well, it did sometimes feel that way. Even as his supervisor, I can say that my own opinions had much greater effect than I would've believed. I must admit, it has made me much more careful with my criticism, much more hesitant to say anything too direct until a piece of work is complete, or nearly complete.

INGRID: He was sensitive. But I think only because he feared hearing his own anxieties about the work repeated by other people.

INT: This brings me to the documents you've mentioned. The notebooks. The online journal terminates a full two months before he took his life, but you tell me he continued making notes until the end in the paper diary.

INGRID: Ja.

INT: Well, you mentioned over the phone that the paper notebooks contain an outline for an entirely new thesis. I wonder if you could say something about that?

INGRID: Toward the end he was growing desperate. He could see the deadline looming and knew that in his state he would never finish the novel. He had about a third of it written, but was happy with almost none of it. He destroyed most of it, I think.

INT: It would seem so....

INGRID: Anyway, he conceived of a thesis that would be like a collage, like 'a picture of a man plummeting to his death,' he said. I think that's what he wanted to call it: 'Falling Man'. He sounded very dramatic when he was depressed. In any case, he envisioned this postmodern game, in which he would use everything he had written that 'contained truth' and stitch it together with a sort of narrative frame or whatever. He'd have this narrator tell the story of a student who killed himself while trying to finish his MA. The narrator would be the supervisor, acting from a sense of guilt at having neglected his best student. Anyway, he begins the process of stitching together all the writing he'd received. It would piece together fake diary entries, short stories, fragments, ideas, essays, and even commentary. I quit English after my Honours year, did a PGCE and got a job. Literary theory was never all that appealing to me. James was mostly the same, but certain theorists, like... I've forgotten his name. The Russian who wrote about 'dialogism'?

INT: Mikhail Bakhtin.

INGRID: Bakhtin, that's it. He loved Bakhtin and wanted to have each section of the thing sort of perform what it was talking about.

INT: How do you mean?

INGRID: So like there would be a section on 'dialogism' in the novel, whose structure would be dialogic, and sort of perform the theory. Or a section that would be entitled 'mise-en-abyme' that would demonstrate the concept itself. He even considered making interviews. As if he were dead and the supervisor goes around interviewing his relatives or whatever. I guess that's quite ironic now....

INT: Yes, indeed. It's uncanny. A rare case of life imitating art. How far did he get? Did he begin writing it?

INGRID: I think he did. I think he saw it as a kind of escape valve. A trick he could use to find the distance he needed to start writing again. I was quite hopeful for a while.

INT: A sort of elaborate, dog-ate-my-homework story, I suppose. What do you think prevented him from working on it further? Or what do you think prevented it from being the escape valve he was looking for?

INGRID: Well—and this was a real problem—he couldn't stand postmodernism. You know, instead of making art that says something, you just make it refer to itself in all sorts of puzzling ways, making every sentence mean at least two things. There's fun in that, but he never liked it much. He used to think of it as a weakness in modern fiction. And I suppose he was right. I don't know. It sometimes feels like writers are trying to hide behind cleverness. To disguise the emotional core of a thing, or to repel attempts at interpretation. (A friend of ours, Donald, in his PhD on Coetzee actually made this criticism: the more Coetzee seems to say about himself in the later autobiographical books, the *less* he says about himself.) Anyway, it's always a fear he had when writing—that some critic would come along one day and reduce everything he'd said to a single line and then dismiss it as inconsequential. Mainly, the postmodernists seemed out of date. It sometimes seemed like writers had two options: realism or postmodernism. But he rejected this. He felt that something new was needed. That a fiction was needed that wasn't all about the self and consciousness. Because in a time when a culture is built upon eating itself, upon nibbling at the roots, at a time when people aren't making new things but simply showing how cleverly they can take apart the ideas of those that came before them, then you're in trouble. So he saw postmodernism as having had

its day. That it was a bag of tricks that had been used too many times to be of any further use. *Who would want to read that?* He said. *Decadent. Unnecessary.* South Africa has so much that is real, so much that needs urgently to be written. On some level, he just didn't believe that he could do it—couldn't escape the inviting game of self-reference, couldn't do what most needed to be done. Not yet anyway. But he was sort of right about the postmodern, don't you think? No one really likes this sort of thing.

Why the Songbird Sings

I have drawn from the well of language many a thought which I do not have and which I could not put into words. —C.G. Lichtenberg

If you stand atop Signal Hill in the early months of the year and look west you can see the faint outline of Robben Island, risen like a featureless sandbar from the waves of the Atlantic. From this distance, history seems puny.

Bones and smoke, as Housman says. What causes? What motives? What sense? I have searched in vain for a place to bury my guilt. I persist. Though he is gone, I persist.

In his diary I find the pages she referred to:

And in the end, I will turn the story back on itself. I will have him interview her and she will tell him about this, about my plan, and he will say, 'A rare case of life imitating art'. And then later, the snake will reach its own tail: he will discover *this*.

In my old Renault, I will sometimes park and watch the sunset. I've been told it isn't safe up there after dark; but I'm of the opinion that avoiding the place will only worsen things, so I keep going.

James's ashes were scattered around here somewhere; at least that is what his brother told me: I was not there. I was never really there for him. But what is there to do now?

Distance simplifies; time thins the past away to runes and we become naked, babies unclothed against new weather.

I sit and watch the sun sink into the sea. He comes up the gravel in a bowler hat, sleeves rolled up and a jacket slung over his shoulder. He sits where I am now. There is no drone of cars, no sound. Smoke rises from the thatched houses below. From his waistcoat pocket he takes his watch and notes the time.

It grows late and I have hours to keep,

My wife awaiting, the child asleep.

How slowly the days pass, how slowly life passes. I replace my hat and make my way down the hill. The blaze of autumn begins on its own.

I could do anything

Annexure: Kariba

"KARIBA"

Kariba Graphic Novel (PTY)
LTD, 2018

PROLOGUE:

Before the spearing of the first fish, before the lighting of the first fire, already Nyaminyami, the Great River Spirit, was ancient. Through the ages have the river peoples worshipped him, and by him have they been nourished. But a secret is kept among them: In each epoch must he die, and in each be reborn. It is this cycle of death and birth that is called the Rumuko.

EXT. RHUTAPA, THE HIDDEN KINGDOM - DAWN

A waterfall thunders. TONGAI (25, handsome) and ROCK HUDSON (28, brawny) paddle toward it in a dugout boat. They pass through thick mist.

ROCK
(nervous)
Tongai, when we get back, will you do me a favour?

TONGAI
What's that Rock?

ROCK
Remind me never to get into a boat with you again.

TONGAI
"No risk, no reward!" Remember?
We're so close, Rock, I can almost smell the treasure!

ROCK
The elders better have been right about this place...

They head close to a maze of rapids and rocks that treacherously front the waterfall. Tongai points.

TONAGI
This must be it - "Where the buffalo's horns break the falls".
See?

Two sharp rocks protrude from the white wall of water.

ROCK
But... we'll be crushed!

(CONTINUED)

TONAGI

On my mark... PADDLE

They steel themselves and with a heave on the paddles head right into the face of the waterfall, between the two horns of rock. Drenched, they emerge into a cavernous ancient city.

TONGAI

Amazing!

ROCK

A real miracle.

TONGAI

Look! Moonlight...

They head towards it and emerge on the other side into a great amphitheater of rock; at its center towers a city of tiered stone, enshrouded by clouds and mist. The two stare in wonder.

TONGAI

...Rhupata!

ROCK

...The Hidden Kingdom.

Stone spires like enormous fingers rise from the water; they make their way between them to the shore of the island.

ROCK

This place...it feels stra-

Suddenly a ghostly wailing sound interrupts him.

TONGAI

Do you hear that?

ROCK

A spirit? I think it's coming from the water...!

Tongai moves toward it as Rock moors the boat.

TONGAI

It sounded like crying.

ROCK

I don't know Tongai, this place gives me the creeps... What if

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

ROCK (cont'd)
you're wrong? What if the treasure
is guarded by Nyaminyami?

Tongai reaches a--

PATCH OF REEDS

He parts them. In the center, within a cradle of white
grass, he finds a BABY (SIKU).

TONGAI
Rock! It's a baby girl!

He leans forward and picks her up, cradling her in his arms.
She glows with an unearthly blue light. She smiles.

Rock at the--

SHORELINE

notices that the water is beginning to bubble. From below
the waters surface yellow white and blue lights flicker and
swirl.

ROCK
Tongai, the water... it's... well
its..err

Slowly, sensing a presence behind him, Rock turns around.

TONGAI
(oblivious)
What?

ROCK
To-To-To-Tongai

Tongai turns. They stare, awestruck.

TITLE: KARIBA

EXT. WALKER'S DRIFT SUPPLY STATION - DAY

"ELEVEN YEARS LATER..."

Siku sits upon a branch and gazes out over the river. She
sees Tongai approaching in his boat.

SIKU
Baba!

(CONTINUED)

Quickly, she descends to meet him. Tongai moors his boat. Siku dives at him for a hug and as he turns she crashes into him.

TONGAI
Oof!... Siku my girl, I missed you.

INT. DRIFT HOUSE - DAY

Tongai and Siku, both heaving luggage, come through the door to their home. YUNI (mid 50s, matronly) stands in the house to receive him.

YUNI
Welcome back Tongai.

TONGAI
It's good to be home, Yuni.

Tongai pulls out a BOX.

TONGAI
Happy birthday, Siku!

Siku unwraps the gift. It is a PORTABLE RADIO.

SIKU
Thank you baba, I love it... What is it?

Tongai attaches the wires. Yuni and Siku stare.

TONGAI
This... is the future. Let me see... this goes here... and this goes...

YUNI
(sardonic)
Unless I can use it for cooking, it's not *my* future.

The radio suddenly blares and Siku springs off the ground in surprise. Music streams forth. Siku is enchanted. Tongai extends his hand to Siku, like an old-fashioned gentleman asking for a dance.

TONGAI
May I have this dance?

Siku giggles. They begin to dance, but Siku steps on his toes and they trip, and burst into laughter.

TONGAI

You will learn! Siku, soon we are going to Salisbury, and you will learn many things: mathematics, biology, anything you like.

YUNI

Pah! She'll have to learn to clean up after herself first...

SIKU

Baba, I love it.

TONGAI

Have you finished your homework?

Siku nods.

SIKU

(responsibly)

Yes.

TONGAI

Then you are released. Go forth and play!

Siku clenches her fists in excitement.

SIKU

YES!!

Siku runs outside, grabbing a paddle, and waves goodbye. Tongai waves from the front door--

PORCH.

TONGAI

Don't go too far! And be back before supper!

SIKU

Okay!

EXT. ZAMBESI RIVER - DAY

The sun plays on the river's surface. Trees cast dappled shadows along the banks. Siku removes her outer clothes and dives--

UNDERWATER.

In the water she looks different -- her skin shimmering subtly.

(CONTINUED)

HIPPOS lumber below.

A little BLUE FISH with bright, pearlescent scales zips along and Siku snatches at it but misses.

She swims quickly after it, but it is very nimble. It goes between the RUSTY TRANSOMS of an old STEAMBOAT WRECK. When she emerges from the ship's dark hull, the fish is gone. She heads up for air.

IN THE CANOE

Siku pulls on her t-shirt and shorts. Suddenly she hears a cry.

HUNTER

H...Help!

Siku starts. She sees emerging from the FOREST a DISHEVELED-LOOKING MAN. Slung over his shoulder is a LARGE PACK. His arm appears to be injured. He wades towards her and collapses into the river. Siku dives and in and swims to him, dragging him into--

THE CANOE

HUNTER

B...bag, get my bag

She reaches out and clutches it. She hauls the man into the canoe. He drifts in and out of consciousness as they head for home.

EXT. WALKER'S DRIFT - DAY

Siku jumps into the shallows and pulls the canoe to the bank.

SIKU

Baba, come quickly!

Tongai runs from the house.

TONGAI

Siku, are you alright!?

She helps the injured man out onto the SHORE. Tongai stands above the man.

TONGAI

Who is this man?

(CONTINUED)

SIKU

He came out of the forest, near the wreck!

Tongai picks up the man's BAG.

TONGAI

What's this?

Tongai loosens its drawstring, revealing inside an ELEPHANT TUSK, still bloody. Siku and Tongai stare in horror. A desperate expression appears on the injured man's face.

HUNTER

Don't touch that!

TONGAI

Ivory... he's a hunter.

Without warning a great rumbling and commotion comes from the forest.

An ANGRY ELEPHANT bursts out into the clearing and charges toward them. It SMASHES through AWNING of the HOUSE.

HUNTER

How did she find me!?

The hunter cries in pain as Tongai lifts him up.

The elephant is almost upon them when Siku, as if in a trance, steps protectively before the two men. Her SKIN has turned a BLUEISH colour and her HAIR, also blue, FLOATS as if suspended in water.

TONAGI

Siku no!!!

So deep is she within her transformed state that she does not hear him. The elephant bears down on the girl.

Siku gestures, and from behind her, the RIVER SWELLS UPWARDS and over the humans in a great wall. The elephant stops short before the water. She can no longer see the humans, and is confused.

She trumpets in defiance, but slowly turns and moves back into the forest.

Siku falls to her knees and the WALL OF WATER, now lifeless, FALLS to the ground. Tongai drops the hunter and runs to his daughter.

(CONTINUED)

The hunter, terrified, hobbles as fast as he can toward the FOREST in the opposite direction of the elephant.

TONGAI
Wait, come back!

Yuni comes out from behind a piece of shelter and runs to Siku and Tongai.

YUNI
Tongai! What happened to the child?

Tongai strokes her face, which still bears the signs of her transformation.

TONGAI
That dam. It's drawing hunters like flies. He saw everything.

EXT. ANCIENT CITY - NIGHT - DREAM

Siku finds herself in a blue world. Her HAIR FLOATS as though under water.

She is in the center of a CAVERN encircled by a high STONE WALL.

A small BOY runs across her path, and then stops to look at her. The boy points at something behind Siku. She turns and sees stone HUTS and TREES.

Suddenly the GROUND BURSTS OPEN gushing forth a TORRENT of WATER, and borne upon it the body of a HUGE SERPENT.

INT. SIKU'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

SIKU
Noo!!!

Siku sits bolt upright, raising her hands in shock and fear - their position the same as it was in her dream to protect herself from the serpent.

TONGAI
You're safe, don't worry.

They embrace. Siku is clearly shaken by her dream.

SIKU
Baba, there was a village, and it was underwater... And...and then I saw... a giant snake!

(CONTINUED)

Tongai looks at the SCALES on Siku's HANDS.

SIKU

Baba! What's happening?

Tongai remains calm.

TONGAI

I don't know, Siku. But I will find out, I promise.

INT. WALKER'S DRIFT - NIGHT

Tongai packs TINS of CONDENSED MILK into a SACHEL.

EXT. WALKER'S DRIFT - NIGHT

Tongai sets out on foot into the FOREST.

EXT. HOT SPRINGS - NIGHT

Tongai walks between blouders. Steam rises among among them.

TONGAI

Maalila, I've come to ask your help.

MAALILA (old, wizened) sits high up on a boulder. He wears a CLOAK covered in BLACK FEATHERS.

MAALILA

But you bring no child? Pah! Now time's come for you to give her up. Many times I've told you... I must train her for RUMUKO.

TONGAI

Please Maalila, there must be another way. I'll do anything.

MAALILA

There is no other way. Love her, yes, but no keeping. She must be trained if Nyaminyami is to be reborn.

TONGAI

She is a *child* Maailia!

Maalila's eyes are covered in CATARACTS. He sniffs suspiciously at an open TIN of CONDENSED MILK.

(CONTINUED)

MAALILA

If she does not, she will drown
from within.

TONGAI

You are a liar! You can free her!

Maalila swallows the condensed milk with a look of pleasure.
Tongai stands and looks away.

MAALILA

You sacrifice the future of the
whole valley... Young Tongai is not
forgotten among the Shonga. Do you
forsake it all? Your fathers? Your
gods? The old ways?

He turns back toward Maalila.

TONGAI

All you care about is gods and
traditions. What about the lives
that are right in front of you? No,
I don't care about any of it. It is
evil! Nyaminyami is evil!

TONGAI

I'll kill him!

But Maalila has vanished.

EXT. WALKER'S DRIFT - DAY

Tongai walks toward his boat. Siku follows him.

SIKU

Do you have to go for such a long
time?

TONGAI

Yes, Siku, we need more money.
Schools in Salisbury are expensive.

SIKU

I can go to a cheaper school.

Tongai turns and climbs into the boat. Siku follows him.

TONGAI

No. Please, you must trust me.

Tongai can't bring himself to look at her.

(CONTINUED)

SIKU

Tell me the truth?

TONGAI

Siku, this thing that happens to you, it's like a curse. The more you let it in, the more control it will have. If I don't do this, every time it happens, you will lose more and more of yourself...

SIKU

But it just happened! I don't know how to control it.

TONGAI

That is why I am going to Kariba. I am going to fix this.

Tears appear in the corners of Siku's eyes.

SIKU

I want to go with you.

TONGAI

No Siku, it's too dangerous.

Siku hugs Tongai desperately. Tongai takes a PENDANT from around his neck, which he presents to Siku. She looks at it, confused.

TONGAI

Siku, when you are scared, or feel the power is too much, hold this. It has special magic.

He puts it over her head. She looks down at it.

TONGAI

I promise I will come back.

SIKU

Okay.

TONGAI

You must look after the drift while I am gone.

Siku smiles.

TONGAI

I love you, Siku, always remember that.

(CONTINUED)

Siku smiles more broadly and hugs Tongai.

TONGAI
Love you baba.

Tongai's eyes are filled with tears of fear and happiness.

EXT. WALKER'S CAMP - DAY

Siku watches Tongai leave.

EXT. KARIBA DAM - NIGHT

"Three months later..."

A storm rages. The river is whipped into a frenzy of waves. Foam beats at the unfinished DAM WALL. WORKERS hurry to raise a SUSPENSION BRIDGE that spans the distance between the two banks, while others ensure all the machinery has been moved clear of the river.

LIA (mid 30s, attractive) hurries to organize men and machines threatened by the rising torrent. River mud is splattered up to her thighs.

LIA
Who directed those men back into B
section? I want them out, now!

Her hair whips in the wind. PERKINS (40s, dark) holds a RADIO and wears a hard hat.

PERKINS
Dr. Keigwin ordered them, Ma'am!
They're laying charges!

LIA
Charges? Who is running this
circus?! Perkins, I want those
workers out of there. I didn't come
here to watch my men die.

Atop the dam wall stands Tongai and KEIGWIN (mid 50s, handsome, with a pencil mustache). The latter peers through a pair of BINOCULARS. They are sheltered by a makeshift tin roof, and in front of them are a series of wires leading to a table on which lie two DETONATERS.

KEIGWIN
I had better not be risking these
men's lives for nothing, Mr Tongai.

(CONTINUED)

TONGAI

He will come. Now, we must wait.

Tongai draws up a CHAIR and sits. Keigwin looks down at him.

KEIGWIN

If this works, Tongai, you could have named any price and I would have paid it.

TONGAI

I believe you, Dr Keigwin, but I would never do this for money.

KEIGWIN

If it's not money, then it's either glory or women.

TONGAI

This is not England... You are going to have to trust me. I want Nyaminyami dead just like you.

The RADIO blares:

RADIO MAN

Sir, I see... I see... a wave, over!

TONGAI

He's here.

KEIGWIN

And there's quite a surprise waiting for him...

Upriver a METAL NET spans the torrent. Approaching fast is a churning layer of WHITE WATER.

RADIO MAN

It's reached the net, over!

The disturbance on the surface is caused by thousands of SMALL FISH jumping and writhing. When it reaches the net the water calms.

RADIO MAN

It's... it's going back!... Hold on. It's through, it's broken through!

Suddenly the net stretches and TEARS from its foundations, CABLES whip and writhe as concrete and men are thrown into the air.

(CONTINUED)

KEIGWIN

Impossible! That was high-tensile steel!

He takes up the radio.

KEIGWIN

Ready the first charge.

Tongai places his hand on the PLUNGE LEVER of the first detonator. There is a beat and then through the radio:

RADIO MAN

Detonate!

Tongai drives the PLUNGE LEVER down, a WALL OF WATER is thrown up into the air as the explosives detonate beneath the surface. Keigwin speaks into the radio:

KEIGWIN

Report!?

RADIO MAN

We've got him!

Lia arrives, drenched.

LIA

You've got who?! Dr Keigwin, explain yourself!

RADIO MAN

*...hold on, it's still coming!
Almost over the second position,
detonate! DETONATE!*

Tongai reaches for the second detonator, clenching his teeth.

LIA

Stop that!

She moves to put her hand in the way, but it's too late. The second explosion throws another WHITE WALL up into the air, this time much closer to the dam. The ground trembles.

KEIGWIN

Nothing could survive that!

They stare out over the raging river, and as the water from the explosion settles they see that it has had no effect, the white water is still heading towards the wall.

(CONTINUED)

LIA

Dio mio... It is as they said...

A massive wave of water SMASHES into the three onlookers, sweeping them off their feet. The concrete, seeming to hold for a few moments, gives way spectacularly in a sheer of metal and stone, a stream of water pouring through the center. Men shout and run - chaos. Tongai is washed over the wall.

INT. SIKU'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Siku sits up in her bed. She goes to the window of her room and looks out over the river.

EXT. KARIBA DAM - DAY

"Some hours later..."

LIA

Months setback! What will I tell the Shonga tribes? You owe me an explanation, Dr Keigwin. *What is going on!?*

KEIGWIN

[irritable] My dear, you mustn't allow local problems to get in the way of our success.

From the wreckage approaches a man holding something. He hands it to Keigwin.

ASSISTANT

Sir, I found this on a reinforcement.

KEIGWIN

I knew it.

LIA

What?

KEIGWIN

We hurt him. It's possible...

The object in his hand is a huge, pearlescent scale.

INT. SALISBURY CITY HALL - DAY

"Some weeks later..."

Keigwin stands before a cluster of microphones and cameras. The hall is filled to capacity with journalists.

Close up on: Gripkins (mid 40s, fat)

GRIPKINS

Word is that many workers at Kariba claim the dam was destroyed by an angry river god. Care to comment?

KEIGWIN

(Break up across various panels)

Let's keep tales of the Loch Ness monster where they belong, Gripkins. [to the audience] We've had some shoddy luck with the floods, gentlemen, but we *will* prevail. I have yet to see a more promising project, nor one with as much civilizing potential. African, Italian, and Englishman work side by side at Kariba -- it's a rare and uplifting sight. The old days are over, and we are ushering in a new age in Africa! Progress is the word on everyone's lips, and so too it should be here. So I urge you to support the agencies that continue to labour for your benefit, and to report only *sensible* news. Gentlemen, I bid you good day. I have a plane to catch.

There is a flurry questions and flash bulbs and waving hands. Keigwin marches off the podium and exits the building.

EXT. SALISBURY STREET - DAY

It is a bright, sunny day. Keigwin comes eye to eye with a CHAPERONE (50s, prim) wearing a hat. AMEDEO (11, quiet) stands beside her.

CHAPERONE

Dr Keigwin?

(CONTINUED)

KEIGWIN

Yes?

CHAPERONE

This is Lia's son, Amedeo. I was told you would take him from here.

KEIGWIN

Ah! Pleased to meet you, lad! Ready for the flight to Kariba?

He extends his hand, which Amedeo shakes.

INT. VIKING FLOATPLANE - DAY

Keigwin sits at the controls and yawns. Amedeo, who sits beside him in the co-pilot's seat, looks down at his hand, where he cradles an OLD POCKET WATCH.

KEIGWIN

I'm sure you never dreamed you'd one day end up in Africa, did you young man?

Amedeo does not respond.

INT. HOSPITAL WARD - DAY - [FLASHBACK]

Amedeo sits beside his father, LORENZO (late 40s, kind), who hands him the OLD POCKET WATCH.

LORENZO

I made it just for you.

Amedeo smiles.

INT. VIKING FLOATPLANE - DAY

Amedeo looks down at his hands, and puts the WATCH away.

KEIGWIN

Don't worry. It's not as bad as all that. Delays are part of the engineer's life, I'm sure your mother has told you. Focus on the good and make the best of the bad - that's my motto. Take this dam for example -- a total disaster now, but I'll set it right.

(CONTINUED)

Amedeo stares out of the window, looking at the scenery pass.

KEIGWIN
[thoughts] I wonder if this poor
wretch even understands English...
[to Amedeo, condescending] Would
you like try flying?

AMEDEO
Yes thanks!

Keigwin is taken aback.

KEIGWIN
Alright, let me give you a lesson
first. This here is the--

AMEDEO
--control column

KEIGWIN
Well, yes. Very good. And this
measures our--

AMEDEO
Altitude...

Amedeo takes the CONTROL COLUMN.

AMEDEO
My Papa taught me to fly.

Keigwin watches, impressed.

AMEDEO
Once we flew a Falcon together all
the way to Morocco.

He banks the plane and points out of the window.

AMEDEO
Look, do you see Dr Keigwin?
Elephants! A whole herd.

Indeed, a herd walks along the banks of the river below.
Keigwin looks down with confusion.

KEIGWIN
You've got rather good eyesight my
boy.

The PLANE RADIO crackles on.

RADIO

Come in Viking-1, this is Kariba Dam.

KEIGWIN

This is Viking-1. We'll be stopping at Walker's for fuel before heading to Kari--

INT. LIA'S OFFICE, KARIBA - DAY

Lia stands in her office, which commands a view of the dam's construction.

LIA

Mi Amore! How is the flight? Are you safe? Have you eaten?

INTERCUT RADIO CONVERSATION:

Keigwin is surprised and affronted by the break in protocol, and Amedeo looks embarrassed.

AMEDEO

Hi Mama, I'm fine!

LIA

Now be friendly to Dr Keigwin -- he is supposed to help me finish this wall.

AMEDEO

We are just stopping for fuel. We will be at Kariba this evening.

LIA

Wonderful.

Through the window Lia watches her BUILDERS, ant-sized in the distance, carrying out the repairs after Nyaminyami's attack. Suddenly a cable snaps and workers scurry to get out of the way as two HUGE PIPES go SMASHING downwards against the side of the wall. Lia shakes her head.

LIA

Che palle! Oh this dam is cursed! I've got to run, Safe flight, can't wait to see you! Ciao!

AMEDEO

Ciao Mama.

Keigwin reclaims the CONTROL COLUMN.

(CONTINUED)

KEIGWIN
I'll take over from here.

EXT. WALKER'S DRIFT - DAY

Siku stands in the shallows wearing only swimming clothes, and carries a CATFISH on her shoulder. She watches the FLOATPLANE come in to land.

EXT. WALKER'S DRIFT JETTY - DAY

Amedeo and Keigwin disembark. As Amedeo gets out of the plane, he sees Siku. Yuni stands before the HOUSE.

YUNI
Welcome to Walker's Drift.

KEIGWIN
Good afternoon! Where is the manager?

YUNI
Working at Kariba, like everyone else. I am preparing the food. It will be ready soon.

KEIGWIN
(Winks at Amedeo)
Splendid.

Keigwin follows Yuni into the house, but Amedeo lingers to watch Siku (now dressed) jump into a boat and tow the plane into a grass hangar. He walks down the jetty to watch her, where he notices her wrestling to fit the FUEL HOSE into the plane.

AMEDEO
You have to undo it first.

Siku starts. She looks at Amedeo, and back at the HOSE. She grabs a reed from the bank and ties the hose into place. Amedeo looks on in surprise.

Suddenly a HORN sounds. Amedeo looks toward the sound and sees a boat coming toward the jetty.

AMEDEO
Wow, nice boat!

Siku sees that the boat is the HMS GREAT BOOTY, a medium-sized river tug that's seen better days.

(CONTINUED)

SIKU

Oh no!

She grabs Amedeo by the arm and begins to run.

AMEDEO

Whoa! What's going on!?

They run toward the front door of the house.

INT. CAMP HOUSE - DAY

She pushes Amedeo inside.

Pirates! Hide, quickly! Don't let
them see you.

She slams the door on him. Amedeo is dumbstruck.

EXT. HMS GREAT BOOTY - DAY

A group of PIRATES stand proudly at the helm of the HMS
GREAT BOOTY.

INT. CAMP HOUSE - DAY

AMEDEO

[thoughts] Where is Dr Keigwin?

UPSTAIRS

Dr Keigwin is having a shave, quite oblivious.

EXT. DRIFT HOUSE PORCH - DAY

Outside Siku guards the door defiantly.

ROCK

THERE SHE IS! Our little river rat
is growing up!

SIKU

What do you want, Rock?

Upstairs Keigwin hears the commotion and looks out the
window.

KEIGWIN

[thoughts] My god... pirates!?

Downstairs Rock bangs open the door.

(CONTINUED)

SIKU

You're not supposed to come here.

ROCK

Since when does a pirate care what he's *supposed* to do.

INT. CAMP HOUSE - DAY

Rock sits on a chair, his feet up on the table.

SIKU

What do you want here, Rock?

ROCK

I want whatever it is I smell cooking. But Mulozi wants Siku at the Baobab. Pack your things, we leave in a jiffy.

SIKU

No, I won't go.

ROCK

Listen, we have louder ways of getting what we want.

He holds his revolver.

ROCK

But why be loud when you can be nice, eh?

EXT. WALKER'S CAMP - DAY

Amedeo peers in through the window of the house.

AMEDEO

[thoughts] *Dio mio*, I have to do something. He has a gun!

Amedeo sets off toward the plane, where he finds a gasoline store.

INT. CAMP HOUSE PASSAGE - DAY

Keigwin sneaks away, his expression surprised and worried.

(CONTINUED)

KEIGWIN

I must get to the radio and call
for help.

As he turns he's met by one of the pirates.

BOGART

Leaving?

INT. CAMP HOUSE - DAY

BOGART

Hey Rock! Look what I found.

ROCK

Who is *that*?

KEIGWIN

I, dear Sirs, am Dr Everhard
Keigwin, Chief Specialist at Kariba
dam. Let us go now and you will
have a fair trial.

ROCK

A fair tri- HAAAA!

All the pirates laugh.

EXT. WALKER'S CAMP - DAY

Rock erupts from the door of the depot carrying Siku over
his shoulder.

YUNI

Put her down you scoundrel!

Yuni lobs a cup at Rock which hits him on the head.

ROCK

Ouch! Hai Hai Hai, you ladies are a
handful.

Siku is kicking and punching, and around her eyes and hands
small scales begin to appear. Siku grabs the pendant and
closes her eyes.

SIKU

[thoughts] No... I can't... stop...

The men are laughing as they reach the gangplank.

EXT. HMS GREAT BOOTY - DAY

Amedeo stands holding a match over the gangplank, wet with gasoline.

AMEDEO

Hey! Let them go or I burn your boat!

Rock pauses, then starts laughing again. He looks to Flynn.

ROCK

Ha! For a second I thought it was a ghost! But it's just a tiny chipoko!

The match Amedeo is holding goes out without him noticing.

ROCK

...aghem...your match has gone out.

Amedeo, sweating a little, fumbles with the matchbox. Rock whistles. A HUGE MALE BABOON jumps onto Amedeo's back. They go to the floor. The baboon catches the match in mid-air, stares at the flame for a moment, and quite suddenly eats the match, coughing up a little puff of smoke.

The pirates cheer.

ROCK

Well done, Livingstone!

GABLE

Hey Rock, there's a plane in here!

GABLE stands a few metres away near the hangar.

ROCK

You brought me a plane Dr Keigwin!?
Why didn't you say so before!?
Thank you! [looking at Keigwin]
There'll be a fat ransom for this little circus.

The FLOATPLANE is attached to The HMS Great Booty. They depart.

ROCK

I think Livingstone has taken a shining to you, Chipoko.

EXT. CAMP HOUSE PORCH - DAY

Yuni helplessly watches the Great Booty disappear down the river. She collapses on her knees and cries.

YUNI
My little Siku!

EXT. BAOBAB BAY - DAY

The Great Booty passes between two towering cliffs of rock. Trees grow from their tops, almost meeting. On the other side is a small bay. At the far end a waterfall cascades onto a large WOODEN MILL. Around an enormous baobab, which grows near the shoreline, itself housing many rooms, there stand the tents and huts and lean-tos of a small settlement.

At the foot of the baobab, upon a RAISED SCAFFOLD, stands MULOZI (ancient, regal). She watches the boat pull into a small dock.

Rock and his crew disembark with Amedeo and Siku.

ROCK
Quite something, eh?

Rock marches up to Mulozzi and bows.

ROCK
I come bearing gifts! Here's the girl your hunter saw, no doubt about it.

Mulozzi notices Keigwin and Amedeo.

MULOZI
Who *are* these people?

ROCK
The other Zvipokos? I thought we could get a ransom! That ugly one says he is the chief 'specialist' at Kariba, he could be worth a lot!

MULOZI
Chief...? You *idiot!* I told you I wanted the child! Not half of the Zambesi! Put them in the cellars, and [pointing at the plane] HIDE THAT THING!

Rock and Flynn drag Amedeo away, the other men start putting branches on top of the plane to camouflage it.

(CONTINUED)

KEGWIN

[thoughts] What does that woman
want with the girl?

INT. BAOBAB, MULOZI'S ROOM - DAY

Siku stands before Mulozi, who sits behind her large desk.

MULOZI

[tenderly] You'll forgive those
foolish pirates, my child, but I
had to speak to you.

Mulozi stands up.

MULOZI

Come with me.

She leads Siku to a balcony. From here they look down at a
huge distillery. Siku's eyes widen at the vastness of the
activity.

MULOZI

This is a place of riches, but
wealth must be protected. What you
see here is under threat. For years
we have fought to control this
land... like dogs over scraps we
fought! But now that the Europeans
are building their dam, I have a
new plan.

MULOZI

Child, if we are to work together,
we must be honest. And so I must
tell you, *I know of your power.*

Siku looks away.

MULOZI

I will keep your secret. But I ask
something in return.

Mulozi leads her back inside.

MULOZI

Come, sit down. Please. You must
think of this place like home. All
you see here could one day be
yours. You could be the princess of
this place. You would need only to
lend your power to help our
village.

(CONTINUED)

SIKU
[looking down] Gogo Mulozi, I'm
sorry, I know about any power. I
live with my father, Tongai, at
Walker's Drift. You can ask him.

MULOZI
Don't lie, little girl! [standing]
There are eyes and ears that have
seen you transform...

Siku is worried, but she tries not to show it. She holds her
amulet.

MULOZI
As for Shonga - are you the last to
hear it? He was swallowed by the
river!

EXT. KARIBA DAM - NIGHT [DREAM]

Tongai falls backwards over the dam wall.

INT. BAOBAB, MULOZI'S ROOM - DAY

SIKU
[thoughts] *NO!!! My dream... NO!!!*
SHE'S LYING!!!

Siku's skin begins to shine blue. Quickly, she grips her
amulet tighter. But it's too late. Mulozi's eyes widen. She
rushes up to Siku, grabs her and stares into her face.

MULOZI
I see you! You can't hide it from
me!

Siku pulls away and runs for the door, but a guard stands on
the other side. She collapses on her knees.

MULOZI
Lock her in the cellar! If she
begins to change... call me.

INT. HMS GREAT BOOTY - NIGHT

FLYNN (early 40s, dopey) sits outside Amedeo's 'cell' (a
locked cabin).

(CONTINUED)

FLYNN

[thoughts] I'm fallin asleep here.
Boy, I could do with a drink.

Amedeo peers through the KEYHOLE of the locked cabin door.

AMEDEO

[thoughts] I must find a way out!

FLYNN

[thoughts] Maybe just a quick one
with Rock.

He stands and leaves.

INT. BAOBAB - NIGHT

Mulozi paces down a corridor in the baobab.

MULOZI

Let's see if this Englishman has
any business sense.

She opens the door on Keigwin's room.

INT. BAOBAB, KEIGWIN'S CELL - NIGHT

KEIGWIN

Release us *this minute* or you will
find yourself rotting in a
Salisbury jail before sundown!

MULOZI

You were brought here by mistake,
Dr. Keigwin. For that I'm sorry.
Perhaps I can make things right...
Follow me, I have something you'll
want to see.

INT. BAOBAB, MULOZI'S ROOM - NIGHT

Keigwin and Mulozi stand in her office over a series of
PLANS.

MULOZI

...extending from here, to here.

KEIGWIN

I see.

(CONTINUED)

MULOZI
20 000 litres per year.

Keigwin nods.

MULOZI
...To be increased as we expand
along the river, and build
distilleries.

KEIGWIN
I'm afraid you've got the wrong
Englishman. I don't drink. Nor, I
believe, should Africans. I have no
interest in this little scheme. In
fact I find it quite distasteful.

Mulozi is frustrated, and changes her tack.

MULOZI
Dr. Keigwin, my spies tell me that
you are a believer in spirits...
You have been trying to kill
Nyaminyami, but you won't succeed.
When he dies, the Rumuko will
begin, and his power will be reborn
in a child. It's an eternal cycle.
The river will always return. Your
dam won't survive.

KEIGWIN
I don't see how this hairy story
has anything to do with--

MULOZI
I am telling you no lie. Without my
help, you will never succeed. And
without your help, my distilleries
are finished. What is it you
British like to say? You scratch my
back and I'll scratch yours.

KEIGWIN
Supposing I did want this
Nyaminyami fellow dead. How then
would you propose to kill him? You
yourself tell me it's impossible?

MULOZI
He is only mortal in his
birthplace, Rhutapa, the hidden
kingdom, which only his child can
open. But if we have the child, our
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

MULOZI (cont'd)
way is clear... we can end the
dynasty of gods in Gurembe
forever... And *I have his child...*

INT. BOABAB, SIKU'S CELL - NIGHT

Siku sits on the floor of a locked cellar. Suddenly a RELEASE VALVE let's out some STEAM, and she sees that from an attached copper COMPARTMENT a PIPE runs to the outside.

She stands up and peers into it. Then she pries open the copper DOOR, and climbs inside.

The PIPE shakes. Eventually she pops out on the other side between two large branches of the giant Baobab. She climbs carefully around the tree. As she passes a WINDOW, her attention is drawn toward the sounds of voices. She peers inside--

MULOZI'S ROOM

KEIGWIN
If the girl's who you say she is,
then we have a deal. But I have a
condition. You will be my guide to
Rhutapa. Then I'll make sure you
get the land you desire. You have
my word.

SIKU
[thoughts] He's working with the
pirates!?

Siku SLIPS and FALLS.

Mulozi hears a noise and goes to the window.

MULOZI
There are spies on this river, Dr
Keigwin. We must be careful.

Siku hangs from a ledge below, safe.

EXT. BAOBAB BAY - NIGHT

Siku sneaks past the HMS Great Booty. Astern are several FISHING BOATS.

(CONTINUED)

SIKU

I'll have to borrow one of these.

Suddenly she hears a thumping noise and looks to her right to see Amedeo, trapped inside, trying to get her attention. He presses his hands up against the window. She gestures to him to be quiet.

EXT. HMS GREAT BOOTY - NIGHT

Up on deck, Rock and Flynn drink.

ROCK HUDSON

Ha! That old witch, treating me like a misbehaving dog! I'm Captain Hock Rudson! Zambesi Prince! She'd be nothing without me! Nothing!

FLYNN

[raising his glass] NOTHING!!!

ROCK HUDSON

Always get the blame. 'Rock don't do this', and 'Rock can't do that', but I'm not the worst!

FLYNN

[raising his glass] THE WORST!!!

ROCK HUDSON

Hey, shuddup!

He whacks Flynn over the head.

INT. HMS GREAT BOOTY - NIGHT

Amedeo struggles to unpick the lock with a pin.

AMEDEO

Impossible. I'll have to knock it down. One... Two...

As he makes a run for it, the DOOR OPENS and he goes CRASHING right into Siku. They TUMBLE into a heap on the floor.

AMEDEO

Dio mio, my head. Sorry about that.

(CONTINUED)

SIKU

We need to hurry, they're trying to kidnapp me!

AMEDEO

Aren't we kidnapped already?

SIKU

I'll explain later. They could notice I'm gone any minute.

AMEDEO

My name is Amedeo by the way. Thank you for coming back for me.

SIKU

I'm Siku. Now we must be quiet, Rock is just abov-

CUT TO:

Rock stands at the head of the STAIRS.

ROCK

Not so... hic...f-f-fast!

SIKU

RUN!!!

They run past Rock.

ROCK

Wooh! Hic... Livingstone!

They scramble off the boat.

EXT. BAOBAB JETTY - NIGHT

On the jetty Siku makes as if to dive into the river.

Livingstone LANDS on Amedeo's head.

ROCK

Grab them!

Siku is caught by the pirates. Amedeo feels Rock's hands dragging on his shoudlers.

FLYNN

Got her!

(CONTINUED)

AMEDEO
Siku!

SIKU
Help!

Siku begins to transform. She grasps her amulet to hold it off.

SIKU
No... I mustn't... I...

ROCK
What on-

Suddenly a SHOCKWAVE ripples outwards from her body, throwing the men flying, rocking the even the heft of the HMS Great Booty and the plane.

AMEDEO
Siku! Are you alright?!

Amedeo finds his feet. He goes to Siku, notices her transformed body. Amedeo looks toward the plane, clenches his teeth.

ROCK
They're going to try to escape in the plane!

Amedeo carries Siku down the destroyed jetty to the plane. He closes them in the--

COCKPIT

Rock's fists thump against the window.

The engine takes in a LOUD ROAR and they begin to move. Siku's face shows pain as the transformation continues.

Rock and Livingstone grab hold of the plane as it slowly lifts into the air. But as Amedeo banks sharply they are CAST OFF, and FALL into the river.

EXT. MULOZI'S BALCONY - NIGHT

From the balcony of the baobab, Keigwin and Mulozi watch as the plane rises into the sky.

MULOZI
I'm going to pickle that pirate in his favourite whiskey and feed him to the crocodiles!

(CONTINUED)

Keigwin looks on, half terrified, half impressed.

KEIGWIN
[thoughts] Unbelievable! Look at
what she did to that jetty...

EXT. ANCIENT SHONGA VILLAGE - DAY [DREAM]

Siku finds herself standing knee-deep in the river. Before her, on the bank, stands a group of SHONGA ANCESTORS, observing a ceremony.

A small SAPLING is carried from the bank of the river to a group of men in boats. A WOMAN wades out and hands it to them.

On the banks the TRIBE watches.

Siku suddenly sinks, falling deep below the water's surface, all around her the body of a SERPENT curls.

INT. VIKING FLOATPLANE - DAWN

Siku wakes with a start. She looks terrified and exhausted.

AMEDEO
Hey, Siku! Are you alright?

She stares ahead, then gazes down out of the window of the plane, here eyes wide.

AMEDEO
It's alright. I know how to fly.

She relaxes.

SIKU
[to herself, but spoken aloud] I
couldn't help it... I broke my
promise. Baba, I'm sorry!

AMEDEO
I don't understand. What promise
did you break?

SIKU
I told my father I would never ever
let it happen again.

(CONTINUED)

AMEDEO

But you just saved our lives! Who knows what would have happened to us if it hadn't been for you.

SIKU

Amedeo, I hate it! It's like I'm possessed!

AMEDEO

Possessed!? [he crosses himself]

SIKU

Yes. Every time I lose control and it takes over, I get closer to letting it control me always! That's why baba told me *never* to let it happen. If I don't do something, I'm not even going to know *who I am* anymore.

Amedeo's face shows surprise but also sympathy. Siku dries her tears.

SIKU

I must get to Kariba. I'm scared what Mulozi said is true.

AMEDEO

My mother is also at Kariba! Let's follow the river. We'll find them Siku.

For a while they sit in silence and stare out of the window.

AMEDEO

Hey, do you want to see a trick?

He opens his window, letting the BURST OF AIR flap his cheeks. He looks to see that Siku is watching - she is. He laughs as his cheeks and hair flap. Siku, at first expressionless, can't help but smile.

She opens her window, and when the same begins to happen to her cheeks and hair she laughs. Amedeo opens his mouth and the air catches his lips exposing his teeth in the gaping "O" that his mouth now forms, he too bursts into laughter. Siku opens her mouth and laughs too.

Their laughter is interrupted when they look ahead. A huge wall of cloud is before them.

(CONTINUED)

AMEDEO

Fog! I'll have to fly by
instruments.

He looks at the COMPASS, and puts the plane into a nimble
dive. The plane enters a world of white.

AMEDEO

I'll have to land on the river.

He lowers the aircraft toward the river. The water slowly
becomes visible.

AMEDEO

Okay...There!

But just as he thinks he's about to touch the water, they
run straight into the FOREST at the bank (there's an unseen
bend in the river). The plane's WINGS are SHEARED right off
and remain behind, while the fuselage BORES a DEEP TUNNEL
into the undergrowth.

Smoke rises. A huge ELEPHANT TUSK protrudes through the
CRACKED WINDSHIELD, almost touching Siku's face.

Amedeo eyes open. He looks over at Siku, whose eyes also
open. They look at one another in sheer relief. But as the
dust settles, they see resolving before them a wasteland of
ENORMOUS SKELETONS.

AMEDEO

Dio mio... So many bones. Where are
we?

They climb from the plane.

EXT. ELEPHANT GRAVEYARD - DAY

They walk between the skeletons of dead elephants.

SIKU

I think it's a graveyard.

They pass to the other side and see the beginning of a
FOREST.

SIKU

Let's go this way. We need to find
the river again.

EXT. FOREST - DAY

A pathway leads them some distance into the forest.

Amedeo pats his TROUSER POCKET. He stops, puts his hand inside the pocket and turns it inside out. It is empty.

Siku in the meanwhile hasn't noticed and walks on.

SIKU

Do you have forests like this where you are from, Amedeo? Amedeo?

She turns around and sees him with his head in his hands, bundled in a ball behind her on the path.

CUT TO:

Some moments later... They sit beside one another on the path.

AMEDEO

I can't believe it! I haven't checked it since... since before I met you. I just *forgot*.

SIKU

Maybe it fell out of your pocket when we crashed?

AMEDEO

I *always* check it.

SIKU

Come, let's go before it gets dark.

Amedeo looks up at her as if from a dream.

EXT. CONSTRUCTION SITE AT KARIBA DAM - DAY

Lia stands over a table covered with MAPS of the river. Four of her MEN are examining them.

A MESSENGER comes rushing to the table.

MESSENGER

Dr Keigwin just radioed in -- Pirates, the boy was taken by *Pirates!*

(CONTINUED)

LIA
Pirates!? *Santo cielo*, Amedeo...

EXT. FOREST - DAY

Amedeo and Siku make their way back through dense forest.

SIKU
Not much further now...

They reach the top of a hill, but still cannot see the plane.

AMEDEO
We're lost... Siku, I think we took the wrong--

--Suddenly, they are confronted by SHONGA WARRIORS in ANIMAL SKINS, holding spears. Amedeo nervously grips his MACHETE.

AMEDEO
Leave us alone!

SIKU
Amedeo, I think it's okay.

The middle warrior lowers his spear and thrusts out his hand, from which Amedeo's POCKET WATCH dangles.

AMEDEO
My watch!

Smiling, he runs to take it, and the warrior does not stop him. He only gives the 'follow me' gesture, and turns on his heel with this two fellows. Amedeo and Siku look at each other and decide to follow.

AMEDEO
Who *are* they? And how did they find my watch?

EXT. CRASH SITE - DAY

Rock and his men come across the wreckage of the plane. FLYNN (mid 30s) stares at the sheared off wings and peers down the tunnel into the forest.

FLYNN
Boss, I think they went that way.

Rock hits him over the head.

(CONTINUED)

ROCK

Ya think?! Come on, we go on foot
from here.

EXT. FOREST - DAY

Siku and Amedeo walk side by side behind the Shonga
warriors.

SIKU

Amedeo, where is your your father?

AMEDEO

He died...

SIKU

I'm sorry.

AMEDEO

Until he got sick he made watches.
He made this one for me just before
he died.

SIKU

What was he sick with?

AMEDEO

One day he didn't come home. A man
came to the house. He said he found
papa on the other side of town.
Papa couldn't talk he was so
scared. Then he told us, he was
walking home, and he just forgot
the way.

SIKU

He lost his memory.

The Shonga warriors stop suddenly.

AMEDEO

Why are we stopping?

EXT. SHONGA VILLAGE - DAY

Siku and Amedeo see before them the Shonga village. It is
late afternoon and the daily chores are still underway.
Women grind millet with long PESTLES and men tend crops.
Children play among the HUTS.

But all activity pauses when the villagers see Siku.

(CONTINUED)

In the centre of the village is a collection of huts belonging to the ageing CHIEF CHISABA, who wearing a humble coat stands alongside CHEELO (late 30s, strong). Cheelo is by all appearances the acting Chief.

Siku looks at Cheelo and bows.

SIKU
Hello Chief.

CHEELO
Daughter of the River, welcome, I am Cheelo, nephew and heir of Chief Chisaba here. Long have we awaited your coming...

Siku and Amedeo's eyes widen in surprise.

CHIEF CHISABA
Who is your friend?

SIKU
This is Amedeo. He helped us escape the pirates. We were in a crash and then we got lost.

CHEELO
You must rest, Siku. The road ahead is long. Two sheep shall be slaughtered, and tonight we will feast in your honour!

Amedeo and Siku look at each other, dumbfounded. They are approached by a SERVANT (20s, sprightly).

SERVANT
I will take you to your hut.

Together they are led away.

Cheelo stands beside Chief Chisaba with a sceptical look on his face.

CHIEF CHISABA
You should never have brought her here. She is not yet ready for the truth.

CHEELO
Two tribes were taken from their lands by the dam builders only a
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CHEELO (cont'd)
fortnight ago, and still you
hesitate. There is no time to wait
for the right moment.

INT. HUT - SHONGA VILLAGE - DAY

Siku and Amedeo are shown into a handsome, well-decorated
HUT.

SERVANT
I hope it is satisfactory.

The servant leaves.

AMEDEO
Siku, what's going on? It's like
these people think you're someone
else!

SIKU
I don't know.

AMEDEO
Do you think they can help us get
to Kariba?

SIKU
Amedeo, I need to tell you... I
feel like I've been here before...
Do you think it means something?

They lie down on their mats and look up at the reed roof.

AMEDEO
When my father lost his memory,
something strange happened.

Siku turns her head to look over at Amedeo.

AMEDEO
He didn't talk, but sometimes he
would begin singing. The songs were
old - from when he was a boy. It
was strange. He remembered every
word. He couldn't recognize us but
he could remember those old songs.

SIKU
Do you remember any of them?

(CONTINUED)

AMEDEO

I learned some verses.

SIKU

Will you sing one for me?

Amedeo blushes.

AMEDEO

I'm not a very good singer, but I
can try.

He begins singing.

AMEDEO

*That little bouquet of flowers /
That come from the mountains / I
want to give it to my sweetheart /
When he comes home tonight.*

Siku slowly falls asleep.

EXT. SHONGA VILLAGE CAMPFIRE - NIGHT

"Later..."

A drum ritual begins, accompanied by a dance. Siku and Amedeo are seated in a big circle. The dancers finish and Siku and Amedeo are offered a DRIKING GOURD that is passed from the chief to them, and thence to the seated villagers.

CHEELO

Welcome. Let us begin the feast!

Food is passed around. Everyone begins to eat but Siku.

SIKU

Chief, we are very grateful, but I
think there has been a mistake.

Cheelo's eyes widen at this.

SIKU

We are not who you think. We are
lost and trying to get to Kariba.
And we must leave soon...

CHEELO

Leave?! But you just arrived!

(CONTINUED)

CHIEF CHISABA

Too soon, too soon...

CHEELO

This is impossible!

The villagers look terrified at this unusual outburst from their Chief.

CHEELO

Siku, there is a reason you are here. Many of our neighbours have been removed from their homes to make way for the great flood that the dam will soon make. We cannot let these European's uproot us like weeds. Do you understand?

Amedeo's eyes widen.

SIKU

I...

CHEELO

We brought you here because you are the daughter to our river god, Nyaminyami. It is time for you to be trained, to complete the *Rumuko* and restore order to our valley.

SIKU

But I am Tongai's daughter. That's why I'm going to Kariba. He went there to work on the dam.

Cheelo is confounded by this, but Chief Chisaba is unsurprised.

CHEELO

Your words surprise me, young one. We are told that Tongai has known all along that you would one day need to fulfill the *Rumuko*. Your task here has not yet begun!

SIKU

I'm sorry, I can't help you. And we have to leave soon...

Chisaba smiles, some question within him answered.

CHEELO

[thoughts] It can't be! Maalila
cannot have been wrong!

In the silence, Chief Chisaba leans forward on his STICK.

CHIEF CHISABA

Have you heard the story of the
Princess and the pool?

Chief Chisaba leans forward.

CHIEF CHISABA

Every day she would go down to the
pool by the river to play. One
moonlit night she could not sleep.
She went to the pool, and there in
the water she saw a witch. She ran
away and told her father, the
chief, who sent out his warriors to
empty to the pool. When it was
empty, all they found were fish and
frogs.

SIKU

What does--

CHIEF CHISABA

Sometimes, we are afraid to see
what we know to be true...

Siku stares at Chief Chisaba.

CHEELO

Let us eat. Tomorrow we will
discuss these matters. But tonight
you are my guests. So we will
feast.

Siku and Amedeo and the villagers, assenting to his request,
resume the feast.

INT. SHONGA VILLAGE RIVERBANK - NIGHT

Siku walks along a path. Dense reeds move languidly in the
wind, as if underwater. Around her she sees the glow of
FIREFLIES. They swarm and she follows. There beside the
shore of the black river, lit by the fireflies which slip
about him, sits Chief Chisaba. Siku sits beside him. He
smiles.

(CONTINUED)

CHIEF CHISABA
Beautiful, aren't they?

SIKU
Yes.

He points toward a mountain above the village.

CHIEF CHISABA
That is where Maalila lives. If you want answers, it is to him you must go. Young Cheelo and I are only men. We do not know the ways of the spirits.

SIKU
Maalila?... but...

CHIEF CHISABA
Siku, tribes perish, new ones are born, and the old ways are forgotten--so is the fate of man! But the ways of gods are unchanging, and if we do not heed our gods we allow chaos to reign on earth. Without the knowledge of our past, we risk losing more than our land in the flood - it is memory itself that will drown.

SIKU
But Chief, can't you stop them moving you? It's not fair. You have always lived here.

CHIEF CHISABA
We have our spears, but we are not a warrior people. Against even one gun, what are a hundred men?

Across Siku's face there passes a look of uncertainty and despair.

CHIEF CHISABA
Follow the narrow path, Siku, and there you will find the answer to the question that is in your heart.

Siku looks toward the forest.

CHIEF CHISABA
But you must take this.

Chief Chisaba takes out a small PIECE OF MEAT wrapped in a cloth.

SIKU
Meat... What is it for?

CHIEF CHISABA
The spirit medium must be paid. Go now.

She peers into the forest, but is afraid to enter, the light of the fireflies behind her slowly fades.

SIKU
Chief, I don't want to--

She turns to see Chisaba walking away.

CHISABA
Don't forget about the food!

She stares at the forest. Slowly, she clenches her fists and takes the first step.

EXT. MAALILA'S FOREST - NIGHT

Siku travels a dense and dark path. Eyes stare at her from the dark, and STRANGE NOISES come from the depths of the thicket. She holds onto her AMULET.

Eventually she reaches a clearing in the centre of which is a small lake. A GOAT approaches Siku from behind, but she does not hear it. It tries to take the MEAT from her hand. Suprised, she spins around and sees the beady-eyed goat, it's teeth bared.

SIKU
No!

The goat bleats and lunges for the food, toppling Siku. It gets the meat between its teeth, but Siku wrestles it to the floor and tries to pull the meat from its jaws. Suddenly the goat TRANSFORMS halfway into the shape of a MAN, Maalila. Siku scrambles away. Maalila stands on his goat legs and swallows the meat.

MAALILA
Delicious!

SIKU
[fearful] You're Maalila?

Siku holds onto her amulet.

(CONTINUED)

SIKU

Chief Chisaba sent me. He said that you can answer my question.

Maalilas eyes widen.

MAALIA

What question is yours to ask?

SIKU

I... I want to know where my father is.

Maalila looks intently at Siku. He takes his hand and draws the shape of an OUROBOUROS in the dirt. He stares down at it along with Siku. He looks up.

MAALILA

RUMUKO! Return never ending...
Nyaminyami - the name eternal.

SIKU

I don't understand. I am looking for Tongai.

Maalila gestures for Siku to be quiet.

MAALILA

Rumuko is beginning and end. In beginning is the end, in end the is beginning. You are river daughter and must return home. There where the smoke thunders.

Siku seems for the first time to wonder whether there is truth in what Maalila is telling her about herself.

SIKU

The... Rumuko...

But she soon regains composure.

SIKU

[hardening] *No, I just want to find my father!*

There is a beat. Maalila is taken aback by her outburst. She breathes heavily.

SIKU

Everyone here thinks I have this "power" but you don't understand! It's a curse!

(CONTINUED)

She turns to leave. She is about to enter back down the path when the sound of Maalila's voice halts her.

MAALIA
And if Tongai is wrong? Closed eye
sees daylight as darkness...

As she looks back, Maalila turns into a bird and flies off.

EXT. SHONGA VILLAGE - DAY

AMEDEO
Siku!

Siku, Amedeo, Chief Chisaba, Cheelo, and several others stand together near the village.

AMEDEO
Are you okay? What happened?

SIKU
[thoughts] 'And what if Tongai is
wrong?'

CHEELO
What is your answer?

SIKU
I... [she looks at Cheelo's
expectant face] I'm sorry. I know
you want me be trained with
Maalila, but I can't.

Cheelo looks crestfallen.

CHEELO
Let me go and meditate.

He leaves. Chief Chisaba, standing back before, now comes forward.

CHIEF CHISABA.
Follow me.

He takes them to a place where leaves cover a little stick shed.

CHIEF CHISABA
I hope it still works. The old
District Commissioner once sold
this to me in our better days.

(CONTINUED)

He pushes them off, revealing an old motorbike. Amedeo's eyes open wide.

CHIEF CHISABA
You said you were in a hurry... I
am told it is very fast.

SIKU
You can drive this, too?

AMEDEO
Of course!

Amedeo grins.

EXT. SHONGA VILLAGE GATE - DAY

Chief Chisaba, Cheelo, and the villagers see them off.

CHIEF CHISABA
Now wherever you go, and whatever
you do, we Shonga believe in you.

SIKU
Thank you Chief. And thanks for
being so kind to us.

They climb onto the motorbike and zoom away.

CHIEF CHISABA
Her heart is true. She is confused,
but she will find her way.

CHEELO
You have more faith than I.

CHIEF CHISABA
No, I only remember better what it
is to be a child...

EXT. DIRT ROAD - DAY

Siku and Amedeo speed along a track that runs beside the river, their hair whipping behind them as they go.

SIKU
[thoughts] 'And what if Tongai is
wrong?'

Amedeo stops the bike to look for a better path.

(CONTINUED)

AMEDEO

The road must be down there!

He heads the bike up a steep incline and down a hill, and dodging rocks that stand in the path.

A beat.

Then, suddenly, a HARPOON shoots past, narrowly missing the motorbike.

SIKU

Rock Hudson!

Near the riverbank sails--

THE HMS GREAT BOOTY

ROCK HUDSON

You idiots, I said aim for the *motorbike!* We want them alive. Full steam ahead!

Rock sees Amedeo go off the road into the hills.

ROCK

Damn it! Drop anchor, we're going ashore! She won't get away that easily.

EXT. HILLSIDE - DAY

Amedeo makes some amazing moves with the bike, but eventually the bike hits deep sand and dust enshrouds them. They go off a CLIFF, FLYING through the air, but their fall is broken by some trees.

Together they struggle up to climb free. As they reach the crest of the hill on foot, they see to their horror that there is a sharp drop down the other side into the river. Siku holds her AMULET.

Rock and his men, out of breath, huffing, have caught up to them; GUNS out they slowly approach. Amedeo and Siku look at one another.

Then Siku closes her eyes, breathes, and lets go of her AMULET...

AMEDEO

Siku?

(CONTINUED)

ROCK
Hold it right there!

She looks down over the precipice, a concentrated expression on her face.

SIKU
Amedeo...

AMEDEO
Siku, don't do it. What if you...

She looks at Amedeo. She extends her hand to Amedeo, who reluctantly takes it in his.

Her skin CHANGES to a blueish hue and the PEARLESCENT SCALES appear. Her expression remains calm.

She falls backwards, pulling Amedeo with her, and together they plummet towards the river, which RISES UP up in a long tower that CATCHES them and lowers them slowly to the water's surface.

ON THE CLIFF

Rock stares in awe. He turns to Flynn.

ROCK
Give me the radio! Get into position.

UNDERWATER

Siku runs upside down along the water's surface, pulling Amedeo behind her, who without her realizing is beginning to drown.

AMEDEO
Siku... I can't... breathe...

Suddenly the harpooner's NET slices through the water catching them, and they are dragged upwards, to the surface, and dumped onto the deck of--

THE HMS GREAT BOOTY.

The pirates point their GUNS. The river itself rears up and seems as if it will climb over the sides of the boat, which yaws and bucks.

Siku blacks out.

INT. ANCIENT CAVERN - NIGHT [DREAM]

There is the deep blue of night all around. Siku stands on a dark lake, smooth as glass. Before her, rising up out of the water is a HUGE STONE JANUS HEAD, its mouth open, creating a circular aperture through its centre.

Siku watches SHONGA TRIBESMAN draw up toward it on canoes, a SAPLING in their hands. Having climbed to the top of the head, they PLANT the sapling.

In a matter of SECONDS the sapling grows into a TREE. From the mouth of the head a GIANT SERPENT appears and begins to circle the head.

Stumbling back in surprise as it nears her, Siku trips and falls, landing on her back. As soon as she touches the surface, flowers and reeds erupt all around her.

INT. HMS GREAT BOOTY CABIN - DAY

Amedeo and Siku sit on the floor of a cabin within the HMS Great Booty, tied back to back.

AMEDEO

Siku! Siku, are you okay?

SIKU

Amedeo...what happened?

AMEDEO

The pirates captured us. We are on their boat. Again.

SIKU

I had a vision again, but this one was different.

AMEDEO

Siku, you controlled it, I saw!

Rock SMASHES open the door and boldly enters.

ROCK

Alright lovebirds, time to talk business. Siku, I need your help. Quid quo pro. I rub my back, you rub yours, et cetera.

SIKU

Are you crazy Rock? Why would I help you?

(CONTINUED)

Rock begins to unbutton his SHIRT.

ROCK
[pontificating] My map is perfect!
So perfect I had it tattoed to my
chest.

He opens his shirt, and indeed, on his chest is a LARGE
TATOOED MAP.

ROCK
So how come each time I've been
there it's a wall of stone and not
a doorway I find? What was
different the time we actually went
in? Well, maybe something was
different when we went in...

AMEDEO
What?

ROCK
She was there! [looking at Siku]

SIKU
Me?

ROCK
Yes. You're the key that will open
the doors to the Rhutapa.

Siku's eyes widen.

SIKU
Go away Rock!

ROCK
You think I'd ask you for help by
choice? You think it's coincidence
that Mulozi wants you? OF COURSE
NOT!!! Wise up! She tried to trick
me out of the deal, but I'm not
falling for it. You're Nyaminyami's
daughter! And you're going to help
ME!

Siku says nothing.

ROCK
Siku, don't waste my time! I need
your help.

Siku still says nothing.

ROCK

Mulozi told you not to say anything to me, didn't she?

SIKU

Mulozi said nothing about treasure. She thinks I can stop Nyaminyami destroying the dam. And Keigwin promised her something if she gets me to help him.

Rock looks dumbfounded. He turns and scratches his chin.

ROCK

Lock them up! Call me when she's ready to talk.

Rock makes to leave.

SIKU

[to Rock] Rock, wait! I'll help you.

He turns around.

ROCK

Finally, you're talking sense!

SIKU

But you have to promise me something...

Rock looks at Siku suspiciously. Amedeo is surprised at Siku's sudden turnaround.

SIKU

You have to help me find my father. I think he's at Kariba.

He scratches his chin.

ROCK

If anyone on this river knows how to find that old salty seadog, it's Rock Hudson. It's a deal!

He begins untying them.

ROCK

Flynn, tell the crew. We're headed for Kariba.

INT. LAND ROVER - NIGHT

Keigwin and Mulozi sit across from one another at a small table.

A MAP is spread across the table, and upon it the GIANT SCALE which Keigwin was earlier given by one of his men. It is has been mounted on a WOODEN RING and acts in the fashion of an unusual compass.

Mulozi notices the scale TWITCH.

MULOZI

It's moving!

They look at it with keen interest. It gives a sudden jump and the scale swivels.

MULOZI

Straight to Kariba... But we could have problems if she gets there before us...

KEIGWIN

Don't worry. I have a plan.

EXT. HMS GREAT BOOTY - DAY

Siku DIVES from the deck of the Great Booty into the water.

Errol and Flynn stare gormlessly, their fishing lines dangling into the water without a nibble. Siku surfaces, waves and dives under.

GABLE

I wish I could swim.

ERROL

You can't *swim*?!

TRACK DOWN TO:

BELOW DECK

Rock and Amedeo stand by the Great Booty's ENGINE. Amedeo holds the tools while Rock is on his back, tinkering. Amedeo, distracted by Siku's splash, looks outside and sees her swimming.

ROCK

Engine's are like wives, Ghost. You leave them alone for five minutes and they start to complain.

(CONTINUED)

Rock notices Amedeo isn't listening. He stands up and looks out the window with Amedeo to watch Siku swimming.

ROCK

I always knew. Even when she was a baby.

AMEDEO

You knew Siku when she was a baby?

ROCK

How do you think I figured she's the key to Rhutapa? Ghost, we *found* Siku there as a baby. Tongai wasn't always Mr Morals. Back then we were Shonga rebels, treasure hunters! -- we had dreams, Ghost. Big ones!

Amedeo looks at him, surprised.

ROCK

But he wanted to keep her and so we parted ways. He betrayed the piratical cause and joined civilization, the spoilsport.

Amedeo looks through the portal at Siku.

Siku swims underwater. She grabs two fish and swims to Errol and Flynn's fishing lines, where their empty hooks dangle.

ON DECK

Errol and Gable sit, bored.

ERROL

Never going to catch a thing without bait, Gable.

GABLE

Why do you always have to be so negative?

Below in the--

ENGINE ROOM

Rock looks at Amedeo looking at Siku.

ROCK

Ghost, let me give you a piece of advice. Every man wants his treasure, but you're never going to
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

ROCK (cont'd)
find it while dreaming. You're like
a pirate trying to navigate a river
by looking backwards.

Amedeo stares at Rock, perplexed. Rock TAPS the side of his nose.

ROCK
Meditate on it, Ghost.

Amedeo watches Siku finish tying the fish to Errol and Flynn's lines.

GABLE
I've got something!

ERROL
I've got something!

They stare at each other in amazement.

EXT. HMS GREAT BOOTY - DAY

"The next morning..."

On the deck of the Great Booty, Siku and Amedeo soak up the sunrise and look down into the water.

The ship pulls into an inlet. Beneath the overgrowth of plants and trees lie ANCIENT RUINS.

ROCK
Long ago this was also part of
Rhutapa. There are ruins like these
all over the Zambesi, but few
people know they belonged to the
same empire.

AMEDEO
Amazing!

SIKU
So beautiful...

ROCK
Just imagine what an empire like
that would've kept as its treasure!

Siku and Amedeo roll their eyes.

(CONTINUED)

SIKU

Can we go and look at them?

ROCK

You go ahead, I've seen these a million times. Be back soon, Bogart's going to see if he can get some information in Kariba.

EXT. ANCIENT RUINS - DAY

Siku and Amedeo walk up a STONE STAIRWAY. On their way they pass several large CROCODILES.

SIKU

Don't worry about them, they're just warming up.

They enter an enormous CAVERN. Shafts of light filter through open cracks in the rock, revealing fallen statues of ENORMOUS BIRDS.

Amedeo stares in wonder at the place.

AMEDEO

This place is amazing. It's like Roma.

SIKU

It reminds me of something, too.

Siku stares at one of the cracked birds and touches its mossy beak. Her eyes begin to fill with tears.

AMEDEO

What's wrong?

SIKU

I'm scared. Everything my father was trying to protect me from, it's all happening. What if what Mulozi was telling the truth?

Below, BOGART walks toward the great booty.

AMEDEO

Look, Bogart's back from Kariba town. Maybe he'll have news about your father?

EXT. HMS GREAT BOOTY - DAY

Siku and Amedeo arrive back. Rock stands impatiently on the foredeck, waiting. Bogart has a hard expression on his face.

ROCK
Here's the good news, Siku. Tongai
is alive.

SIKU
I knew it!

She hugs Amedeo, who blushes.

SIKU
I knew she was lying!

ROCK
Not so fast. Bogart cased the place
and it looks like... he's in jail.

Bogart nods. Siku's face falls.

SIKU
Jail? But why?

ROCK
He's being blamed for the dam
falling down.

SIKU
But that makes no sense. Bogart,
are you sure?

BOGART
I'm afraid so.

AMEDEO
There must be some mistake, Siku!
Let's talk to my mother, she will
fix this.

Siku and Amedeo nod in agreement.

ROCK
No ways. I'm not throwing us into
the hands of the police.

SIKU
You promised to help me!

(CONTINUED)

ROCK
And I will. But I'll do it my way.
Pirate style...

EXT. KARIBA ROADSIDE - DAY

Rock lies sleeping against a tree. The pirates and the children crouch behind some rocks just out of sight. Shaded by the trees the men lounge about, some of them play cards. A call comes from the trees above them.

LOOKOUT
I see it!

Rock sits bolt upright.

ROCK
Ghost, you're up.

Amedeo stands in the middle of the path as the truck approaches. It slows and then stops a few meters from him. A DRIVER (50s, overweight) climbs out.

DRIVER
Good heavens, lad! What are you
doing all the way out here!?

AMEDEO
I'm lost signore! Where is Kariba?

DRIVER
I'll take you. Hop in.

AMEDEO
Thank you signore. You're very
nice... I'm sorry.

DRIVER
For what?

AMEDEO
For them.

The driver looks behind him and sees the pirates with their many GUNS pointed at him and his co driver. Rock grins and tips his HAT.

INT. TRANSPORT TRUCK - DAY

They approach the dam in the STOLEN TRUCK. Rock and Bogart are dressed in the POLICE OFFICERS' UNIFORMS, Rock with white paint on his face in an effort to resemble the officer whose uniform he is wearing. Siku and Amedeo are hidden in the back.

They enter the town. Bogart points to a BUILDING.

BOGART
There it is.

EXT. KARIBA DAM - DAY

A few land rovers are parked outside and asleep on a stool at the door is a GUARD.

ROCK
Siku and Amedeo, you sneak round
the back and we'll come in through
the front.

Rock and Flynn enter the building. Siku and Amedeo run off in the other direction.

INT. INFIRMARY RECEPTION - DAY

Rock and Bogart stand before a small, uptight-looking CLERK who sits behind a desk flanked by filing cabinets. Despite the heat, his shirt is buttoned all the way up.

ROCK
Good morning my dear fellow!

The man looks up with a mixture of irritation and surprise.

ROCK
We are here to collect Tongai. He
is to be... tranferred.

CLERK
You are Sergeant... Wilkins?

Rock looks down at the NAME TAG on his stolen SHIRT: it reads "WILKINS".

ROCK
Yes... yes exactly!

The Clerk extends his hand.

(CONTINUED)

CLERK

Could I see your identification and the transfer papers?

ROCK

The transfer papers, of course... Private Bogart! The transfer papers please.

Rock holds his hand out to Bogart whilst still looking forward at the clerk. Bogart places a TRUNCHEON into Rock's hand and with one smooth motion Rock swings it, HITTING the clerk squarely on the head.

He crumples to the floor.

INT. INFIRMARY - DAY

Siku and Amedeo sneak around into the infirmary, picking the lock to get inside.

Keigwin, Mulozi, and guards with GUNS and a TRANQUILIZER GUN stand waiting...

Siku and Amedeo's faces sink in horror.

KEIGWIN

Now listen. Come calmly and my men won't shoot.

SIKU

Where is my father!?

Behind Siku and Amedeo, the door opens and Rock's head appears. His eyes widen.

ROCK

Bogart, I think it's time for those 'transfer papers' again...

Rock sticks his hand back, ready for the truncheon.

BOGART

Sure, Rock.

Bogart WHACKS Rock on the head. Rock collapses face-foward into the room. Bogart steps inside and goes to stand with Keigwin.

AMEDEO

Bogart!?

(CONTINUED)

KEIGWIN

We had to invent that part to get you here.

MULOZI

It's just like I told you, he's dead.

Siku's eyes well up with tears, but her face wears an expression of fury.

Amedeo watches her nervously.

Mulozi notices water from a GLASS sitting on the table next to Keigwin begin to FLOAT UPWARDS.

MULOZI

She's beginning to transform!

AMEDEO

Siku... Siku! You must control it!
Don't let go!

The ground SHUDDERS and a cold wind blows open the windows, causing the curtains and people's clothes to FLAP frantically.

SIKU

You're lying! Where is he?!!

KEIGWIN

Stop this child, or we'll be forced to shoot!

MULOZI

It's too late, shoot her!

AMEDEO

No!

Amedeo stands in front of her. One of the men tries to shoot a tranquilizer dart, but the gun jams.

MULOZI

Hurry you fool!

Suddenly the building begins to SHAKE and is slowly, piece by piece, SHEARED into DEBRIS.

The roof and walls are TORN apart and FLUNG in all directions. A VORTEX of water like a writhing serpent has reached out from the dam wreaking destruction on its course toward Siku.

(CONTINUED)

Everything is encircled in an angry whirl of white water. Amedeo turns to face her.

AMEDEO
Siku, no!!! Come back!!!

KEIGWIN
You idiot!

Keigwin grabs the gun and HITS it hard. He raises it, takes aim, and pulls the TRIGGER, but it jams again.

KEIGWIN
Dammit!

Siku goes forward, moved by an invisible force. A SHOCKWAVE of water HITS Amedeo in the back, THROWING him forward through the air, his HEAD HITTING a concrete post.

Siku screams, GRABBING Keigwin by the collar before he can pull the TRIGGER.

Amedeo's face is STREAKED with BLOOD, his eyes glassed over. He tries to get up, reaches his hand out towards Siku.

AMEDEO
Si...Siku...(softly)

But he can't stay conscious, his arm drops, then the rest of him.

Siku's face slackens, confusion replacing anger; she turns her head to look at Amedeo.

At that moment MULOZI takes a DART in her hand and STABS Siku with it.

Siku drops the man and tries to move towards Amedeo, but the dart takes effect almost immediately, her eyes rolling back as she falls to her knees.

The SUSPENDED VORTEX of water DROPS in a great torrent of rain.

EXT. ZAMBESI RIVER - NIGHT [DREAM]

Siku sees the sky streaked with lightning. The river writhes in a mad fury. The water tears at the dam wall, WORKERS are washed away and swallowed by the boiling waves - destruction, fear and death.

Beneath the water, the serpent wages his battle.

(CONTINUED)

SIKU

STOP!

She reaches out her hand, which is covered in the serpent's colourful scales, and seeing this recoils in horror.

The serpent now turns to her, beginning its pursuit as before. Siku tries to escape, swimming through GNARLED DEAD TREES and ANCIENT RUINS.

As before it quickly begins to close the gap between them. In the distance, Siku sees the huge JANUS HEAD and makes out through its wide open mouth the INSIDE OF HER HOUSE at Walker's Camp.

Using the last of her strength she makes it through the entrance, TUMBLING head first into the SUNLIT ROOM. Looking back she sees that her front door is now a PORTAL to the blue world that she has just escaped, and moving menacingly on the other side is the pearlescent body of the serpent.

She SLAMS the door shut.

Mulozi's DISEMBODIED FACE looms into the room, ghostlike and huge. It twists slowly into a band of grey hair that spirals about the door, SEALING IT SHUT, and gripping Siku's wrists.

INT. KEIGWIN'S RIVERBOAT - DAY

Siku sits bolt upright. Mulozi and Keigwin stand over her. Mulozi has something smoking in her hand. Between her fingers is a small band of her own hair forming a knot, lit at the bottom.

SIKU

Amedeo!

MULOZI

I shut the way back. You should be grateful.

She stares wildly at Mulozi.

SIKU

Amedeo... Where is he?

MULOZI

In hospital... let us hope he survives.

Siku cries.

(CONTINUED)

MULOZI

Don't cry, child. You had your chance when I made my offer.

Siku looks up, enraged. She tries to summon her powers. Mulozzi watches her.

SIKU

[thoughts] Nothing's happening...

MULOZI

You ran away from your realm of power. I watched you, and now I have shut the door.

Siku keeps trying, but to no avail. Mulozzi stands to leave.

MULOZI

Save your energy. You turned your back on your future, now have the courage to live with your choice.

"Later that evening..."

Siku lies on her bed. Her expression is hopeless.

Suddenly the door bursts open and THREE SHONGA WARRIORS enter. They kneel before her.

WARRIOR1

Daughter of the River, we have come to take you away from the barbarians.

They stand.

WARRIOR2

And to bring you back unto your rightful place.

SIKU

Where are you taking me?

They are shocked.

WARRIOR1

You are to make council before Cheelo.

Siku, confused, relieved, exhausted, agrees.

EXT. ZAMBESI RIVER - NIGHT

The Shonga stealthily escape with her.

Their slim canoe rows away into the dawn.

EXT. SHONGA VILLAGE - DAY

Siku is brought into Chief Chisaba's village by the Shonga spies.

She sees villagers PACKING up their belongings. It is clear: a migration is underway. The villagers do not look her in the eye.

She is brought before Cheelo.

CHEELO

Welcome, Child. I am so glad you are safe.

SIKU

Thank you Cheelo. Why are people packing away their homes?

CHEELO

We are afraid for the future of our village. Your refusal means Nyaminyami cannot be reborn. He is angry. Soon a flood will begin.

Siku's anger and upset have finally come to a head.

SIKU

My father is dead because of *me!* Because this is a *curse!* And besides, it's gone now. There's nothing I can do, I'm sorry.

She sobs, then turns to leave.

Cheelo's face is impassive, but knowing.

CHEELO

Follow me, Siku.

She stops, turns. He walks toward a hut behind his own, and draws away the opening so that she may enter.

Inside, lying on a bed convalescing, is Tongai.

(CONTINUED)

SIKU

Baba!!!!

She runs to him and puts her arms around him.

TONGAI

Siku! I was so worried about you!

CHEELO

He was foolish enough to fight a god, and nearly paid the price. One of my warriors found him washed up on a rock.

"Some hours later..."

SIKU

Yes, they're going to Rhutapa to kill Nyaminyami.

TONGAI

But what they are doing is good! You will be normal, we can go to Salisbury and live a happy, *normal* life.

Siku is surprised.

SIKU

I already locked it away. And Baba, don't you know that if they *kill* Nyaminyami, terrible things will happen, the whole valley will flood!

TONGAI

Siku, we can't expect the whole country to go without electricity because of a few villagers who do not want to move.

SIKU

Baba, this is their *home*!

TONGAI

I know, I know! But Siku... you must *trust me*... I am your father!

Siku looks away.

SIKU

Baba, you are not always right. What Maalila said was true. Not

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

SIKU (cont'd)
everything is the way you think it
is.

TONGAI
How dare you say that?! You trust
the words of these villagers over
mine? You are *my* daughter! Not
Nyaminyami's, not Chief Chisaba's,
not anyone's but *mine*!

Siku runs out of the hut.

Tongai raises himself from his bed and, using all his
strength stands in the doorway.

TONGAI
Siku!!!

His eyes fall to the floor.

TONGAI
I'm sorry...

EXT. SHONGA VILLAGE RIVERBANK - DAY

Siku sits and dries her tears, as she stares at the river.
The wind picks up.

A CROW flies down and eyes Siku from a DEAD BRANCH that
rises from the water. Siku stares at the bird.

Lightning strikes, and Maalia appears, standing knee deep in
the water before her.

She stands up.

MAALILA
Stubborn stubborn! Ha! Yes. Girl
grows weary before her chores are
done.

SIKU
Maalila. I didn't believe you but
you were right. I was too scared, I
shut the door! I'm sorry...

MAALILA
You made it thus, a dam *inside*. But
no dam holds forever!

(CONTINUED)

SIKU

But I can't go back! I can't...

MAALILA

You *must*! Task's unfinished...
Gurembe valley, Shonga drown, many
drown if no Rumuko.

SIKU

I have had dreams, Maalila! I've
seen what happens when Nyaminyami
wakes and goes out. The dam is
destroyed! And people die there
too!

MAALILA

To think thus shows your mind is
weak!

He turns into a JAKKAL and jumps at Siku, pinning her to the ground. He breathes heavily, teeth bared, then stalks off into the bushes.

LIGHTNING STIRKES again, but this time a heavy rain ensues. Instead of turning back to the drift, Siku begins to run.

EXT. ZAMBESI FOREST - NIGHT

She runs, faster and faster through the forest.

Voices come to her, and visions of faces chase her, crowd her from all sides.

CHIEF CHISABA

*Do not leave, child. The River
needs you. Your true people need
you!*

TONGAI

*Siku! Come home! The future is
waiting for us. We will be happy,
Siku, I promise!*

Siku runs. She runs so fast that she trips. She tumbles and falls through thick trees and underbrush twenty metres straight down into the river.

She gasps for air. The water draws her helplessly under. Borne away on strong storm currents, she sees lightening strike again and again. She goes into a spin in the water. She blacks out.

Her eyes open and she is underwater, drowned.

(CONTINUED)

Then, she sees a bright light above her, the ragged-edged sun coming through broken water. Through this light emerges the Siku in her transformed state. She seems regal, almost larger than life. Nyaminyami's colours play in the shafts of light through which she swims.

The TRANSFORMED SIKU looks at her drowned Self, an expression of understanding on her face. She extends her hand down.

Slowly, DROWNED SIKU takes TRANSFORMED SIKU'S hand. She is pulled upward toward the surface, toward the light.

Her eyes open. She lies on the riverbank, saved.

INT. NEW INFIRMARY TENT - DAY

"Some days later..."

Amedeo lies in bed still unconscious, half his body bandaged.

INT. HOSPITAL WARD - DAY - [DREAM]

Lia walks toward Amedeo.

AMEDEO

Mama!

She walks straight through him and toward a bed that we see is behind him - in which Amedeo's father, Lorenzo, lies.

Amedeo watches Lia sit on the bed and stroke Lorenzo's face. Lorenzo stares blankly at the ceiling.

LIA

Amedeo will be eleven tomorrow. Do you know what he said? He said he didn't want a birthday. He said he only wants to turn eleven once you come back to us.

Lia bursts into tears. She stands up, adjusts the duvet, dries her eyes.

LIA

We will not give up on you, *mi amore*.

Amedeo goes up close to his mother, watching her like a speechless infant, awe-filled, sad.

(CONTINUED)

She leaves. Amedeo watches.

LORENZO
Amedeo...

Amedeo turns around, surprised.

AMEDEO
You can see me...

LORENZO
Amedeo, my son. The future cannot
be stopped. And you must not think
you are responsible for it all.
Everyone walks their own path.

Amedeo looks down toward the floor.

LORENZO
Death is never only sad. It is a
new life. And though I am gone, I
will always be there in you...

He points feebly at Amedeo's heart.

LORENZO
You must *live*, Amedeo. *Live*.

INT. NEW INFIRMARY TENT - DAY

Amedeo wakes in the infirmary.

He gently sits up, climbs from his bed, and walks over to
the window.

MEN outside laugh and chat as they work. It is a hot day.
There is a gentle breeze that passes through the window and
lifts his hair.

INT. "PRISON" ROOM - DAY

From the room where he is locked, Rock peers through the
barred window.

ROCK
I smell trouble cooking out there!

The guard places the porridge on the table and backs out of
the room.

(CONTINUED)

GUARD

Porridge is what you smell, matey.
Now be a good boy and shovel that
down yer ol' yap trap.

Rock sits down and picks up his porridge, sniffing at it
with a disgusted, sorrowful expression.

ROCK

This is no life for a pirate.

INT. NEW INFIRMARY TENT - DAY

INSERT: IMAGE OF AMEDEO'S POCKET WATCH, LYING BESIDE HIS
EMPTY BED.

EXT. LIA'S HOUSE - DAY

Amedeo knocks at Lia's door. She opens it and blanches. Her
expression turns to delight. They embrace.

LIA

You're okay! Tell me *everything*!
What happened?

Amedeo looks daunted.

INT. LIA'S HOUSE - DAY

Lia stands with her ear pressed to the telephone.

OFFICER

I'm sorry, Ma'am, but we have
strict orders. No Kariba police to
leave town under any circumstances.

LIA

Whose orders?!

OFFICERS

I'm not at liberty to say, Ma'am.

Lia slams down the phone and turns to Amedeo.

LIA

Amedeo, I'm sorry...

AMEDEO

But mama! Siku needs us! The
villagers need us! Keigwin's going

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

AMEDEO (cont'd)
to use Siku to try and kill
Nyaminyami! And all so that this
dam won't be destroyed.

LIA
Look, Amedeo, I don't want to build
this dam if people are going to die
because of it. But I am only an
engineer! Except for calling the
police, what am I supposed to do?
It is the government that moves the
villagers, and whatever Keigwin is
doing is a matter for the police.
But clearly Keigwin is giving the
orders!

Amedeo looks dejected, stands up from the table and goes to
the window. He turns around.

AMEDEO
Mama, I have an idea, and I need
your help. But if you don't help me
I am going to do it anyway.

Lia's expression is one of pride mixed in with surprise.

EXT. A KARIBA PATH - DAY

Lia and Amedeo walk toward Rock's holding cell.

LIA
I don't think they will set free an
infamous pirate just because I ask.

They enter the 'jail' and the first thing they see is the
guard GAGGED and tied behind his desk, his UNDERPANTS on his
head.

Rock and his men stand around him. In Rock's hand is a bowl
of old porridge. He sits the bowl upside down on the Clerk's
head.

ROCK
Cheer up, 'matey'! This'll keep you
regular! HA HA HA!!!

AMEDEO
Rock!

Rock and his men see Lia and Amedeo and pull out their guns.

(CONTINUED)

AMEDEO

Wait, wait! We're not going to stop
you. We need your help!

EXT. HMS GREAT BOOTY - DAY

The Great Booty makes ready to sail from the Kariba harbour.

ROCK

Hurry up! Haul anchor!

ERROL

Raise the main sail!

GABLE

We don't have sails, you idiot!

ERROL

It's an *expression*, you idiot!

Lia watches, terrified.

LIA

I can't believe what I'm doing...

AMEDEO

Mama, I promise. We are doing the
right thing. Siku needs our help.

LIA

I'm so proud of you, Amedeo.

ROCK

He's something to be proud of
ma'am. That boy's nearly as brave
as I am.

LIA

Mr Hudson, are you sure this is the
way? We are going to the falls?

ROCK

Am I sure? Ha!

He opens his shirt and sticks out his chest.

ROCK

Only as sure as the ink on my own
flesh!

Lia blushes. She and Amedeo look at each other, surprised.

EXT. ZAMBESI RIVER - DAY

Siku paddles along on a MAKESHIFT RAFT.

A FISHERMAN from the Shonga village sees her coming toward him.

SIKU

Tell Chief Chisaba and Cheelo that
they must go to Rhutapa! They will
understand!

She paddles on. The fisherman's eyes widen. He runs back toward the village.

EXT. RHUTAPA, THE HIDDEN KINGDOM - DAY

Siku's boat moves along the narrowing river, the banks turn from grassland and forest to rocky cliffs, fringed only at their very tops by green.

The cliffs close in and a MIST rises in the distance with the still soft but ominous sound of waterfalls.

The first of the falls appears, a stream of white cascading down from high above. Siku moves closer, deeper into the maze of cliffs. She is flanked by roaring white walls. Eventually she arrives at a spot, seemingly indistinguishable from the surrounding cacophony of falling water.

Siku paddles back nervously, but the boat moves forward into the wall of white water. As it reaches the water, the falls open up like a curtain and we see that the WATERFALL is in fact PAPER THIN, only serving to hide a huge STONE ARCHWAY, leading into a short tunnel. An equally thin waterfall covers its other end.

She goes into a massive open-roofed cave. Cliffs hundreds of feet high form an oval with a continuous waterfall covering them, broken here and there by jutting promontories of rock.

In the centre is an ISLAND covered in dense forest and terraced areas of grass and rock - the remains of the GREAT FORGOTTEN KINGDOM of RHUTAPA. Upon the shore of this island Keigwin and Mulozi's boat is anchored.

Siku moors her boat behind some rocks.

In the distance she sees Keigwin and Mulozi conferring. She tries to stay out of sight. By agile climbing and a series of brave jumps across sheer drops between the crumbling

(CONTINUED)

walls of the city, she comes eventually to a place commanding a view of the central pillar, upon which she sees standing the huge JANUS HEAD from her vision.

She listens to Keigwin and Mulozi, who stand together with Keigwin's men fifty feet below.

KEIGWIN

Are the charges laid?

GOON

Yes Sir.

KEIGWIN

Then we are ready for you Mulozi... call the monster and let's get this job done in time for tea.

MULOZI

One does not simply 'call' a god, Dr. Keigwin. There are preparations to be done.

KEIGWIN

Then prepare!

Mulozi IGNITES one by one the HERBS that sit in small piles about her in a CIRCLE.

Siku looks from the group over to the Janus Head.

SIKU

[thoughts] I must hurry!

Keigwin and his men stand behind Mulozi.

All eyes are upon her as she begins an INCANTATION, her right hand held out before her. Siku makes a dash for the Janus Head. Just as she is about to reach it, a hand appears and grabs her by the hair. The hand belongs to RAWLINS (40s, dapper) one of Keigwin's men.

RAWLINS

Dr. Keigwin, look what I found!

MULOZI

Foolish girl! Why didn't you listen to me and stay away!

KEIGWIN

Tie her up!

He turns to Mulozi, who is looking up at Siku.

KEIGWIN

Don't get distracted, woman.

Mulozi resumes the summoning rite.

Suddenly a massive ROCKET whistles past and SMASHES a rock where one of Keigwin's men is standing. The MAN FALLS into the space that has been created beneath him. Clouds of dust bellow up.

KEIGWIN

What in goodness name--

All turn: behind them in the water floats the HMS Great Booty, with Lia, Amedeo, and Rock aboard. In Rock's arms is a huge, SMOKING BAZOOKA.

ROCK

I've always wanted to try that.

LIA

We agreed we would talk first, Mr Hudson! I don't like all these guns!

ROCK

Ma'am. A five hundred foot river god is about to come up from this lake and most probably drown us all if we do not stop that witch now.

KEIGWIN

Not *that* fool again!

Keigwin turns to his men.

KEIGWIN

Hold them off!

He turns back to Mulozi.

KEIGWIN

As soon as we see him, we're blowing this place to cinders.

MULOZI

Quiet! [concentrating, her arm outstretched]

A semi-circle of guards with guns surrounds Mulozi to protect her. Keigwin's men begin to EXCHANGE FIRE with the Great Booty as it approaches. A gun shot from one of Keigwin's goons whistles toward the Great Booty, narrowly missing Rock, and grazing Amedeo's cheek.

EXT. HMS GREAT BOOTY - DAY

AMEDEO

Ah!

Lia looks up, furious. She grabs a huge and unweildy shotgun from where it leans against the cabin wall. She raises it.

LIA

Bring the boat in closer!

Unnoticed, Amedeo jumps off the boat and makes his way to the island where Siku is being held.

Fire RAINS DOWN upon the Great Booty. Rock's men fire back.

ERROL

Rock, we're outnumbered!

ROCK

Now's not the time to pretend you can count Errol!

Rock fires another bazooka shot.

LIA

They're too many!

EXT. A HIDDEN ROCK - DAY

One of Keigwin's men stands hidden on a rock beside the advancing Great Booty, clearly trying to flank them and give fire from an unprotected angle. He trains his RIFLE on Lia.

GOON

Hello, m'lady.

Suddenly a SPEAR knocks him clear off the rock and sends him SOMERSAULTING into the water.

EXT. HMS GREAT BOOTY - DAY

Rock sees the man falling.

ROCK

What in the...?

He looks behind him to see that CHEELO has arrived, along with several BOATS full of SHONGA WARRIORS.

A VOLLEY of SPEARS comes over the Great Booty, thudering upon the shore like stakes driven into the ground, and scattering Keigwin's men.

EXT. CHEELO'S BOAT - DAY

CHEELO

Halt, god killer! Or our ancient kingdom will tonight become your grave!

Keigwin looks up from his hiding place. He turns to his men.

EXT. THE SUMMONING CIRCLE - DAY

KEIGWIN

You, you, hold those savages off!
Hurry up woman! We're running out of time!

Keigwin's men hide behind rocks and try to hold off the advancing Shonga, while Rock's men continue firing in return. It's all out battle, and BULLETS fly every which way.

Within the remaining circle of protectors, Mulozi continues the summoning, her face SWEATING with concentration.

Right when it seems as if nothing will happen, when Keigwin has lost all patience and has become desperate as his men are despatched one by one, a SLOW SHUDDERING of the ground begins.

Mulozi's eyes open wide. Keigwin stops firing from behind his rock and stares back at Mulozi. The rumbling continues. The ground shakes, but Mulozi's expression of concentration only intensifies, as slowly a HUGE SWELL appears from beneath the water.

MULOZI

Nyaminyami... It's happening.

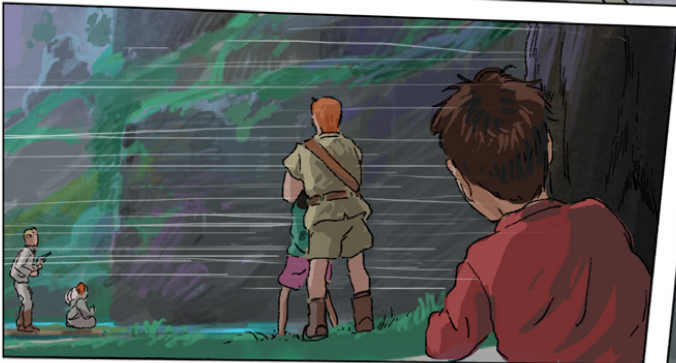
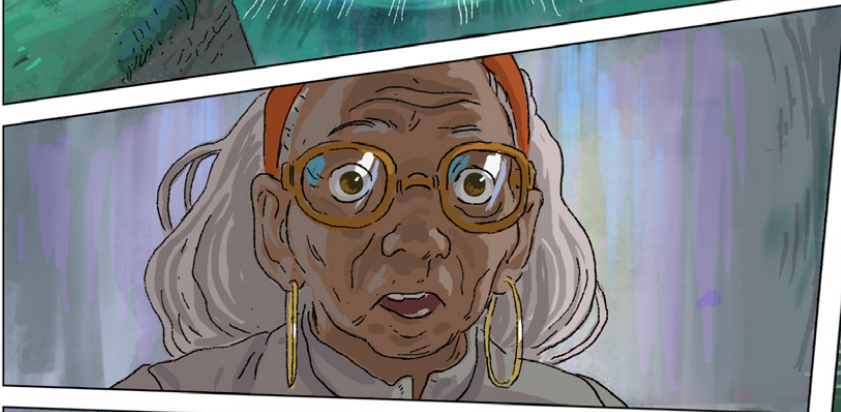
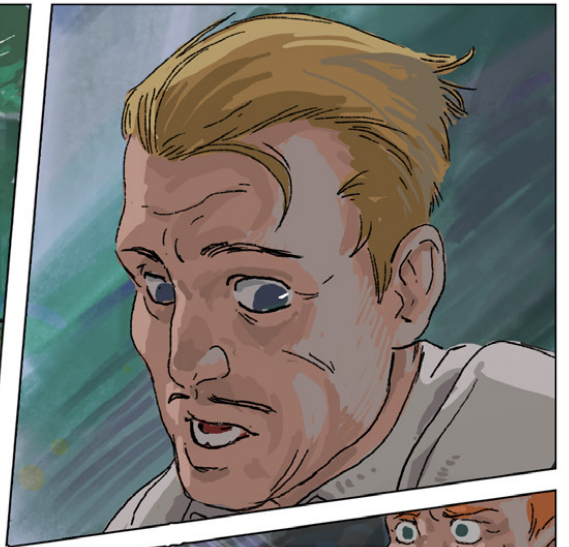
All look on, aghast.

KEIGWIN

It worked!

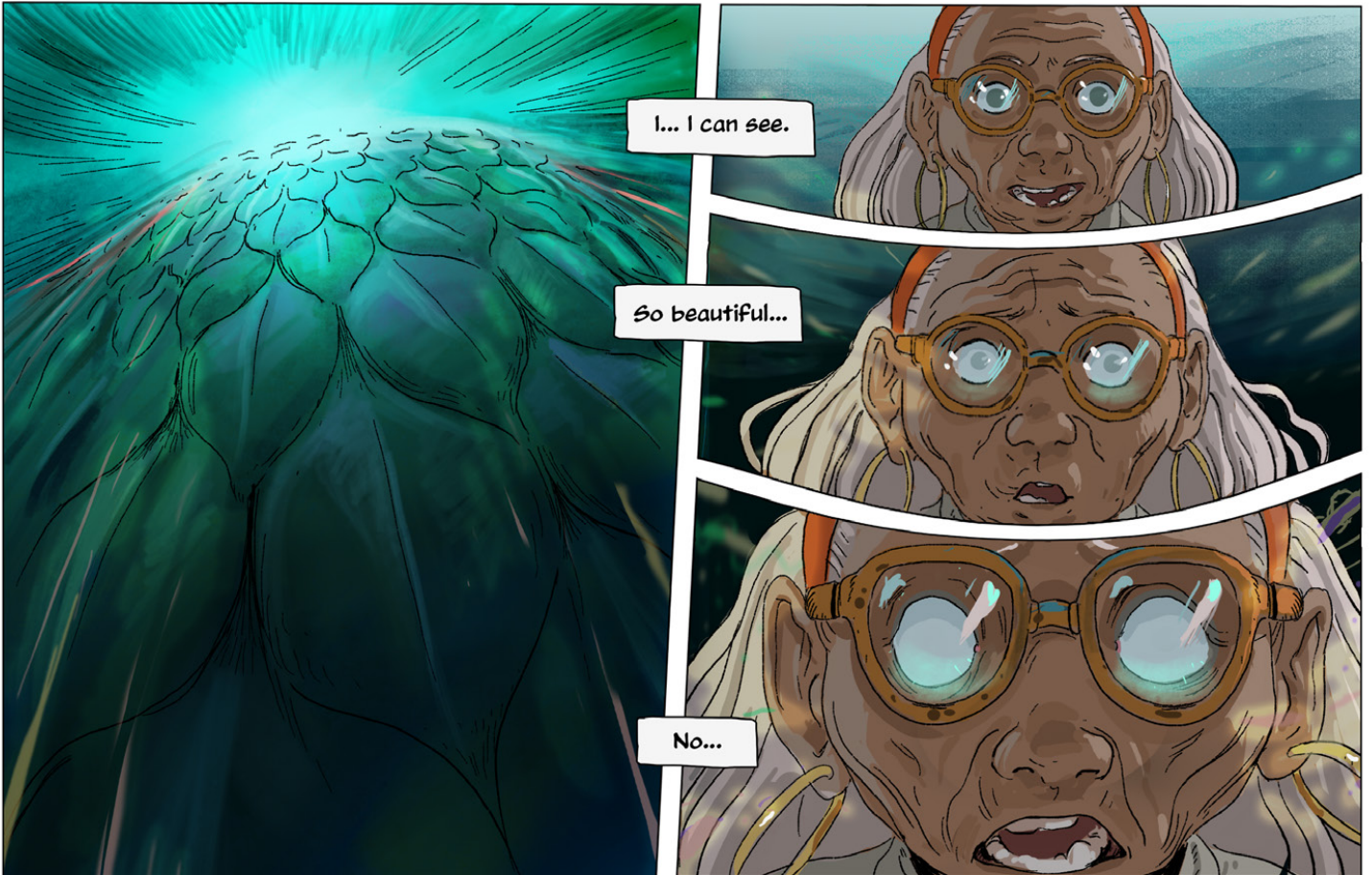
Nyaminyami's huge body begins to show from beneath the water. The water roils and CONCENTRIC WAVES appear on the surface. Everyone in the battle pauses - something momentous is happening...

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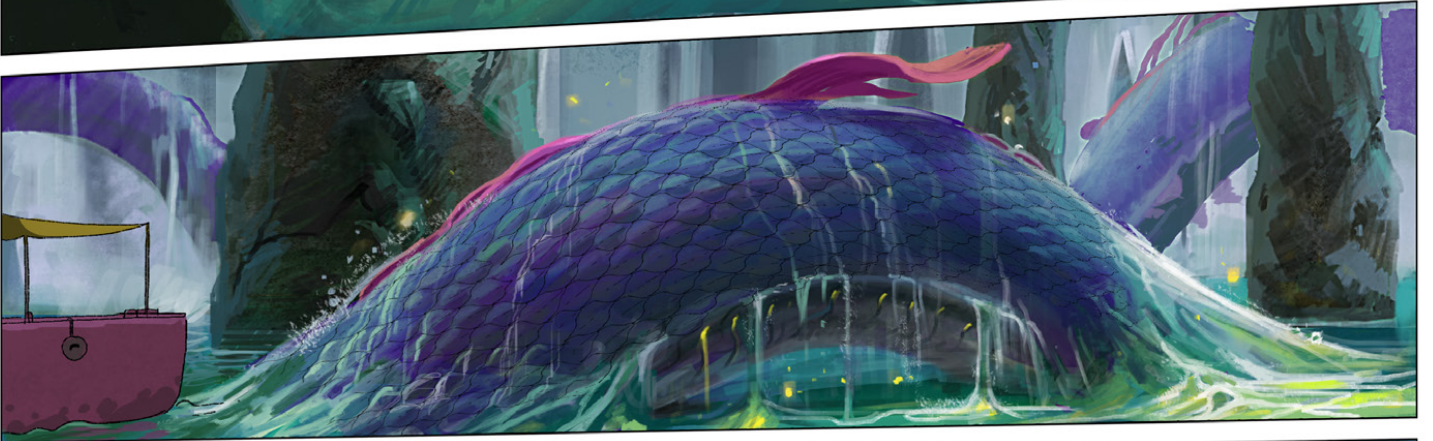
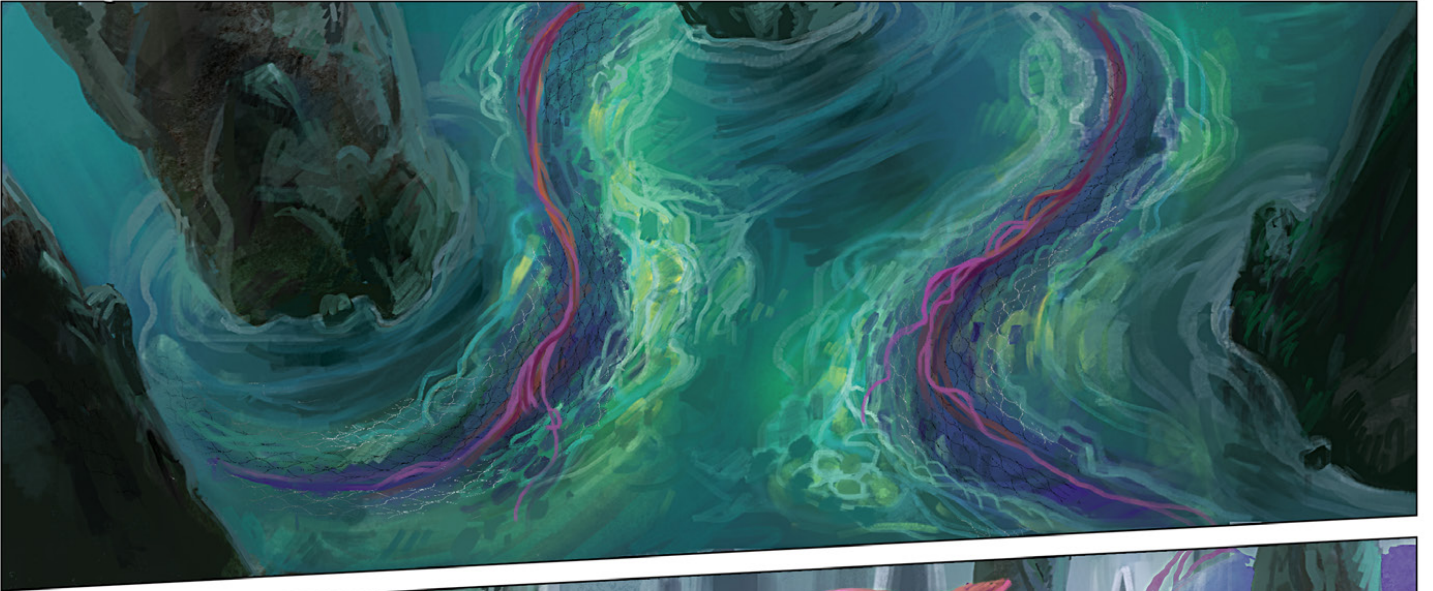
It worked!

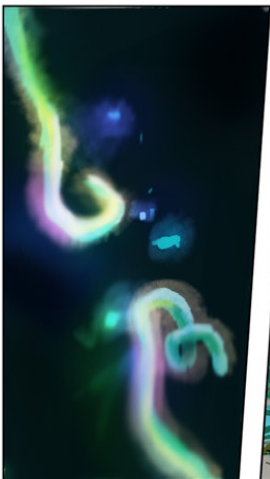
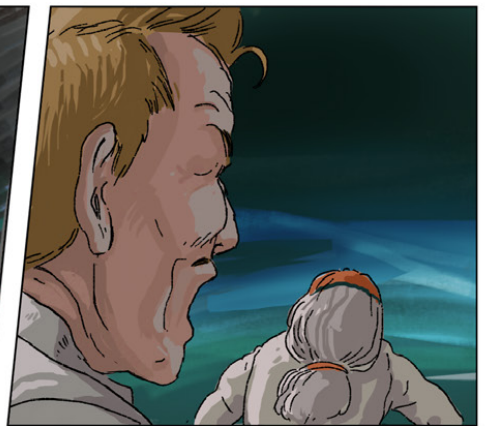
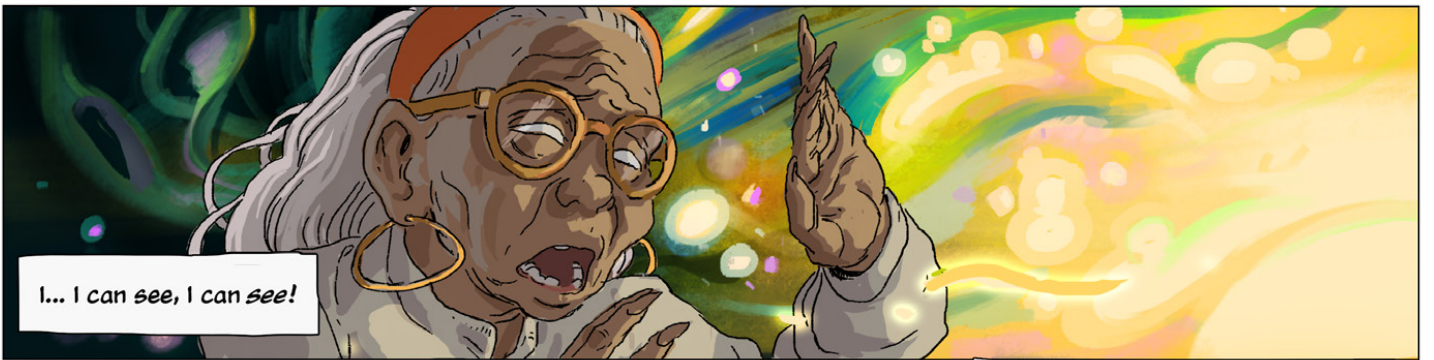
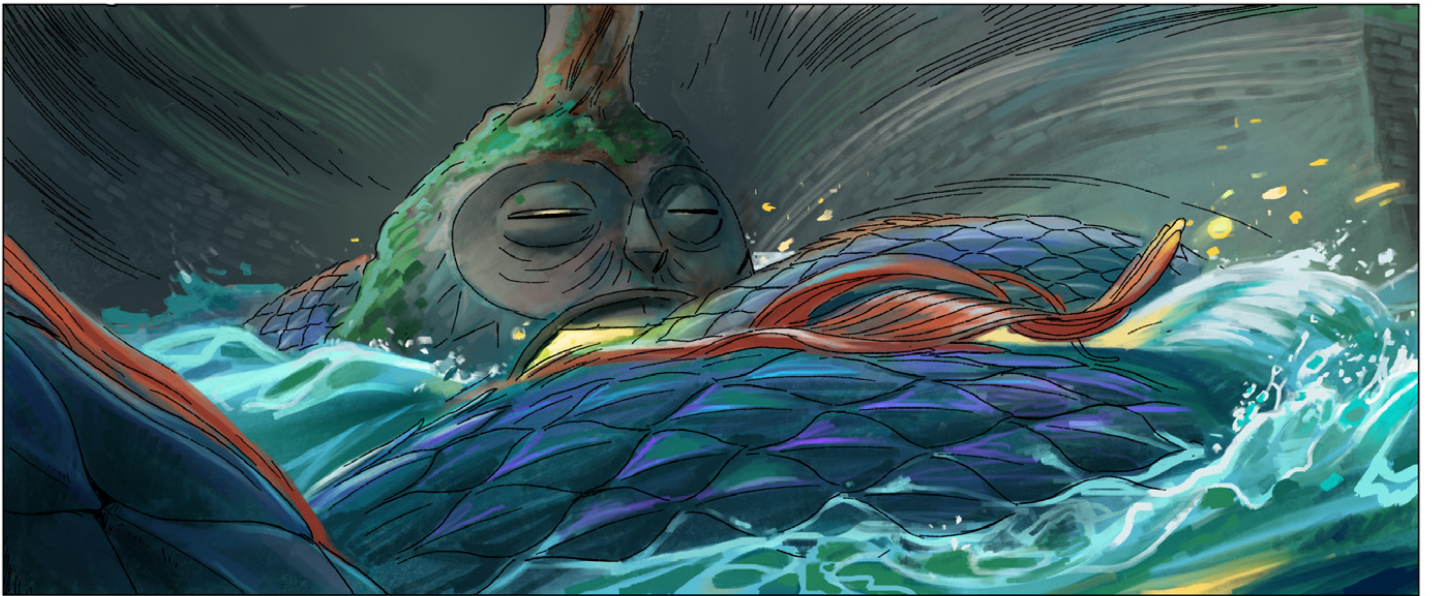


I... I can see.

So beautiful...

No...







May we be forgiven for the evil we have done...

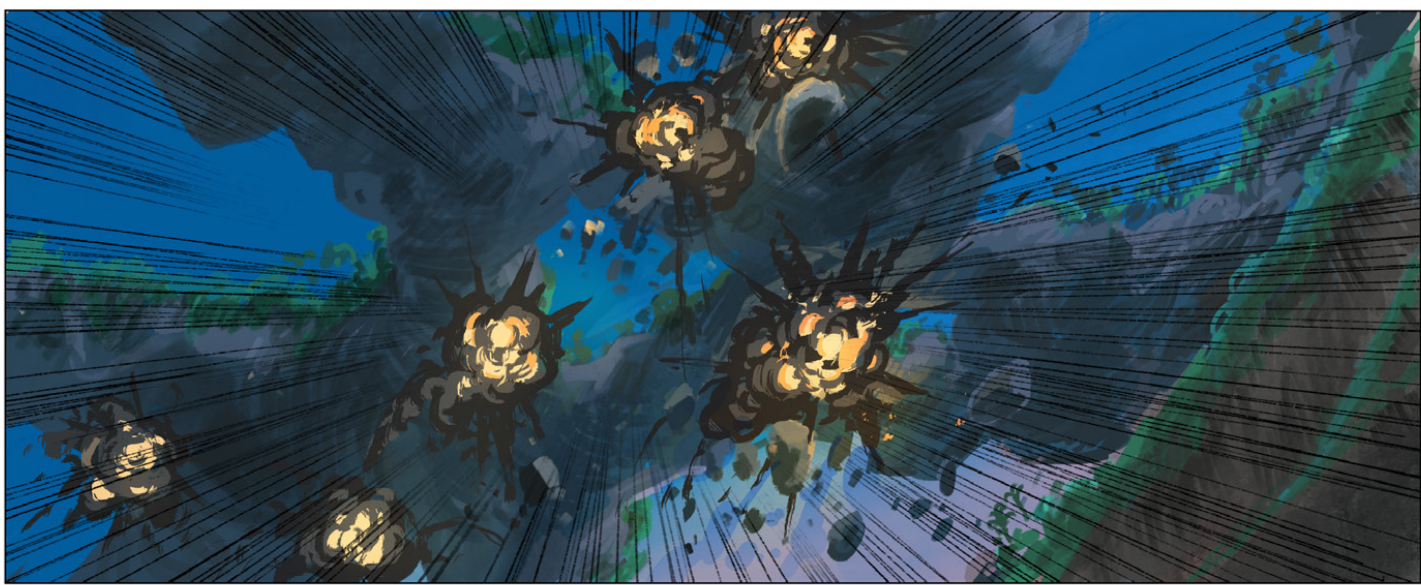
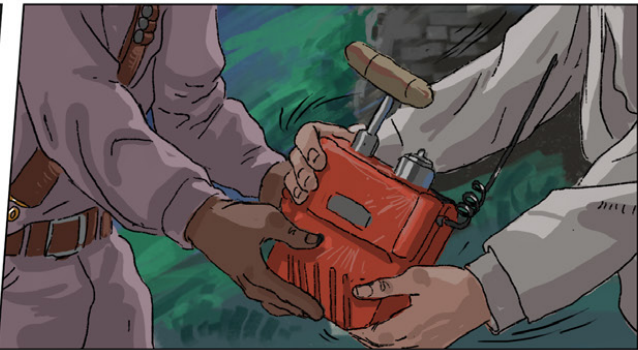


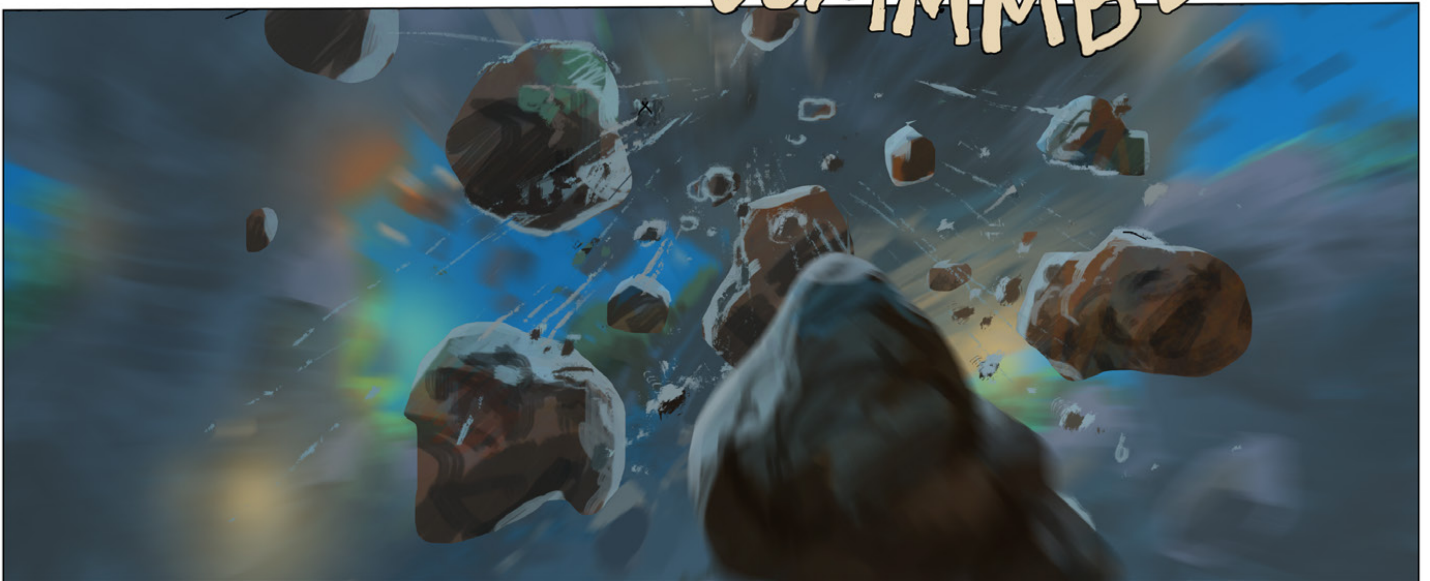
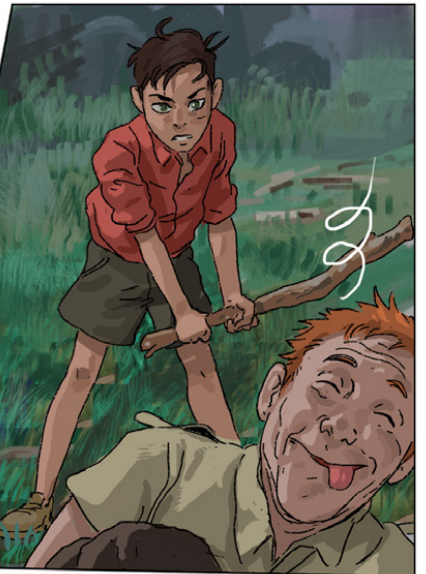
Hand me the detonator!

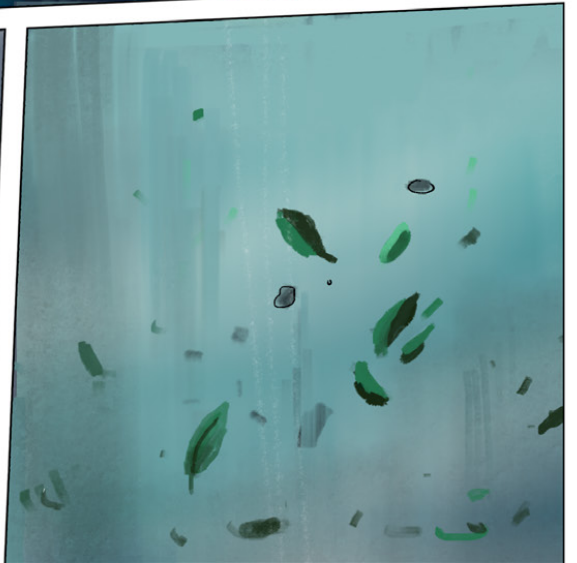
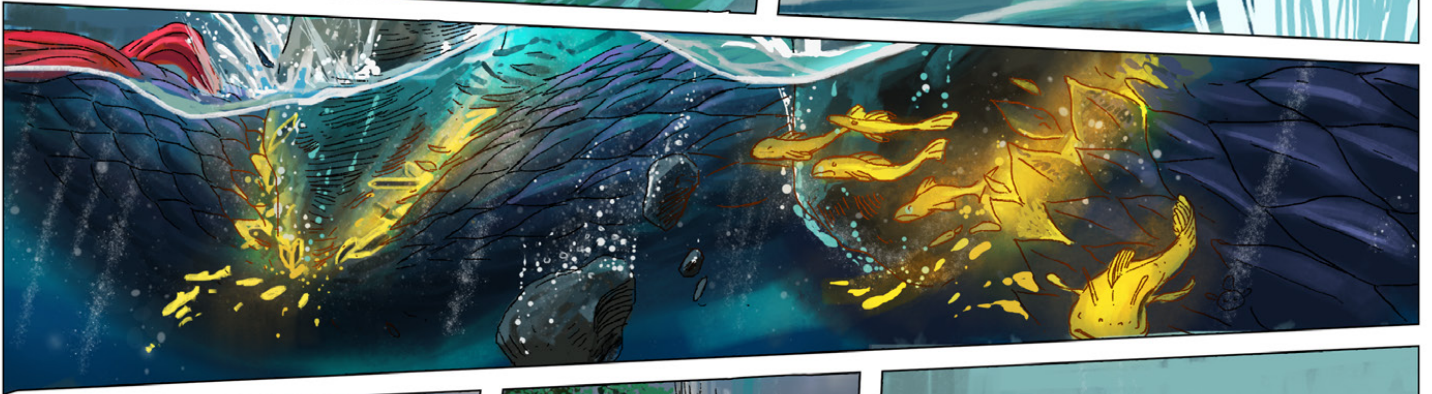
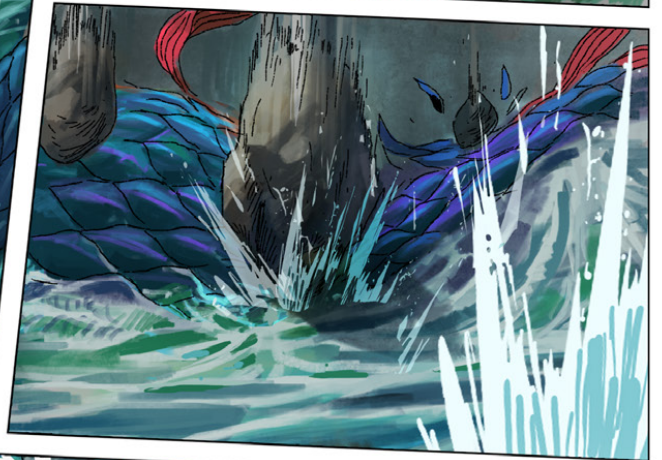
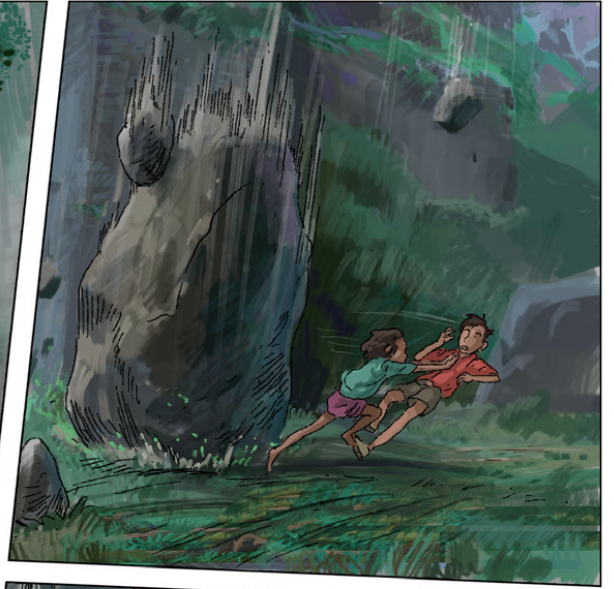


But sir...

Now!

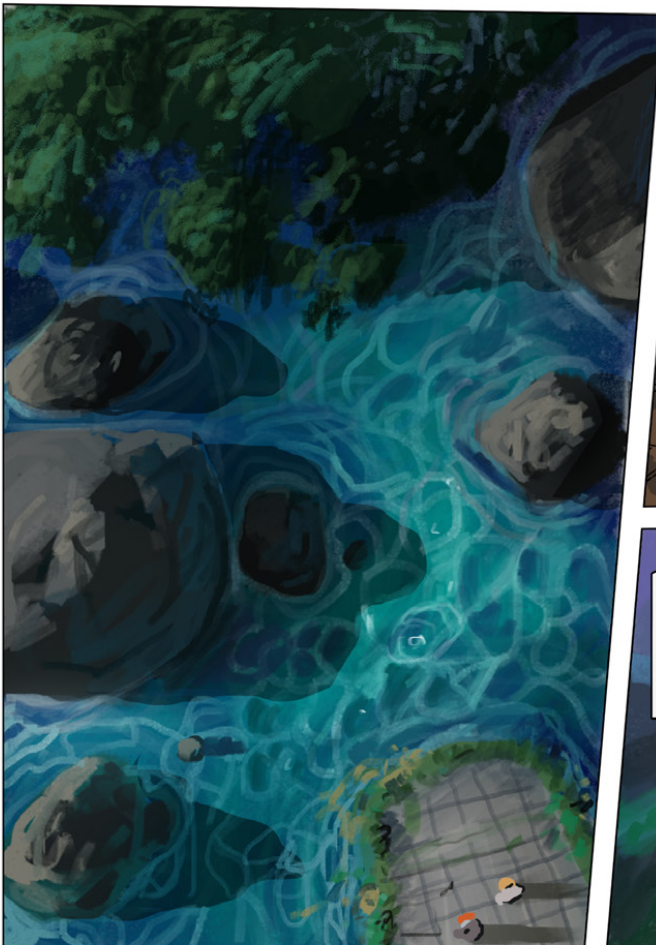








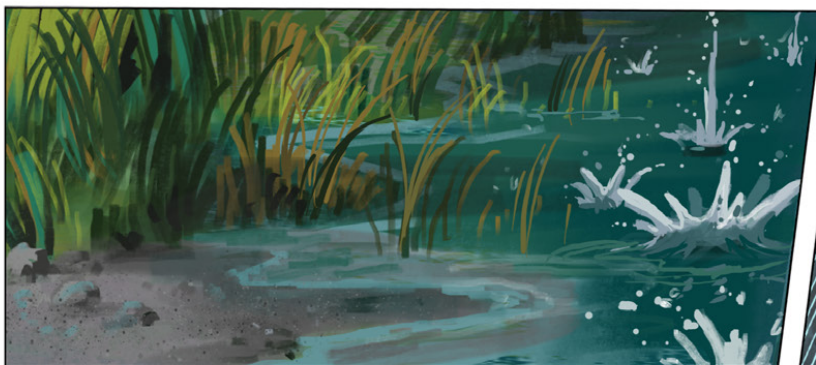
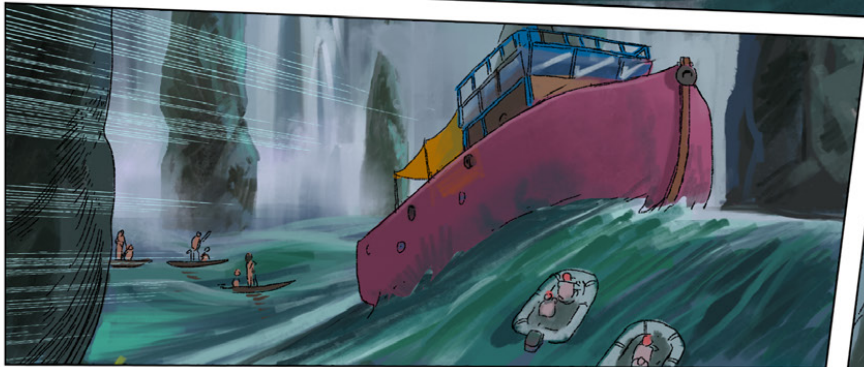
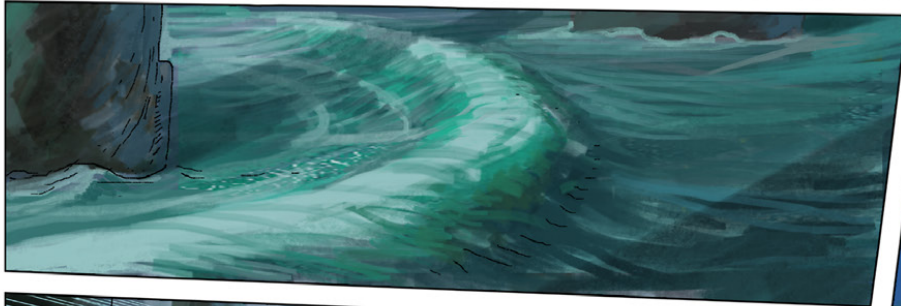
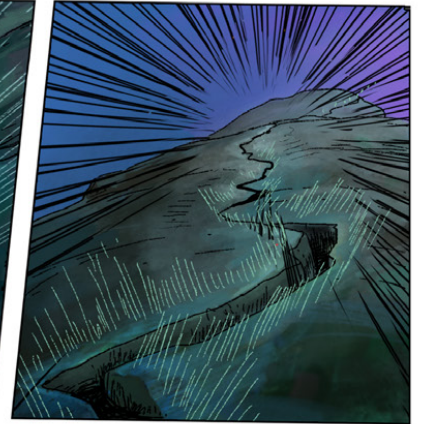
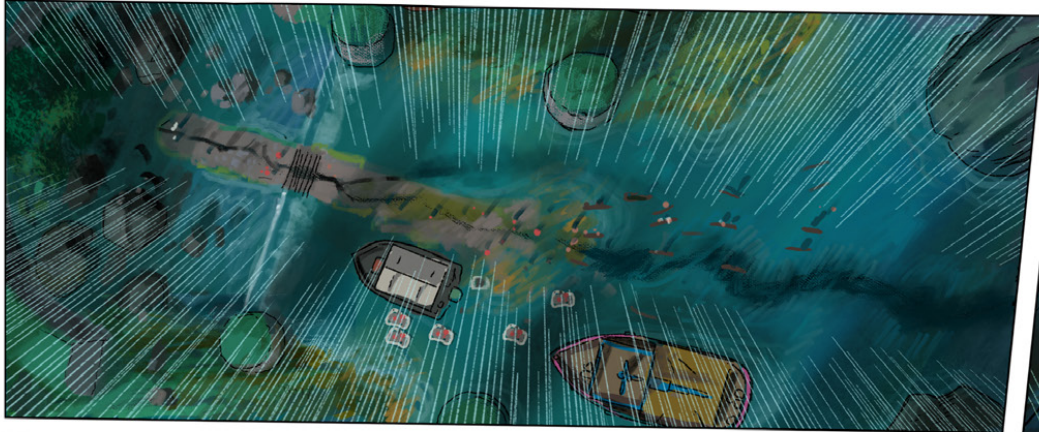
We've done it!

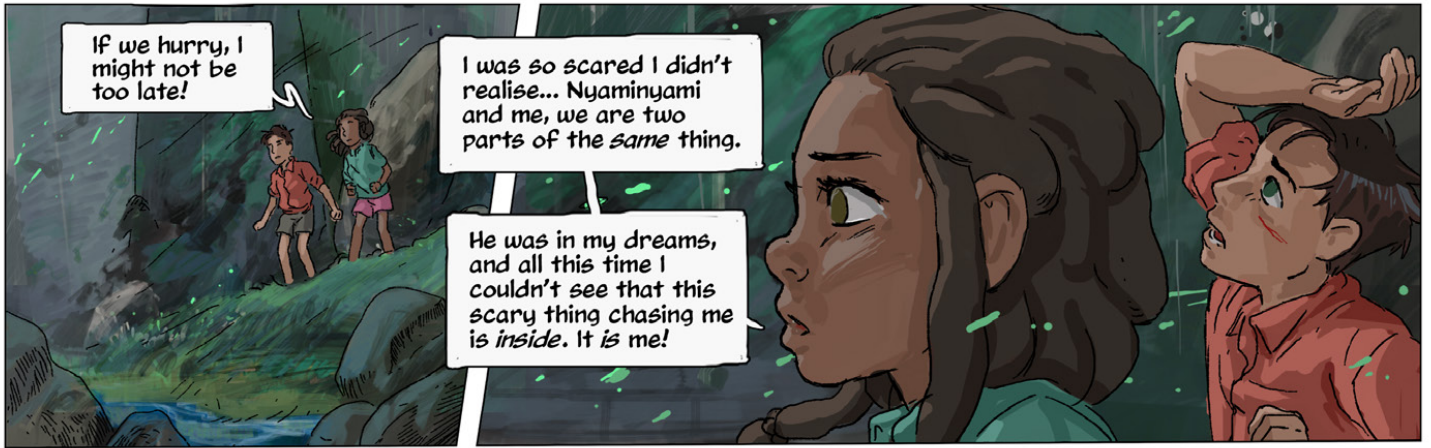


It is over, the river shall perish...



How have I been so blind? My life a waste...

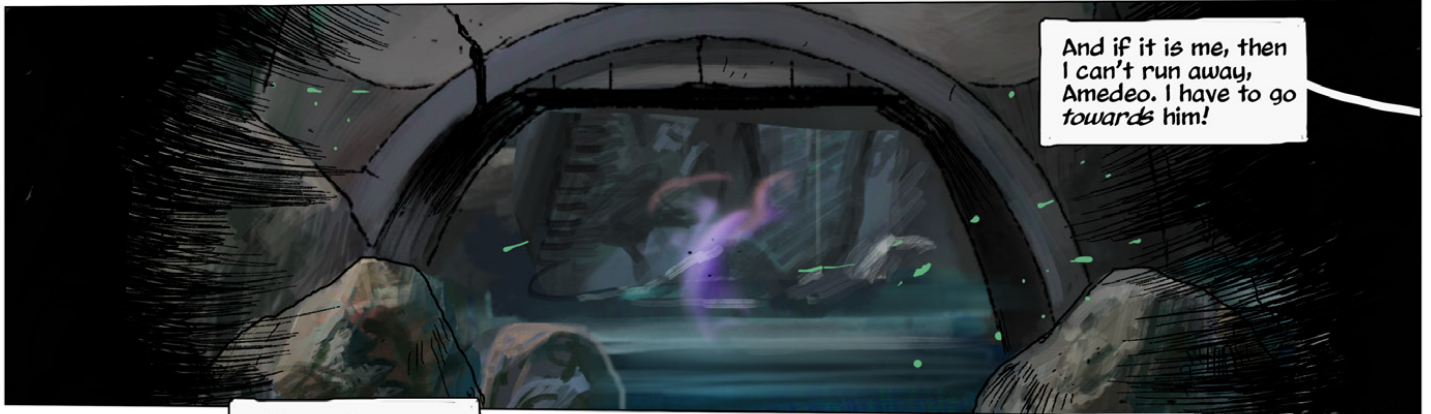




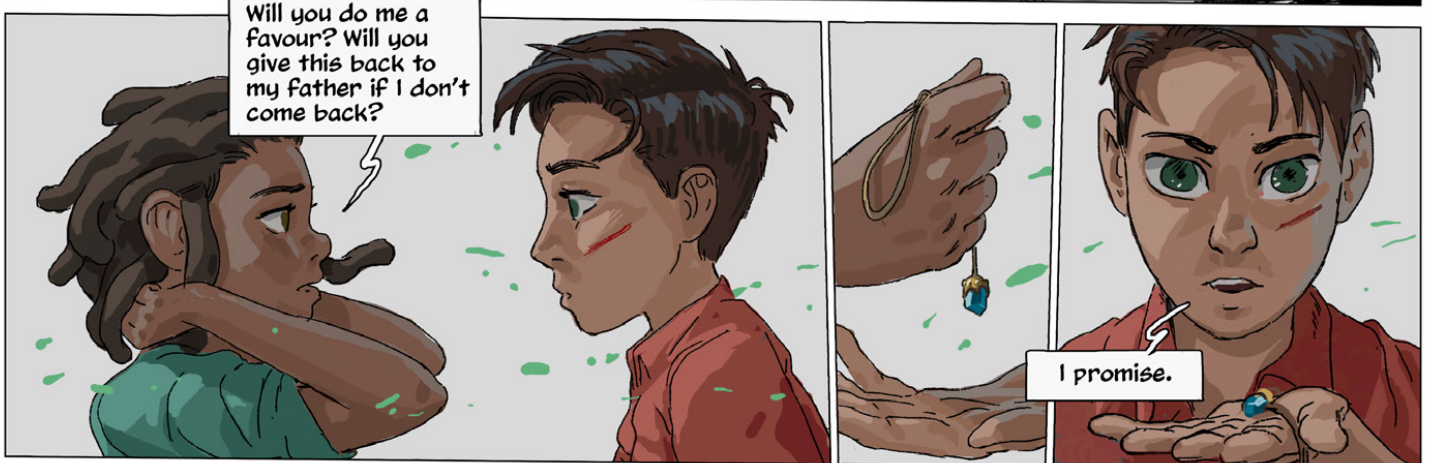
If we hurry, I might not be too late!

I was so scared I didn't realise... Nyaminyami and me, we are two parts of the same thing.

He was in my dreams, and all this time I couldn't see that this scary thing chasing me is inside. It is me!



And if it is me, then I can't run away, Amedeo. I have to go towards him!



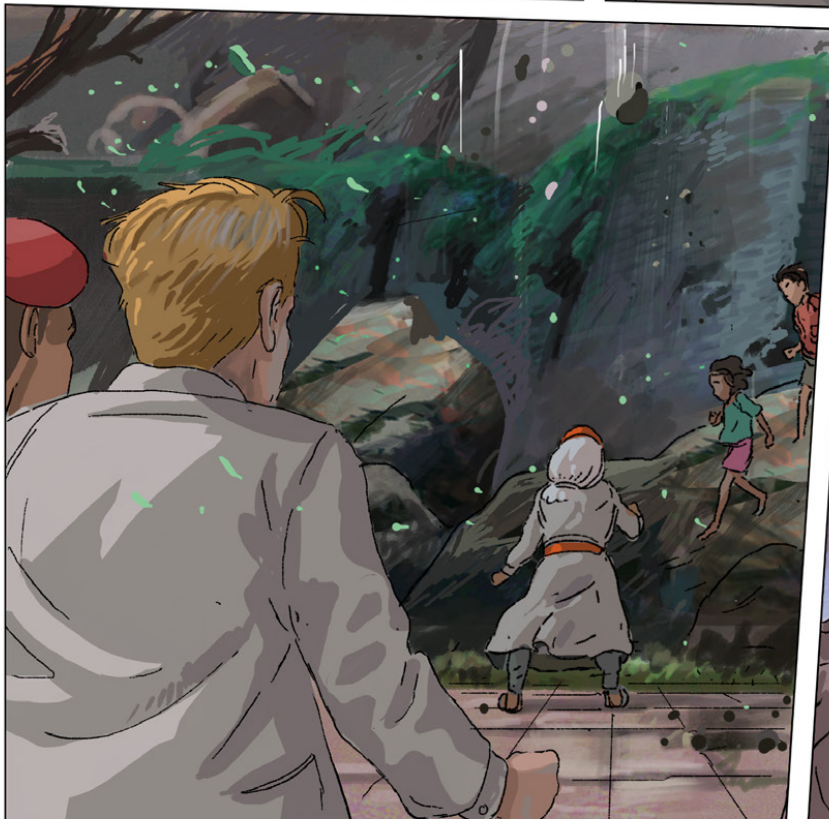
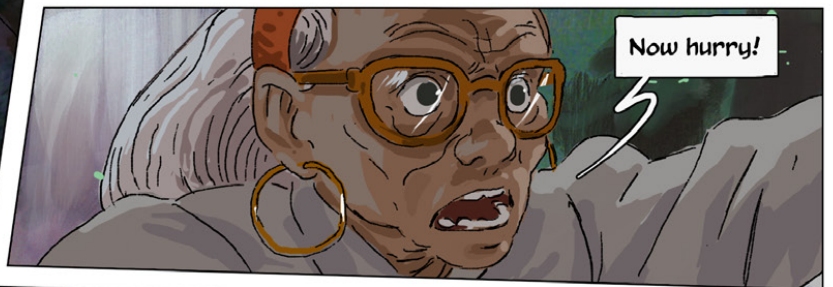
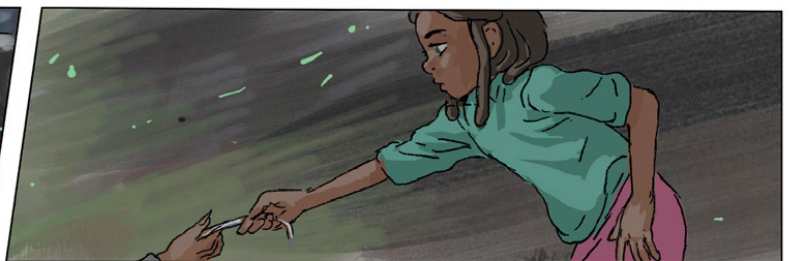
Will you do me a favour? Will you give this back to my father if I don't come back?

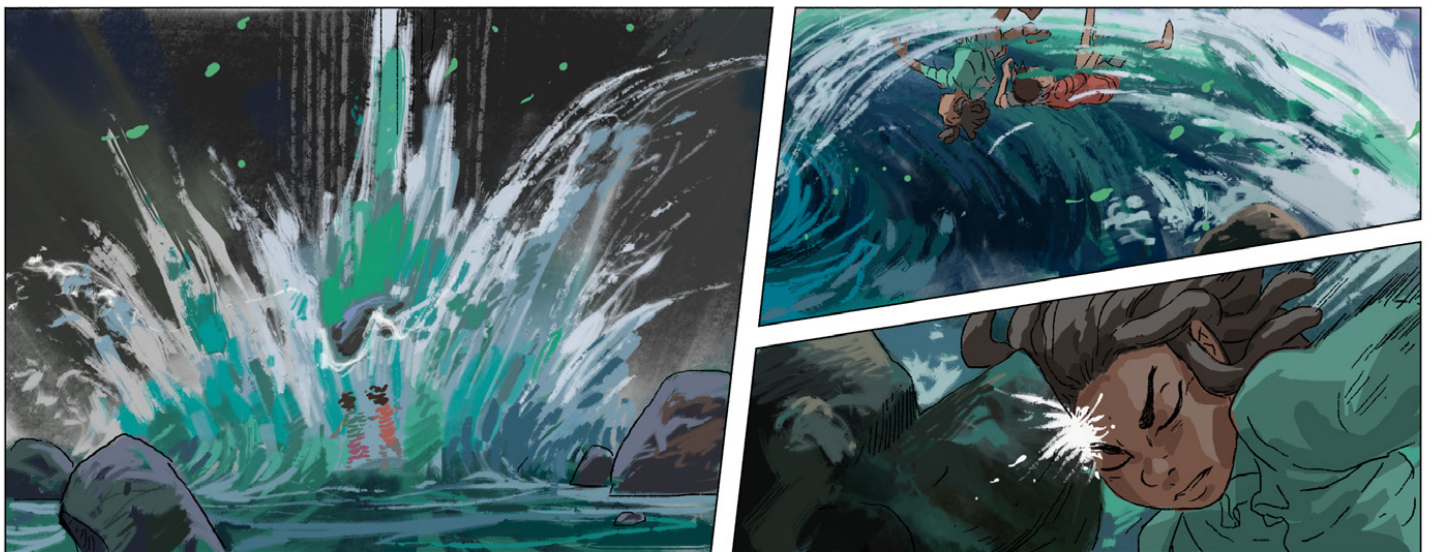
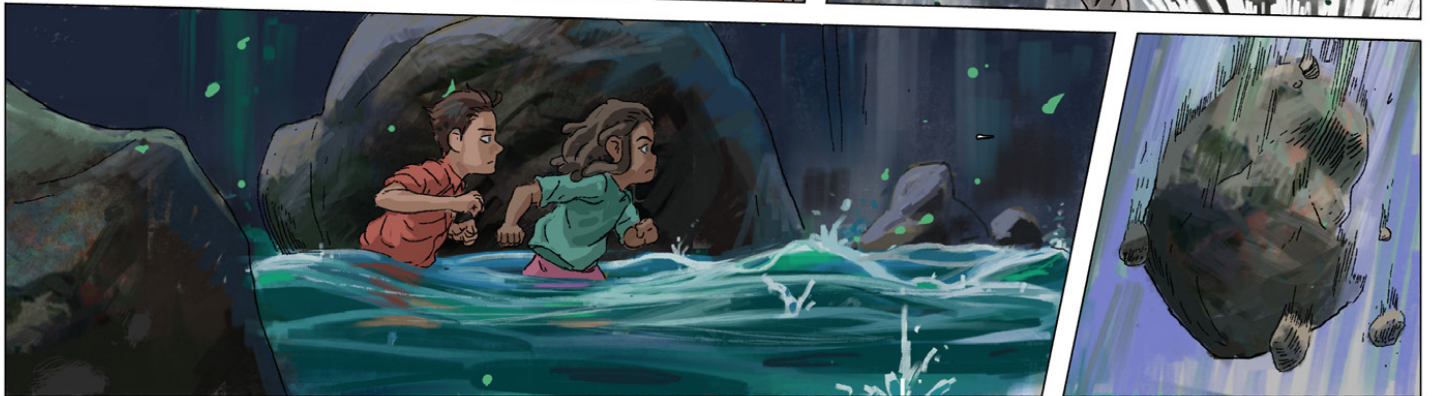
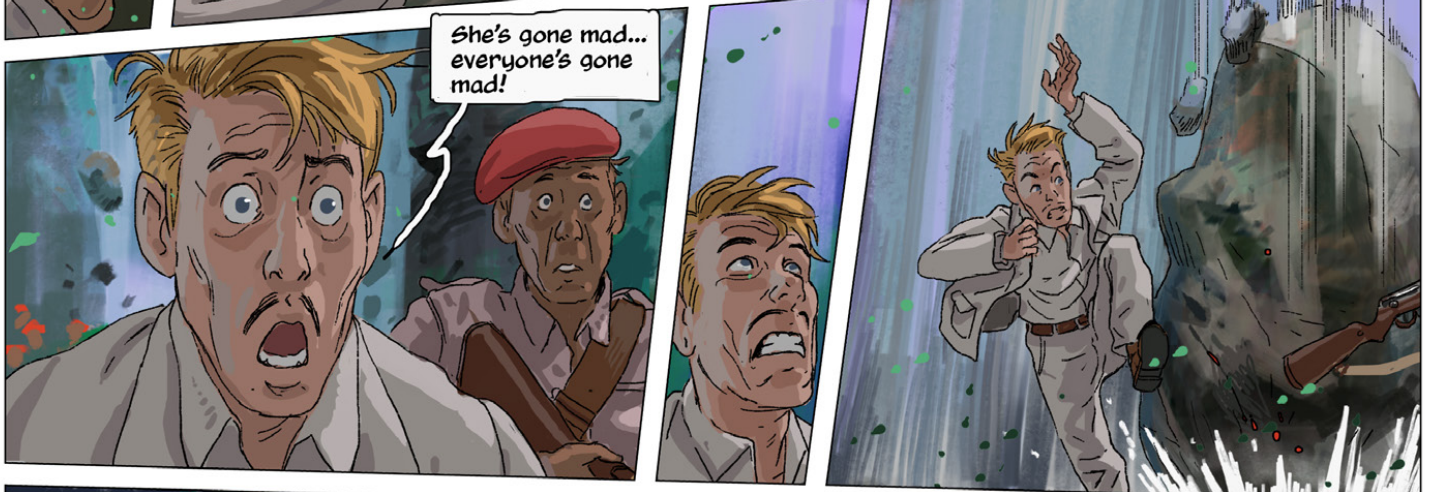


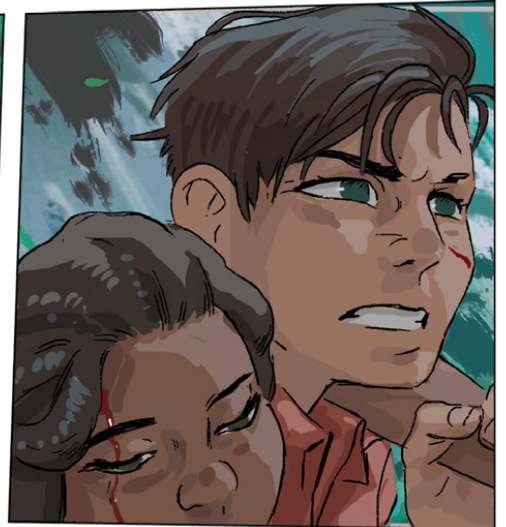
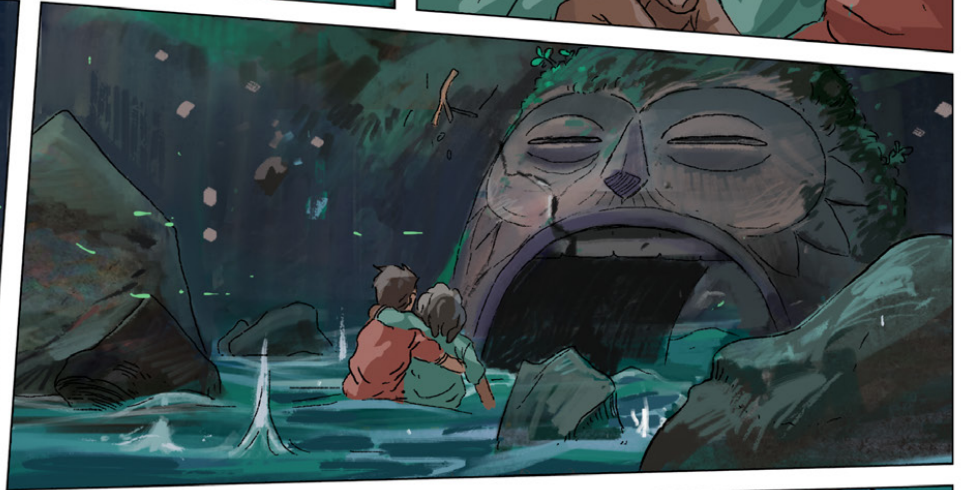
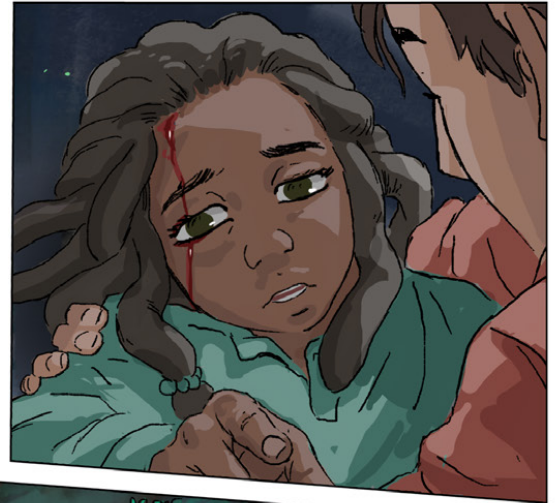
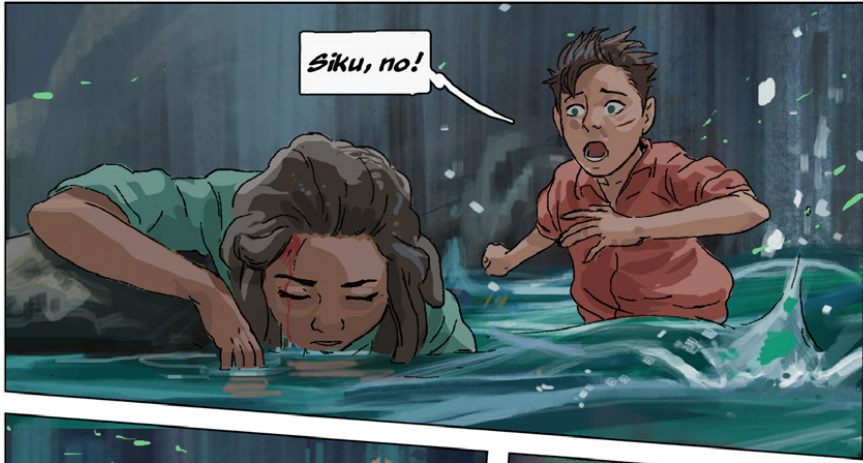
I promise.

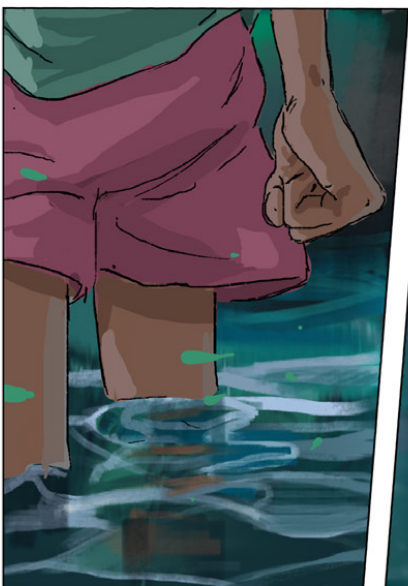
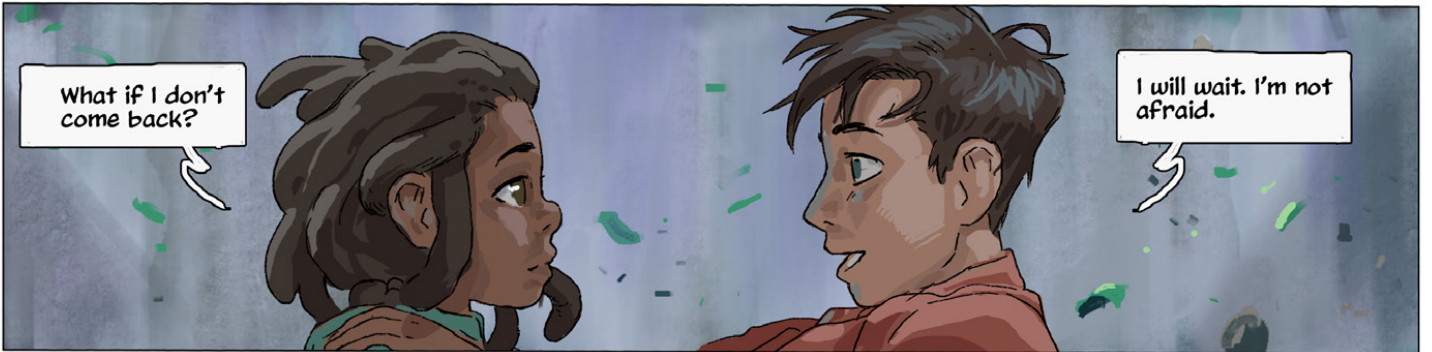


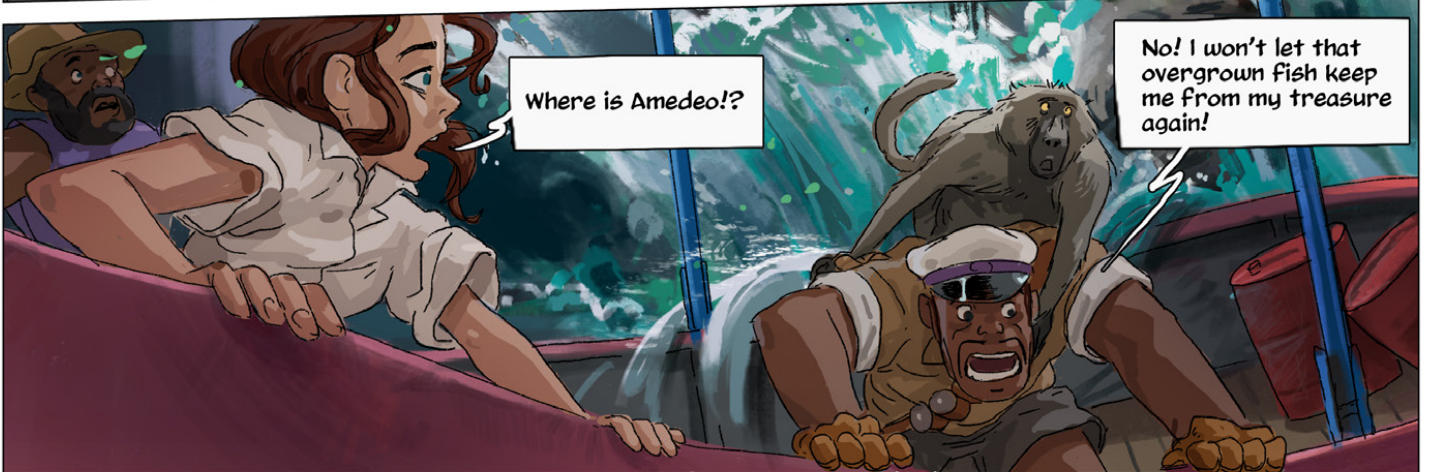
Children!

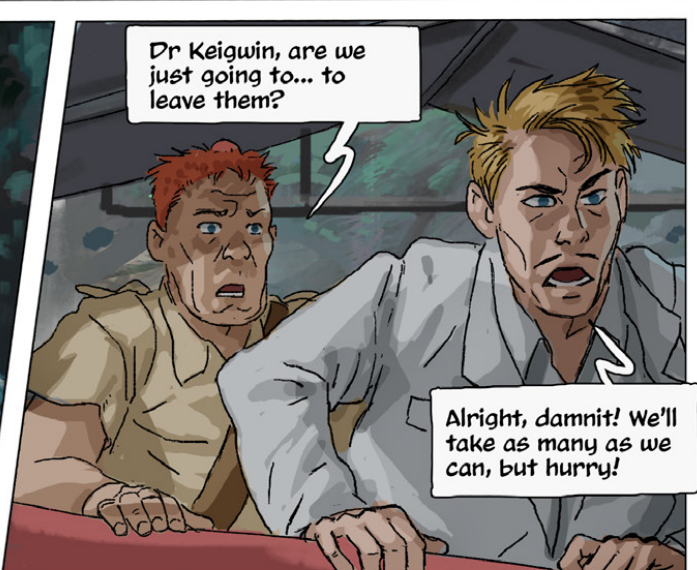
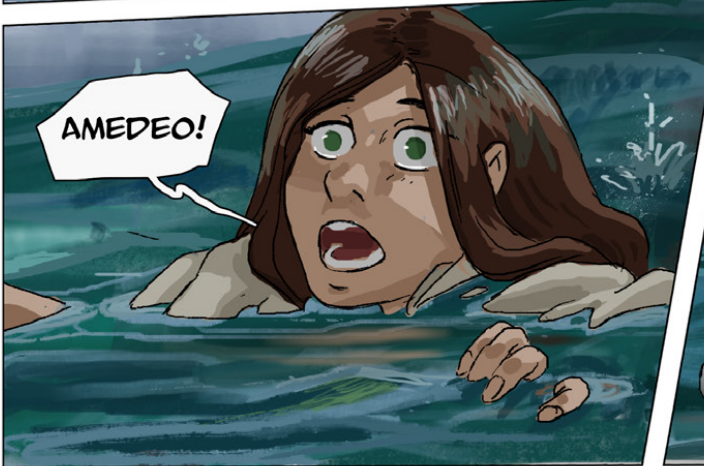
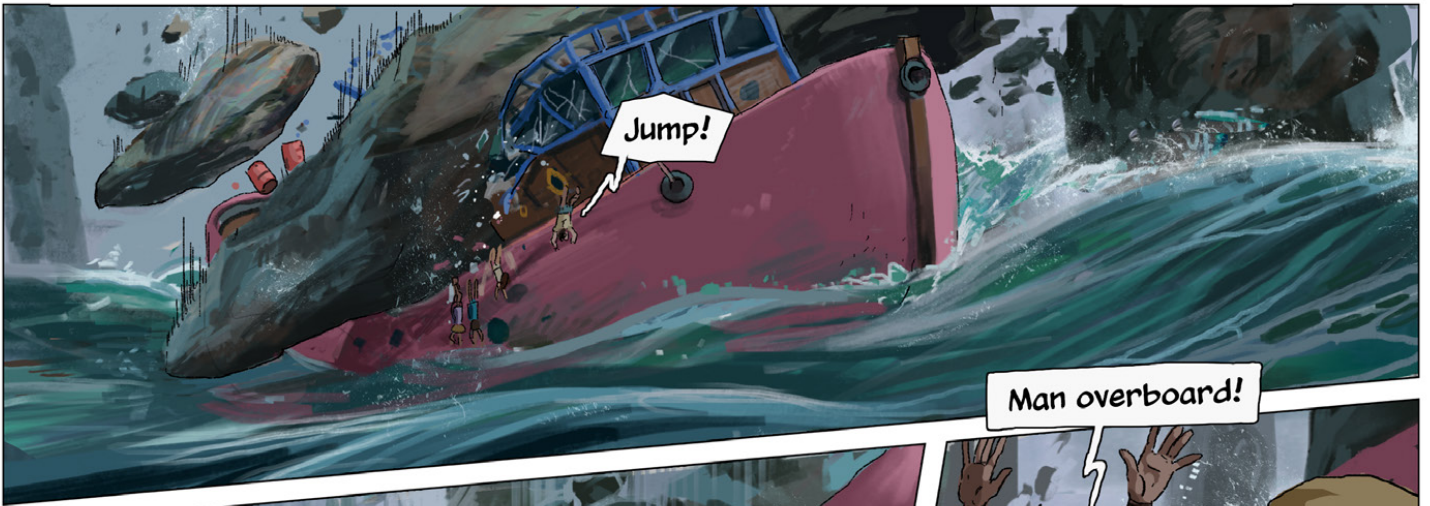






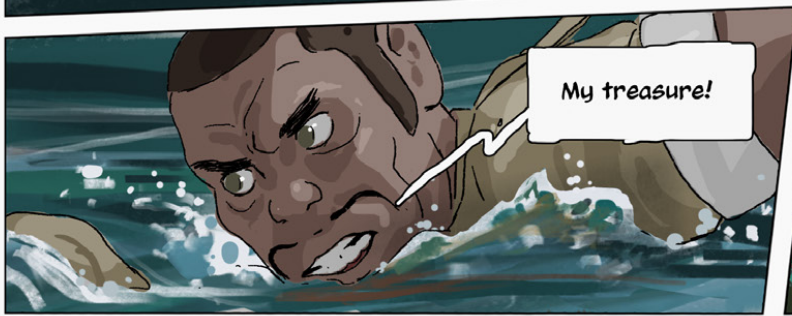




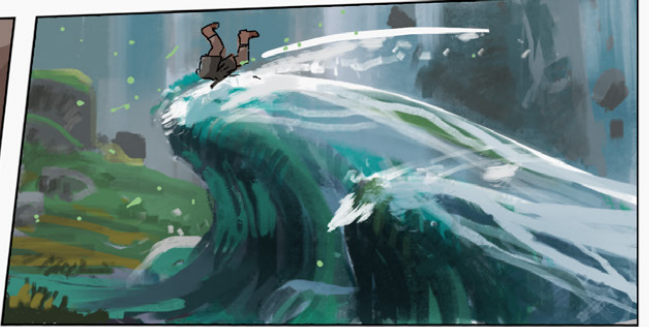




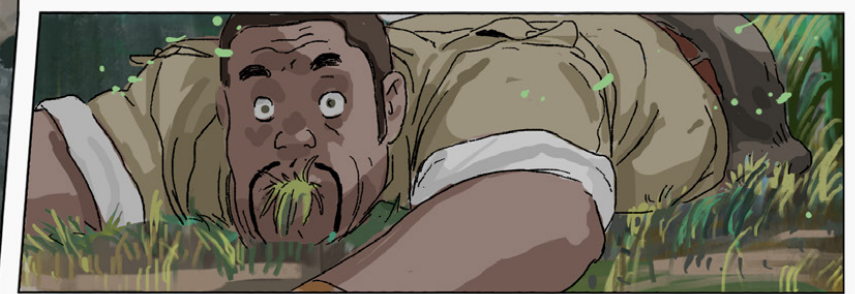
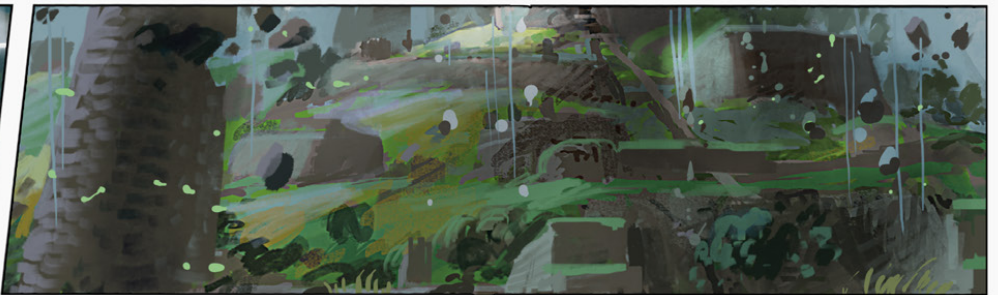
Rock, where are you going!?

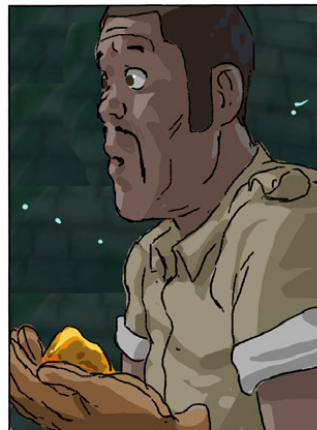
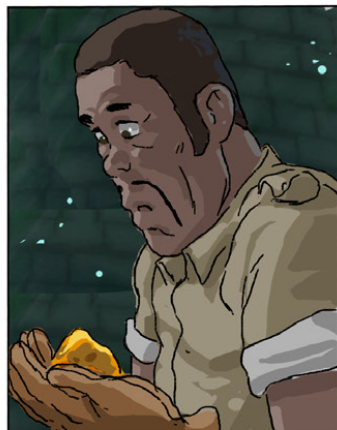
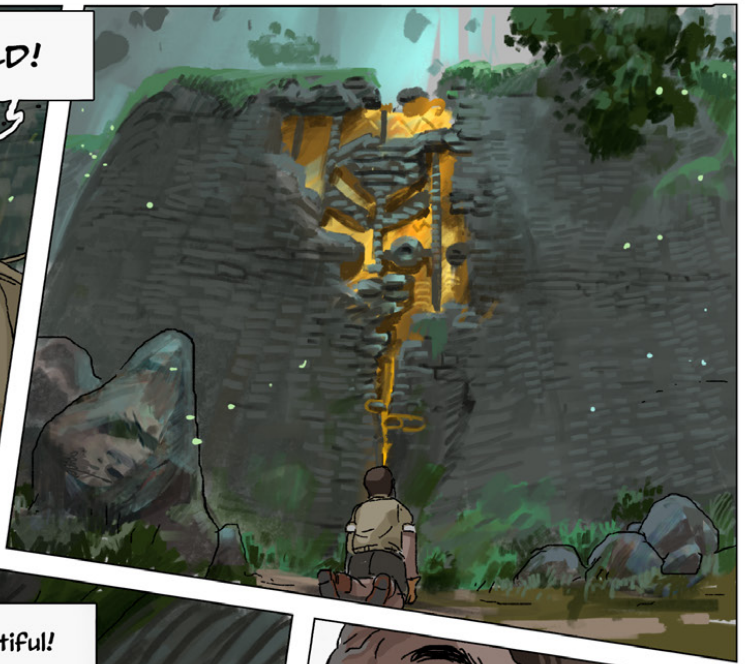


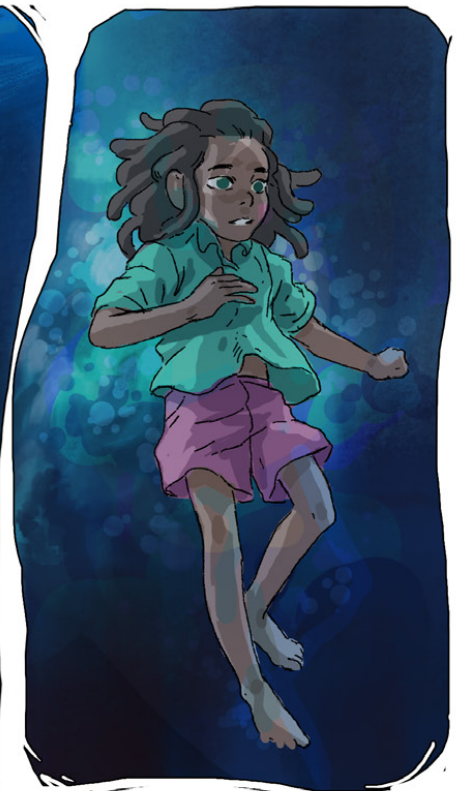
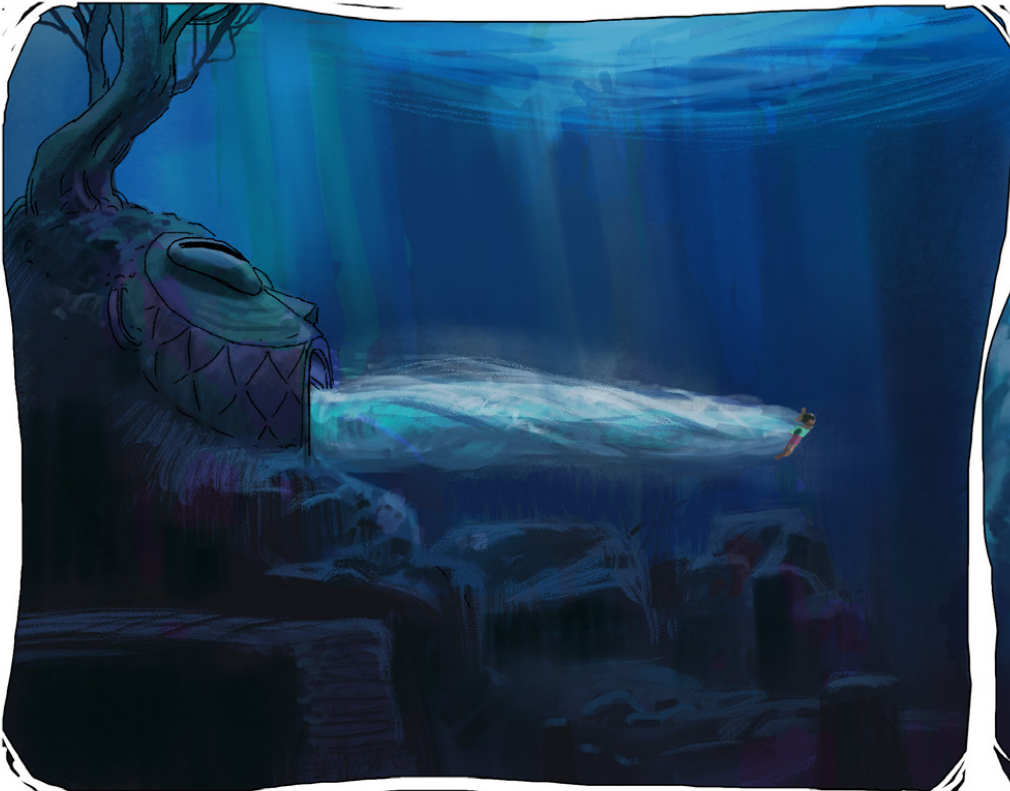
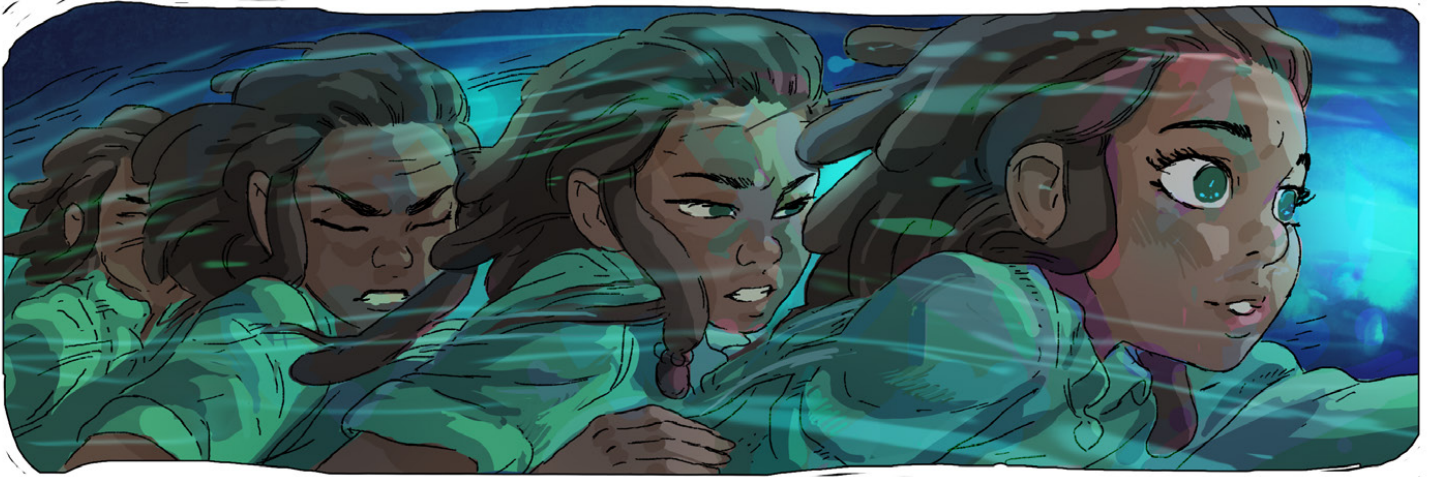
My treasure!

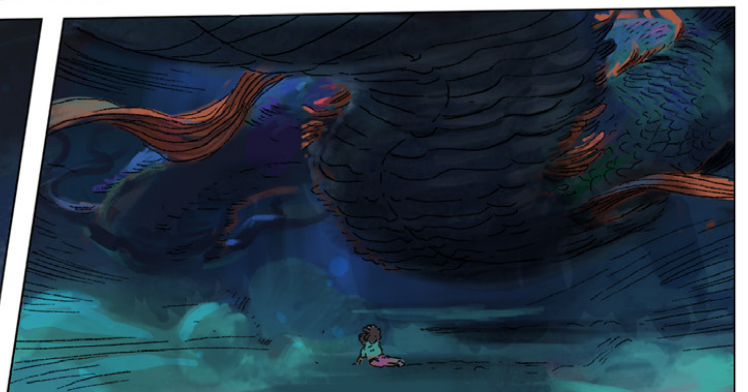
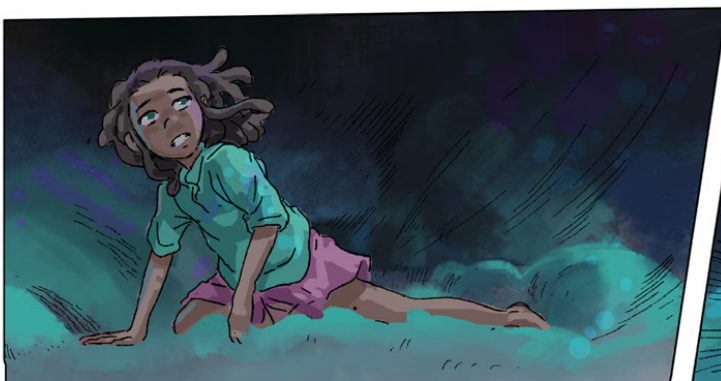
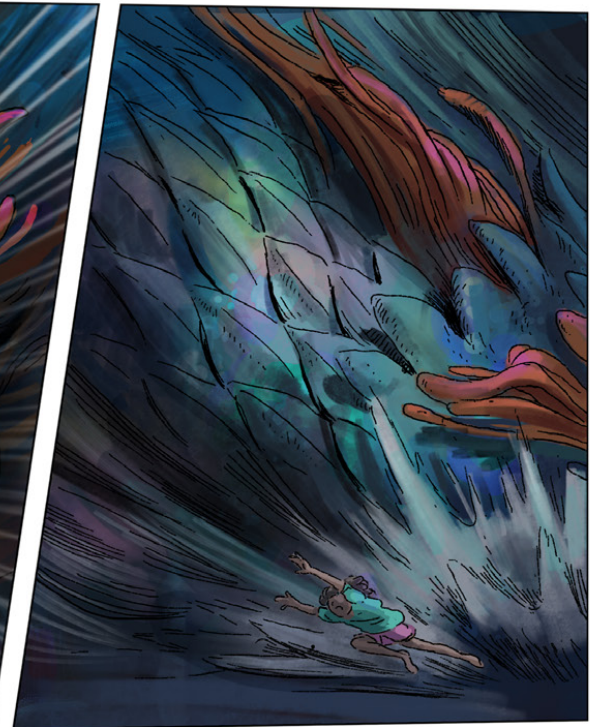
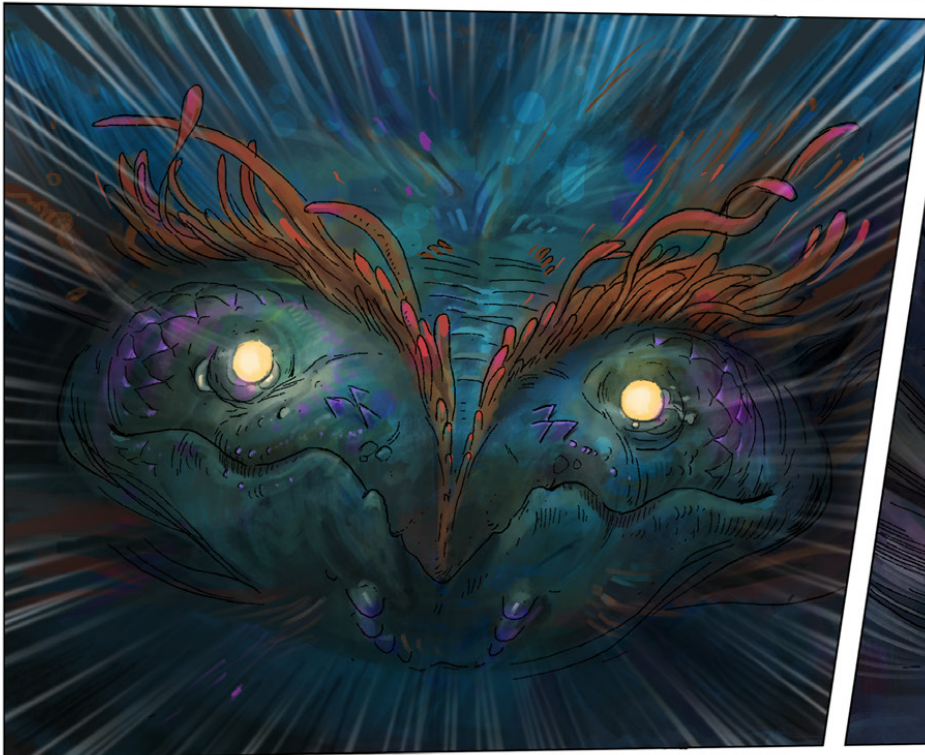
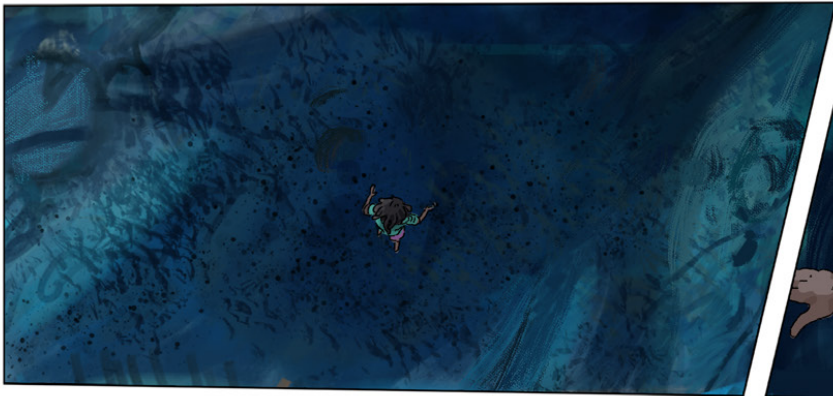


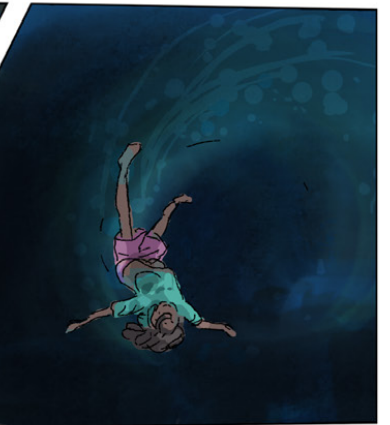
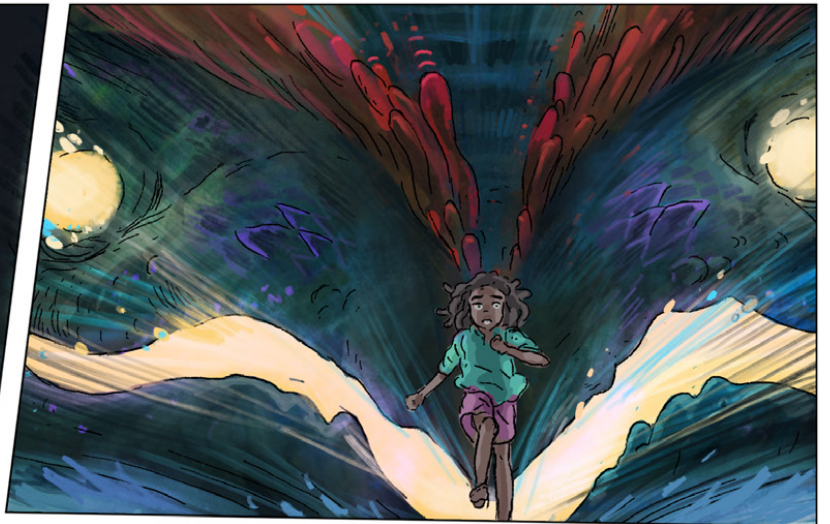
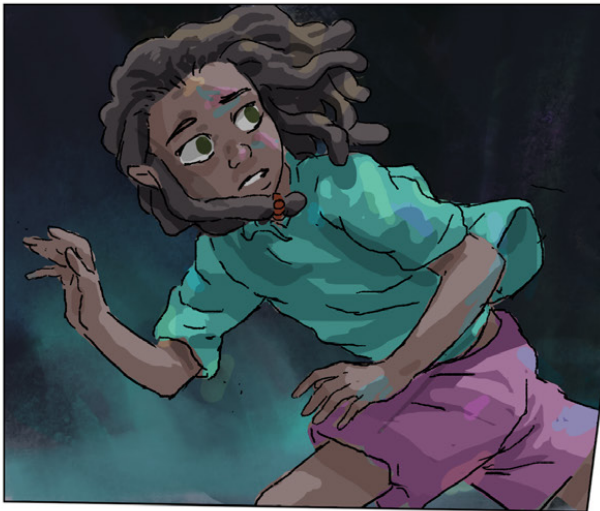
I made it!

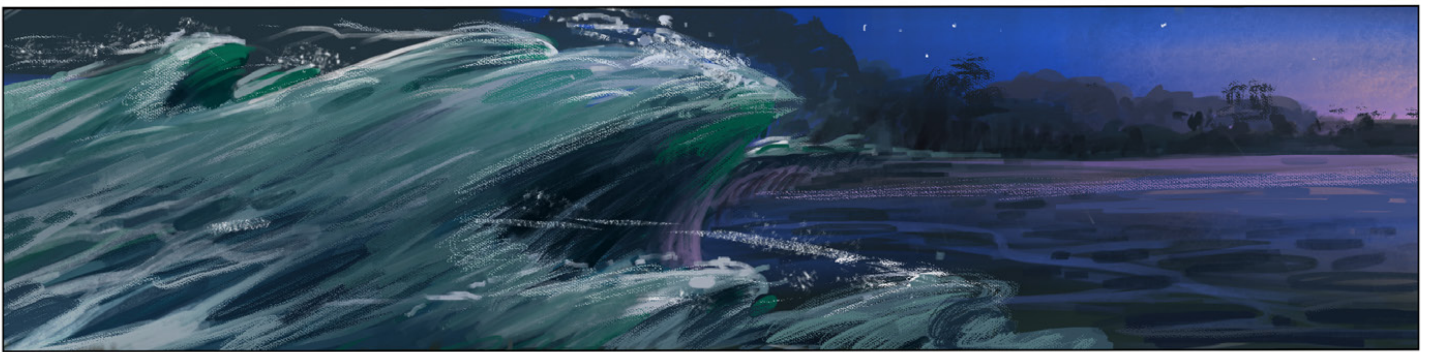
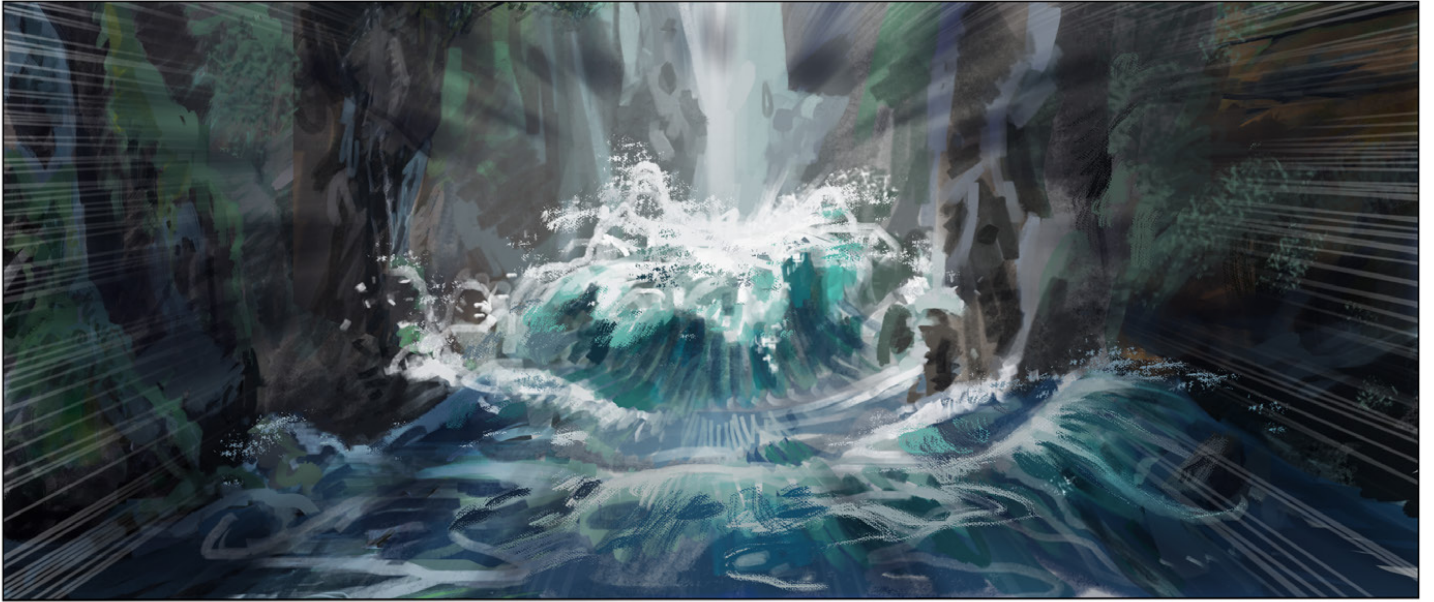


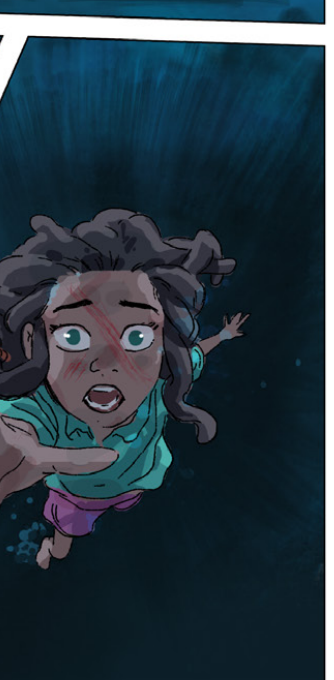
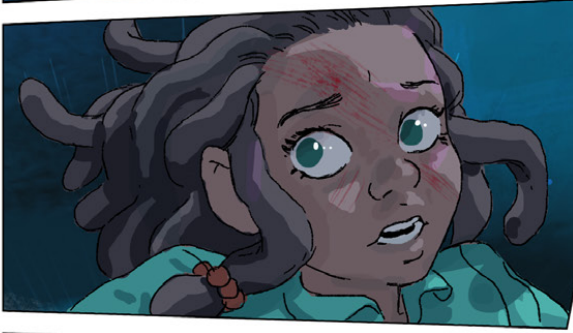


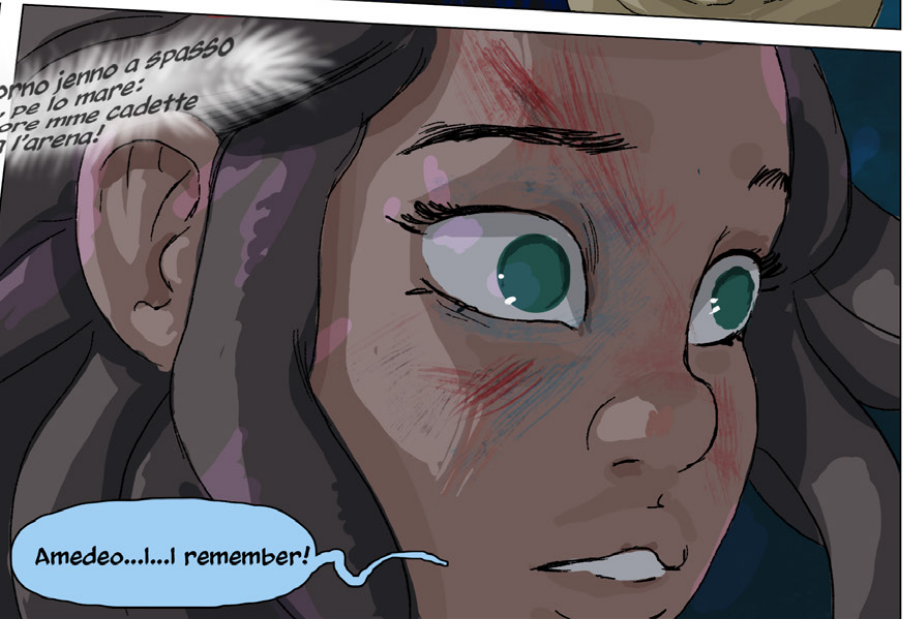
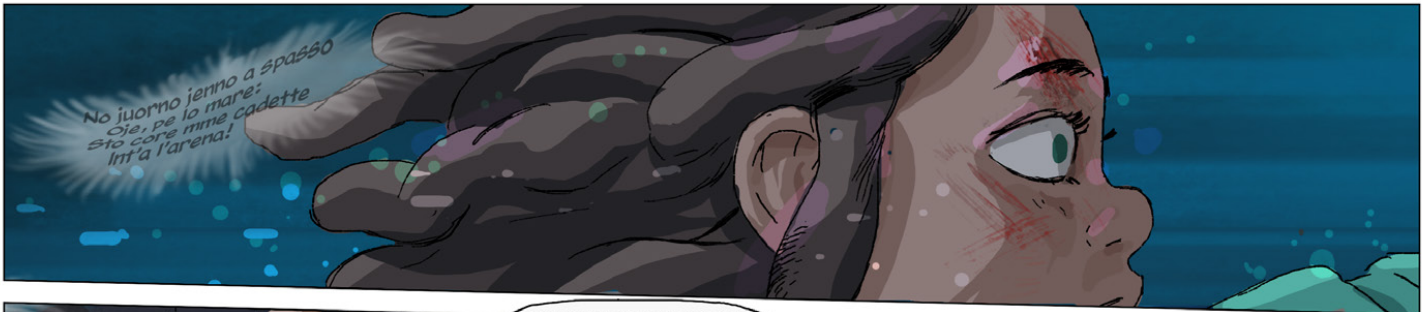


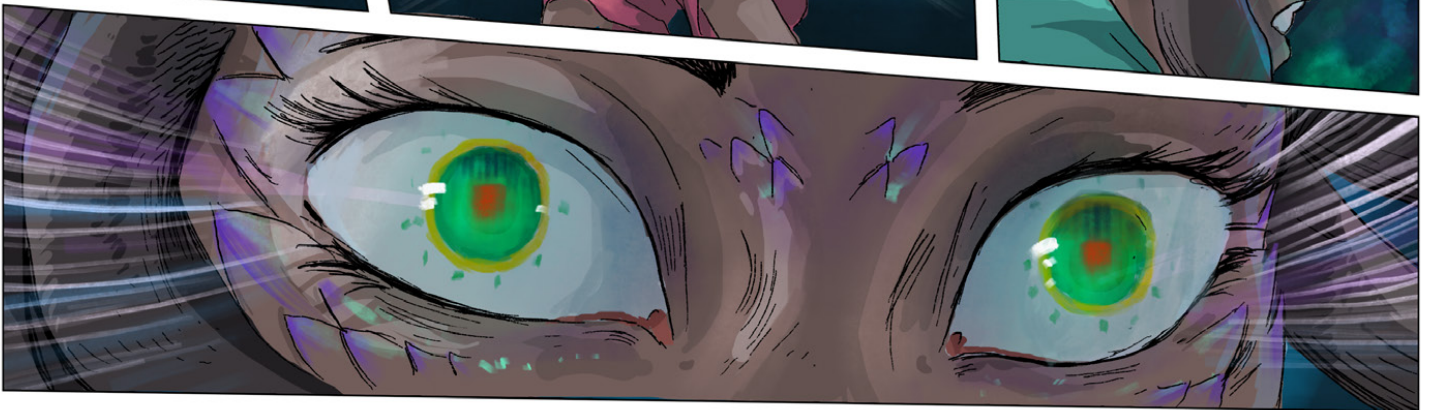
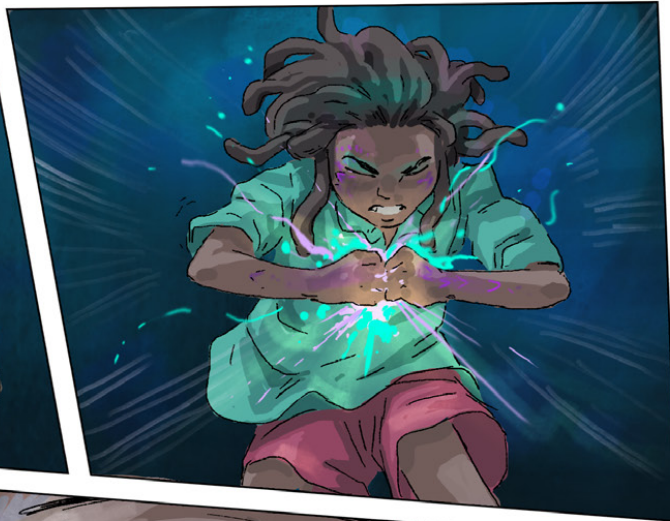


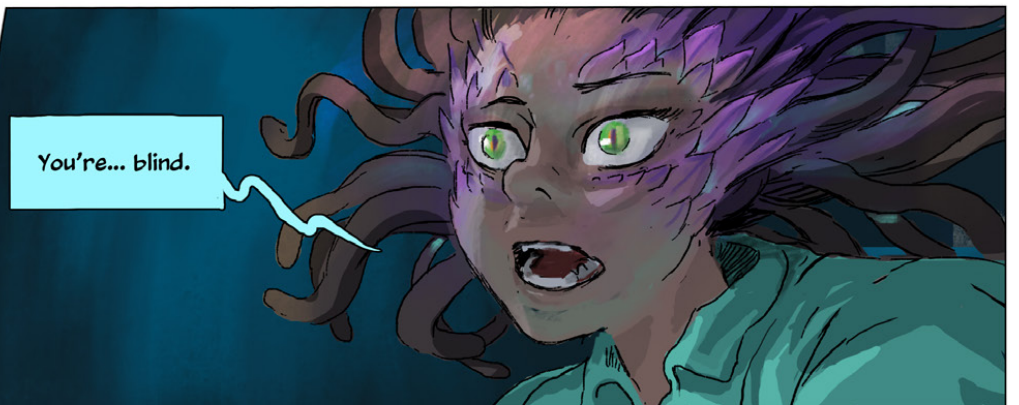
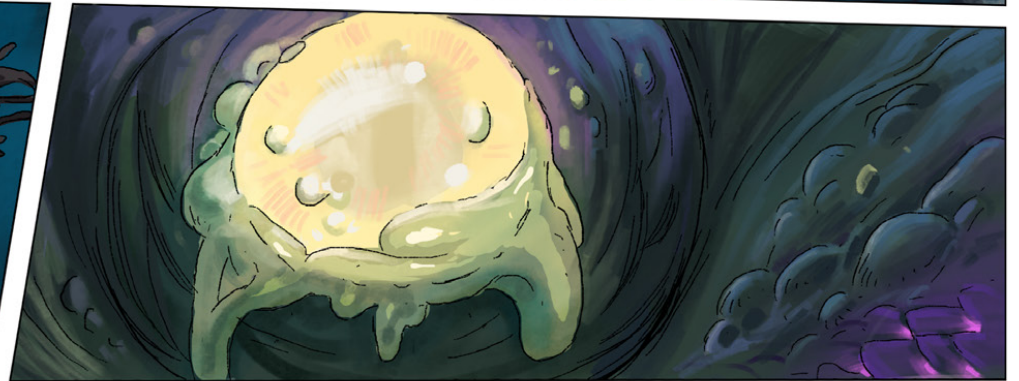
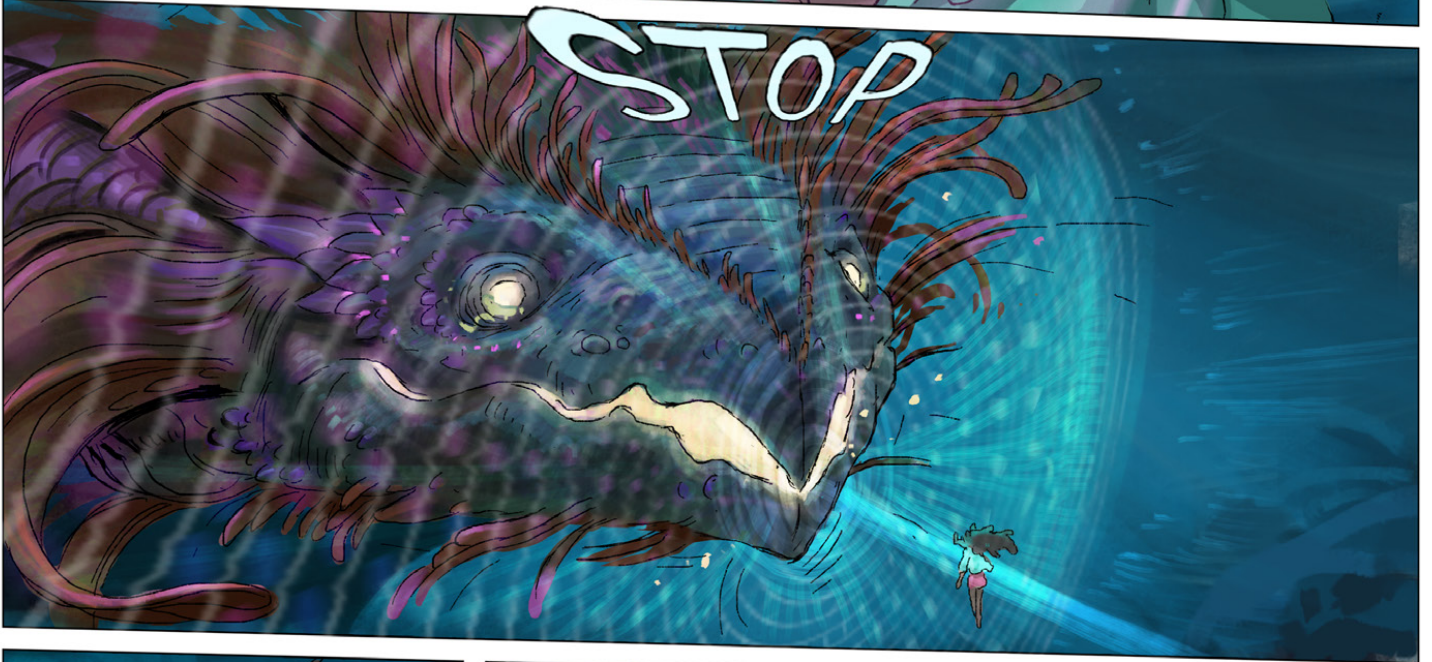
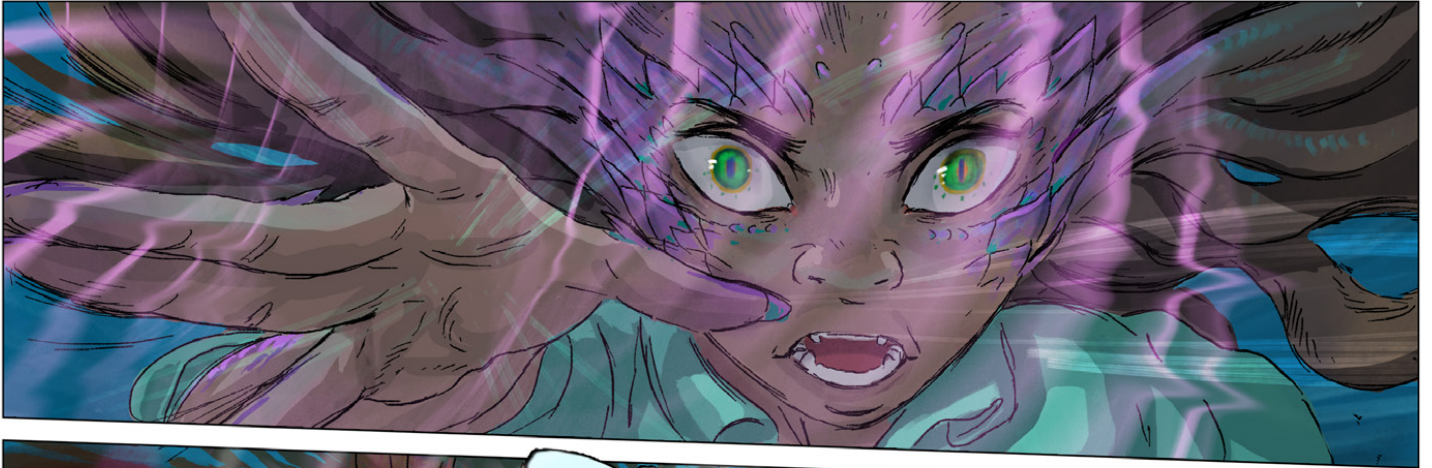


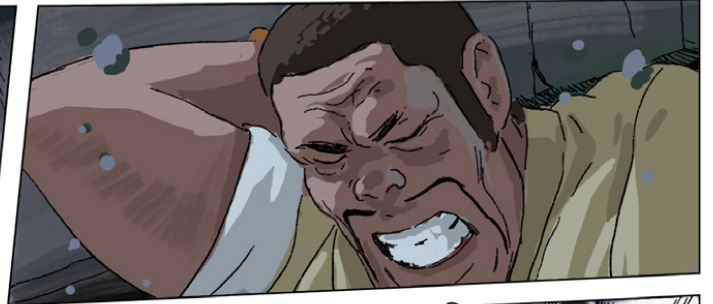
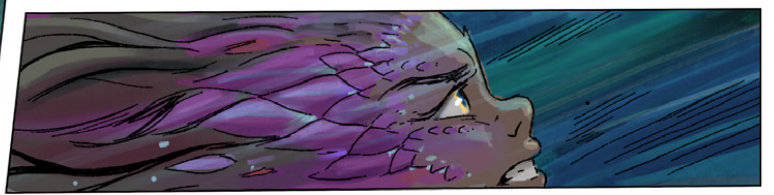
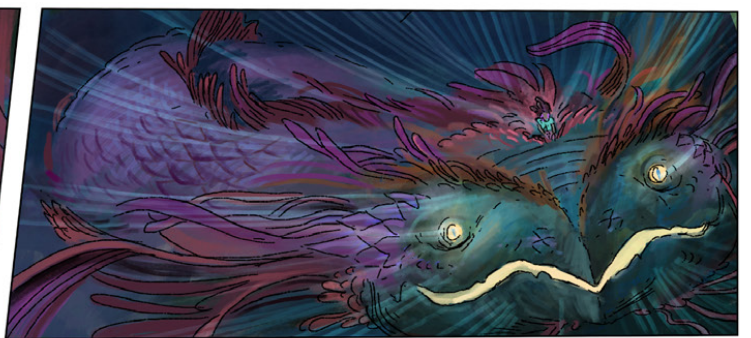




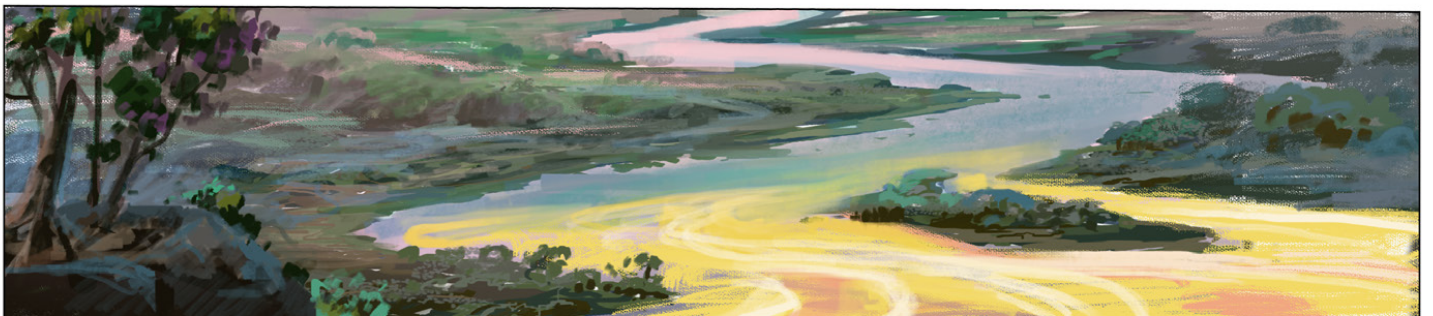
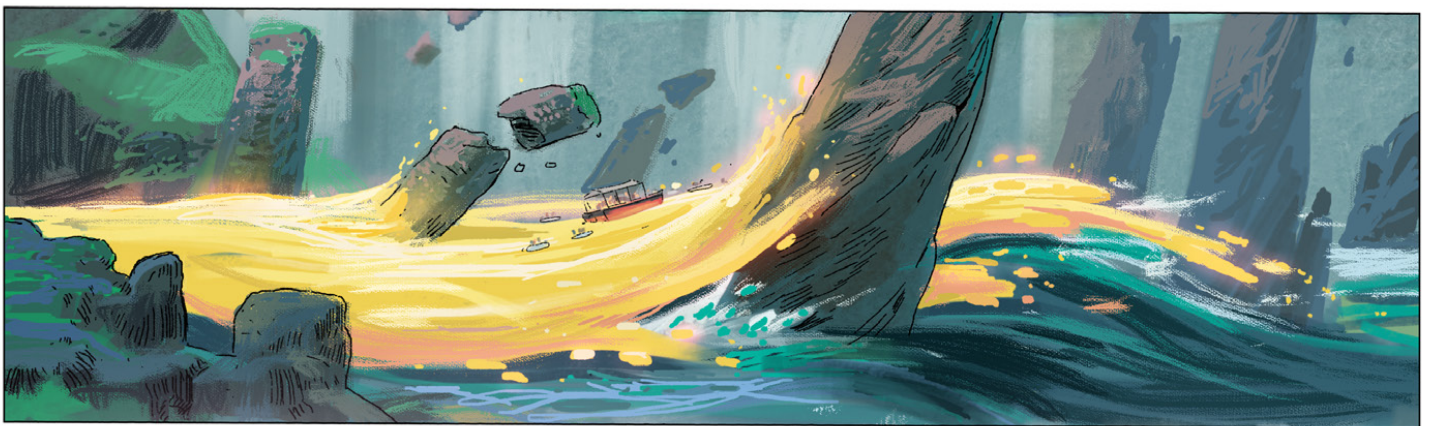


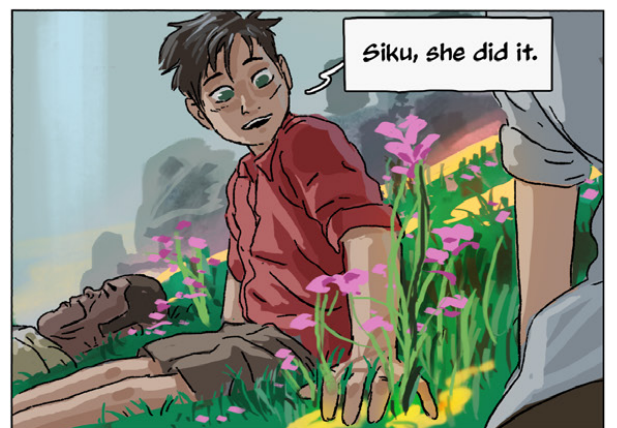
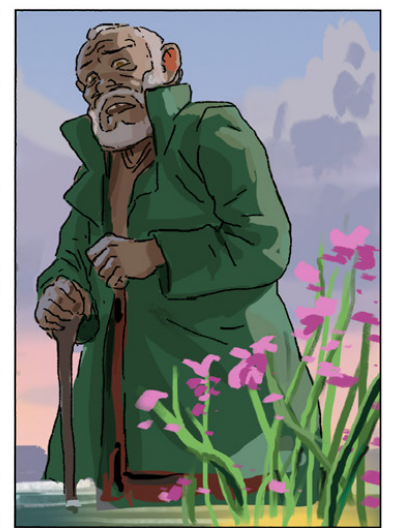
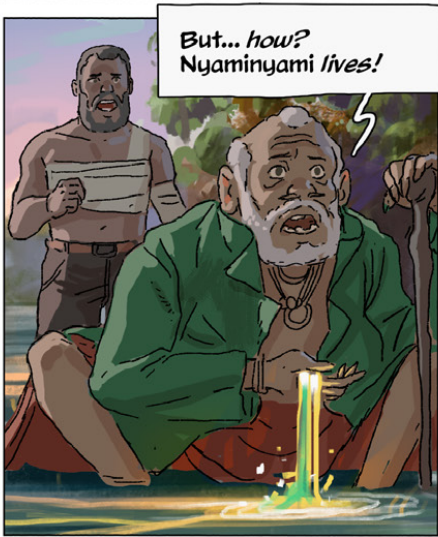


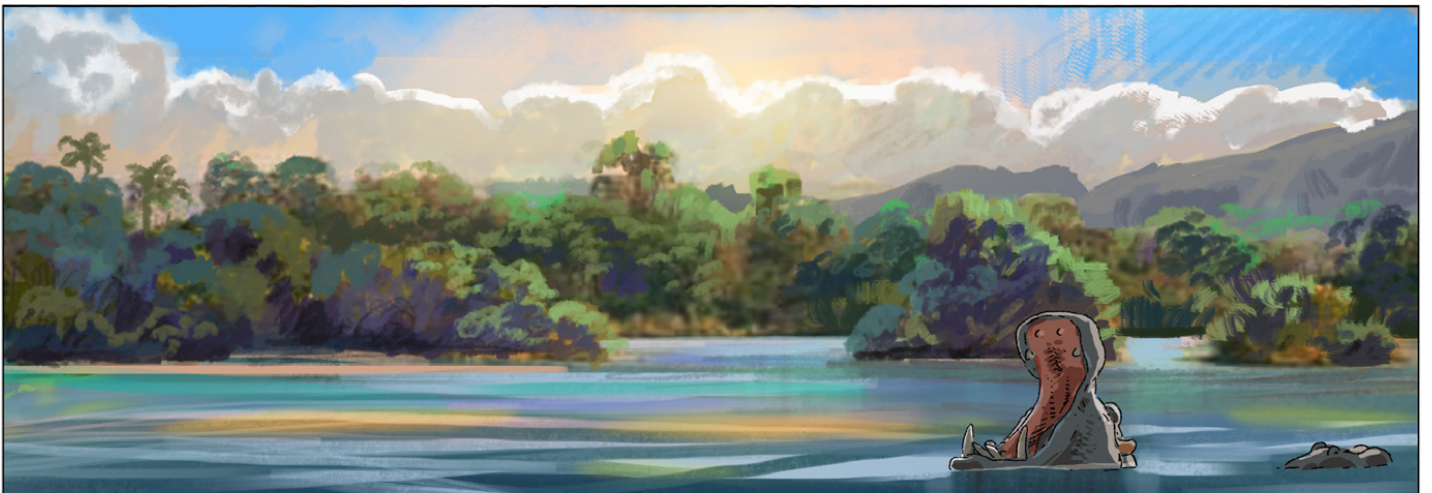
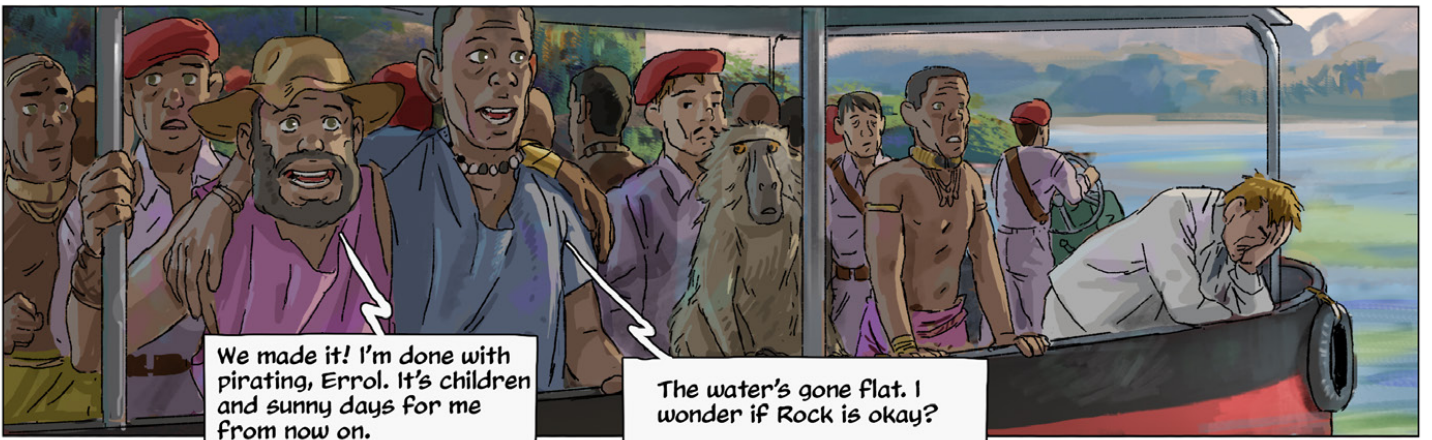


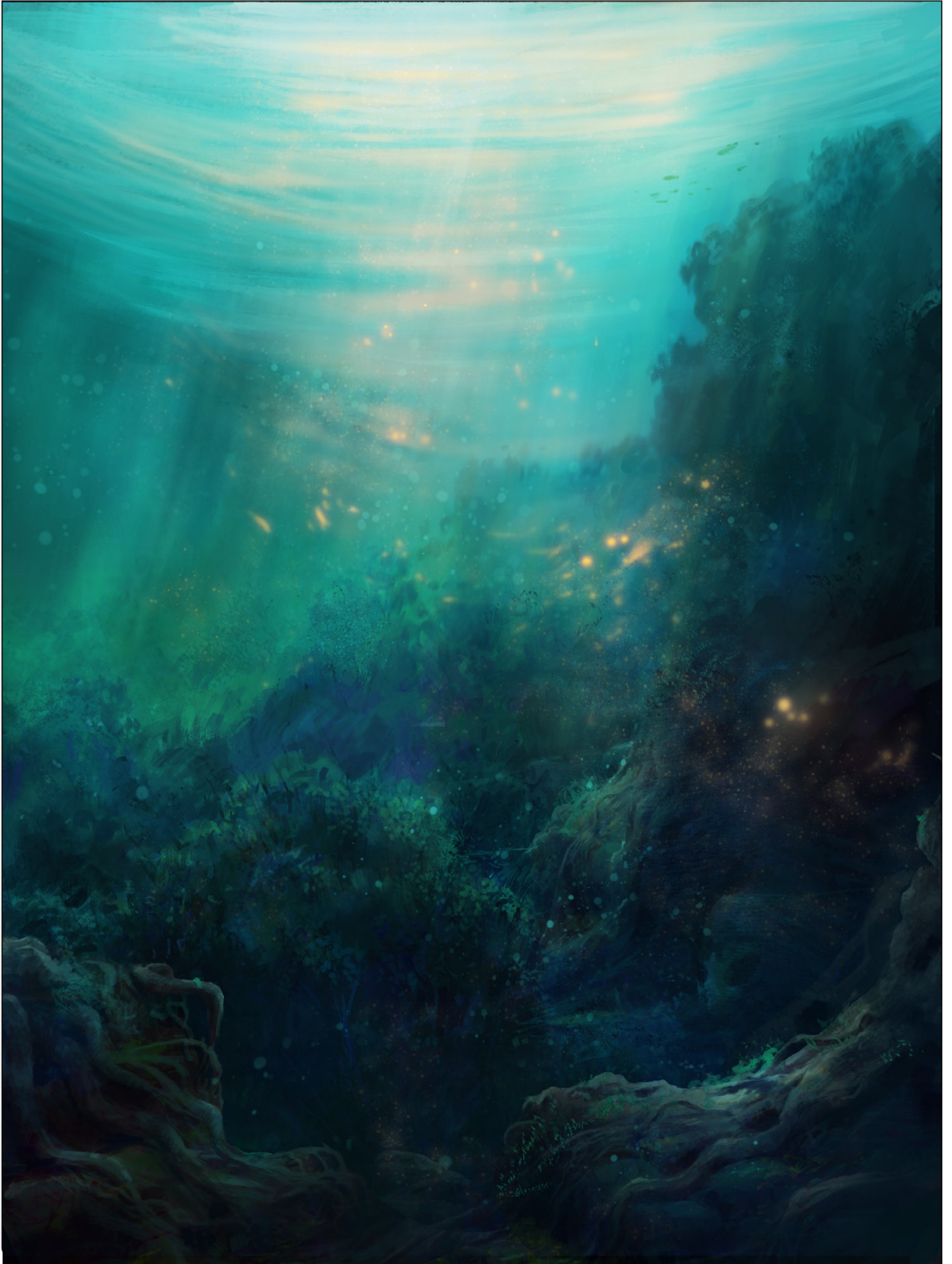


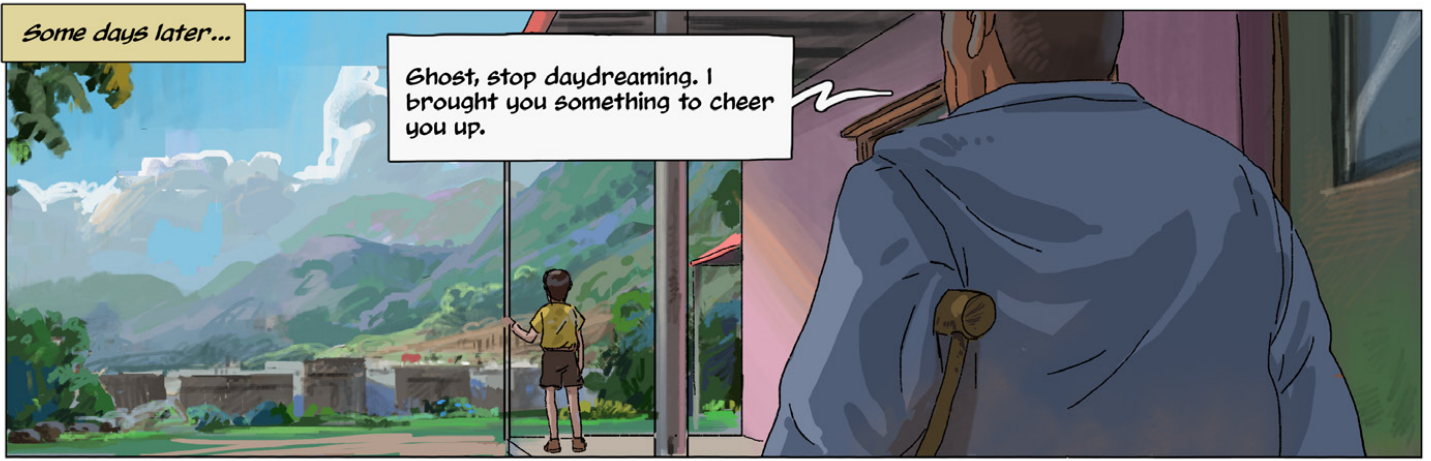










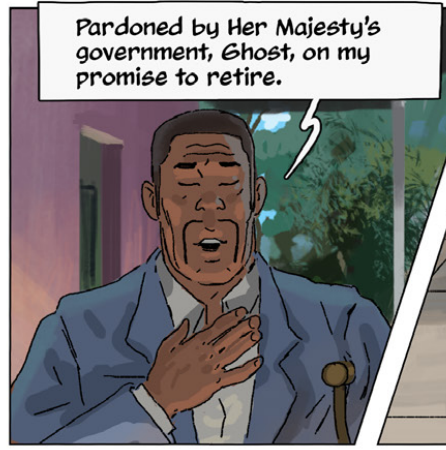


Some days later...

Ghost, stop daydreaming. I brought you something to cheer you up.



Rock! What are you doing here? How's your leg?



Pardoned by Her Majesty's government, Ghost, on my promise to retire.



As for my leg, well, they say a wooden leg is the mark of a true pirate.



Retired pirate...

Yes...retired...of course...Ghost, you're distracting me. I came with a present!



Here!



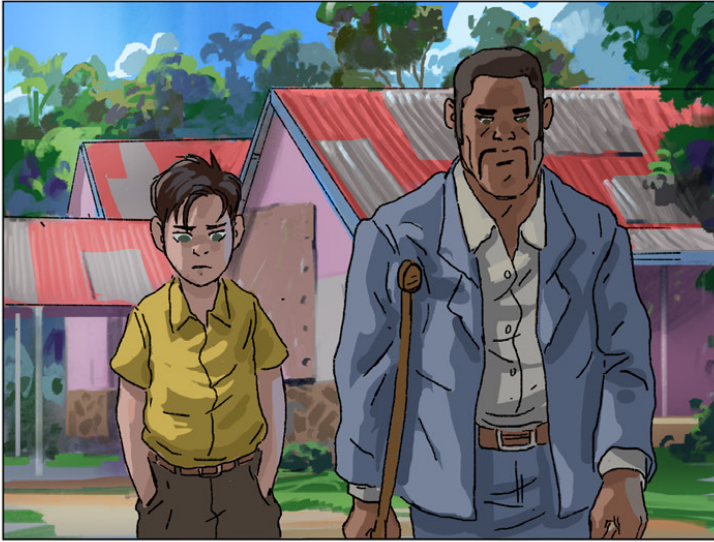
Gold!



Shhh! A true pirate always shares the booty with his crew.



And seeing they couldn't kill Nyami-nyami, no one's getting back into Rhutapa any time soon. Keep it safe, Ghost. One day you'll be able to buy an aeroplane with that.



I'll be seeing you, Rock.

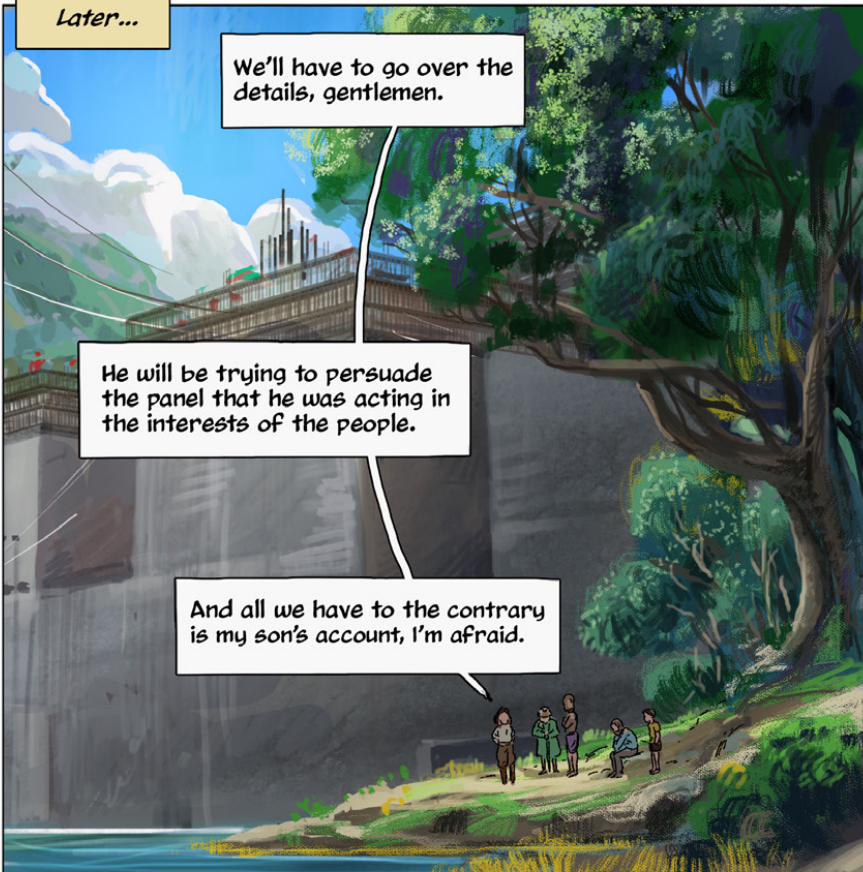
May the wind always fill your sails, Ghost.



And always keep those eyes open, Ghost. There's treasure everywhere.



Later...



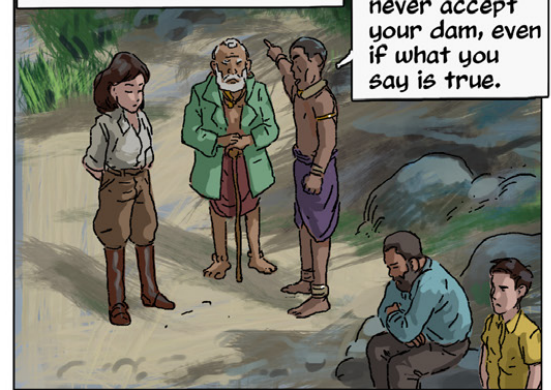
We'll have to go over the details, gentlemen.

He will be trying to persuade the panel that he was acting in the interests of the people.

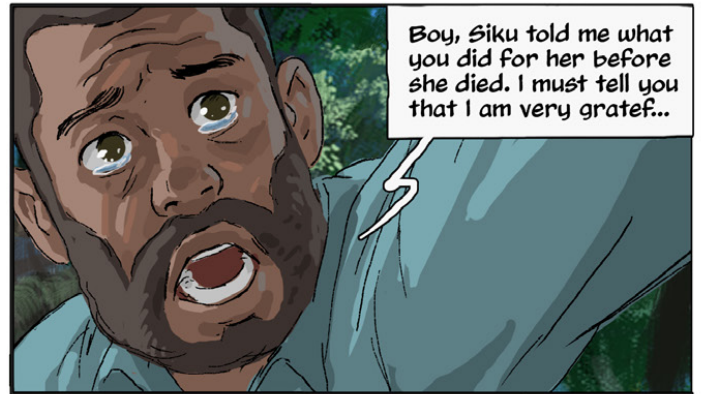
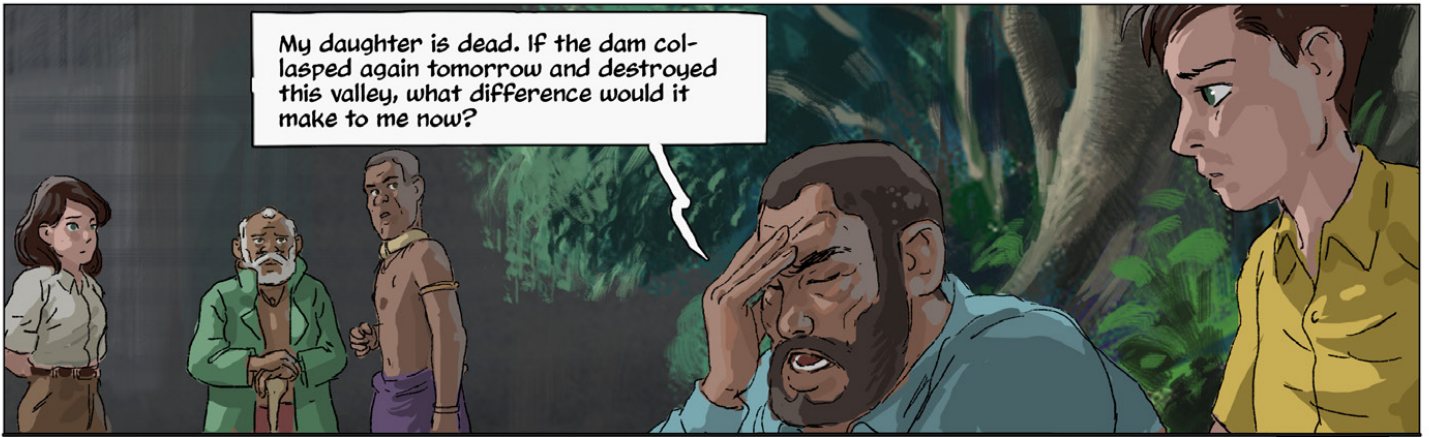
And all we have to the contrary is my son's account, I'm afraid.

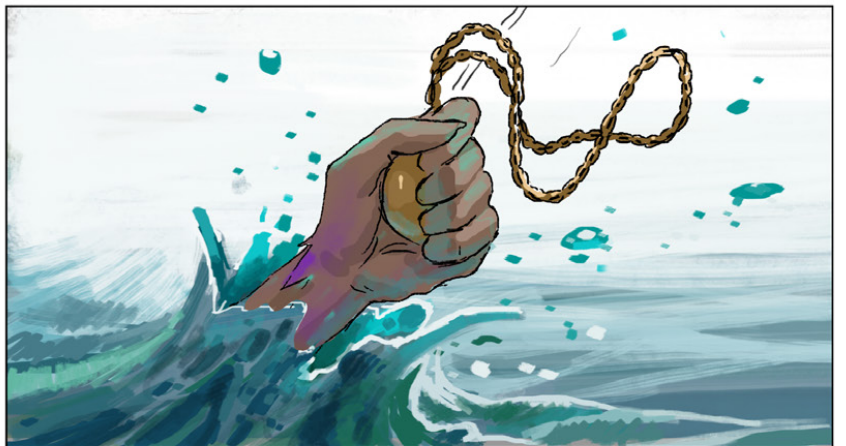
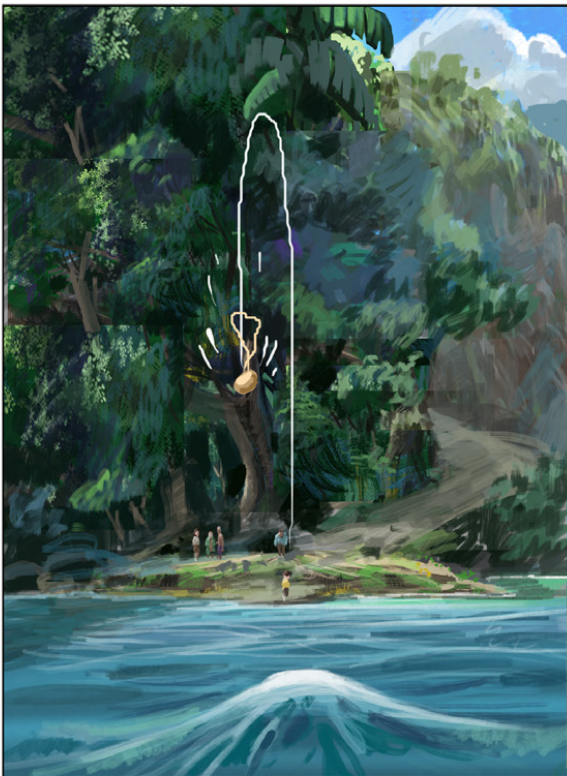
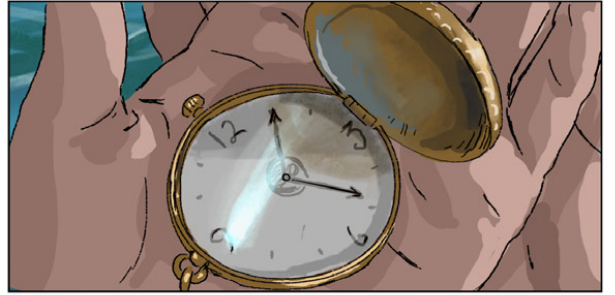
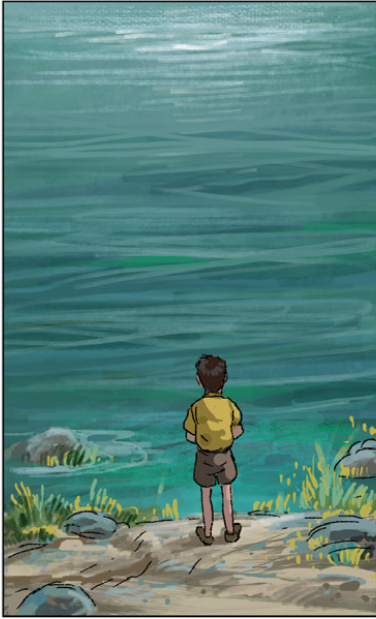
Miss Lia, I do not believe you are like Dr Keigwin - your heart is pure.

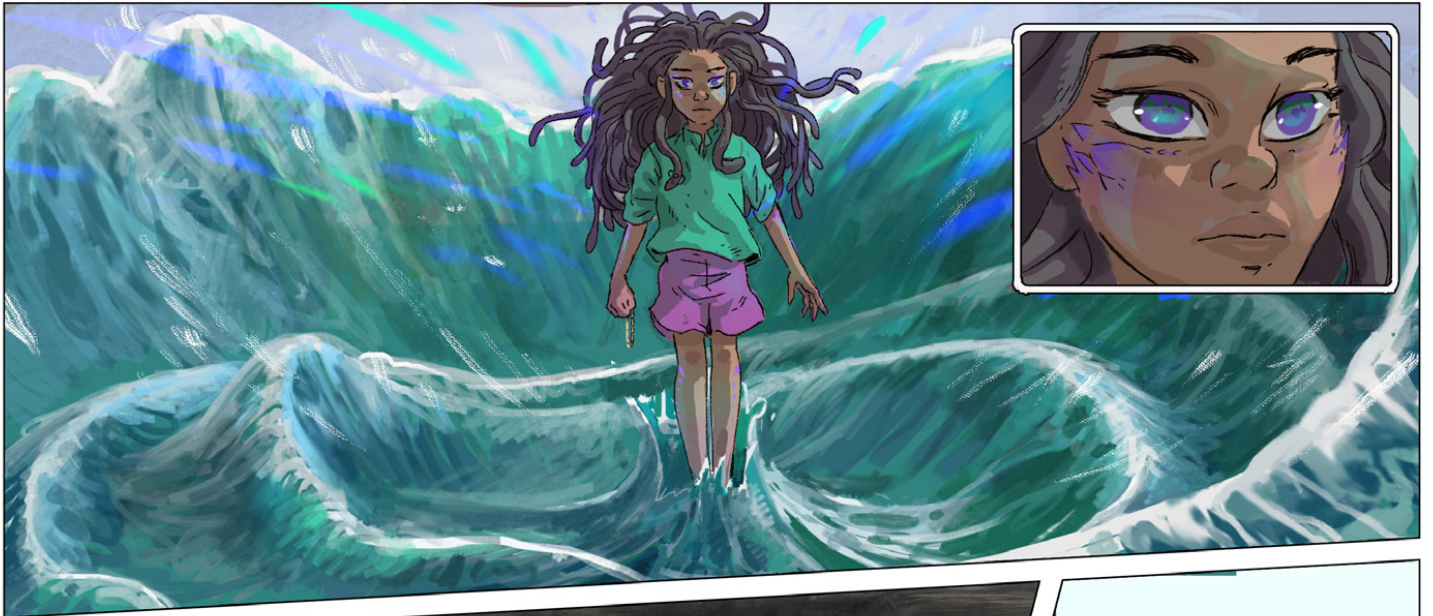
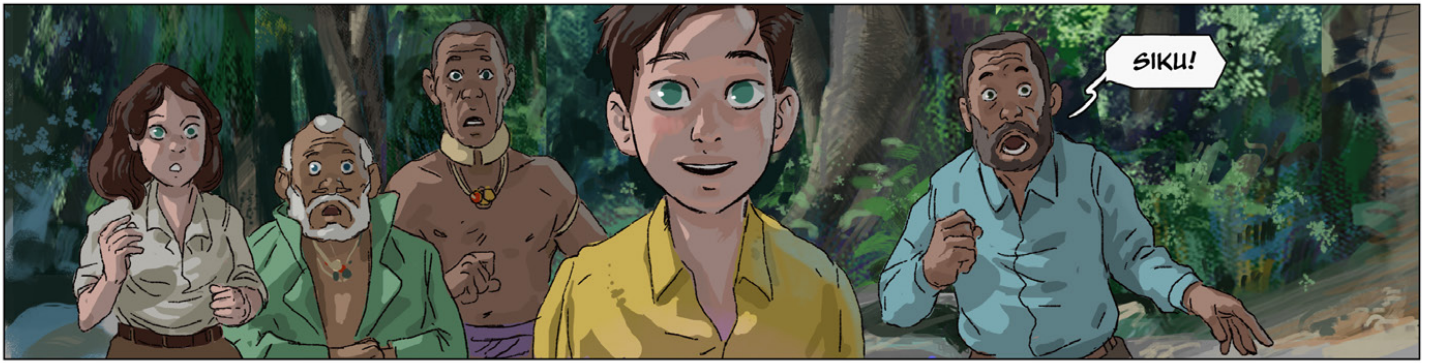
But even so, we Shonga will never accept your dam, even if what you say is true.



I understand.





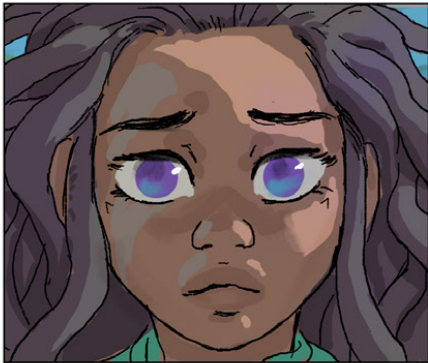




Yes, Baba. I was never gone.



You... you'll come with me to Salisbury...?



I will go, but the river is also my home now. Maalila wanted the old ways to stay, but how can they, when everything has changed?

When I was gone, I realised what I was scared of. But now I know that if we are going to keep the past, to keep it from dying, we also have to accept the future. Maalila has a lot to teach me, but he couldn't accept that.

Chief Chisaba, if we want to stay here, we cannot destroy this dam! But we *don't* need to accept everything it brings, either. We need to work together, to find a *new* way. That is why Maalila must teach me, that is why I will go to school. I am not here to destroy the old ways, but to make them true again.

Help one another! The river's power flows through everything - through the Shonga and through the dam. Through you. That power will feed us.



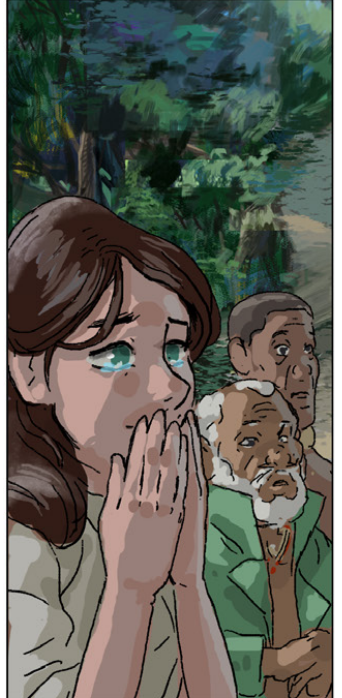
She has seen what none of us could: The true meaning of the Rumuko.



I will help you!



Siku... Siku I am so proud of you! I am going to do everything I can.





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A NOTE ON THE STORY

Like most fiction, **Kariba** draws heavily upon historical fact. But this should not prompt the reader to make an easy equation between the two. While in our research we read extensively on the subject of the dam's construction and its consequences, very little will be found in this book to satisfy the historian. This is not the story of the Tonga, or the many others whose lives were uprooted and homes destroyed. Nor is it an account of the ongoing trials of those who continue to live on the banks of the river and the dam. Least of all is it a polemic against dams in general. This is a work of fantasy, and it is our intention that it be read not against History (itself contested), but alongside it, as one interprets a dream after waking: not checking its correspondence to one's life, but how its features, in their relationships with one another, may be seen to have meaning.