

Goodbye, Hallelujah!

Jesse Brown – BRWJES007

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1

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Saturday morning – the day after my father shows up – I wake up to a fully-fledged plan in my mind. *Kyle, you donner*, I want to say over and over. There's also that one song stuck *was* in my head.

Is it a coincidence that he comes home and then I suddenly have inspiration to cause moelikheid on the Flats? Sieker not. He's been gone since 1972, back when TVs weren't even around. Pastor Darryl – my father – who has been away from home ever since I could speak, is sitting tjoepstil in Mummie's room.

"I'm leaving," I call from the kitchen, not waiting to hear what he thinks. It's more courtesy than he deserves. He's still busy going through his old notes in the boxes she's kept under her bed. Mummie is at work now, but she's staying at her sister in Bonteheuwel until he's out of sight again. The only reason I'm still here is to settle some drama over the road in Athlone.

Irene Court is *biesag* today – youngsters are spilling out in the parks, sitting on those half-buried tires or swinging beside one another. Packs of small children wander around the playground barefoot. The adults that don't have proper work – the ones who aren't teachers, principals, or drivers – are in their *huiswinkels* or smoking on low railings, waiting for something to happen. Smashed glass all around. I pass them all by and the mense look at my black eye like it's the first time they've seen a *donnered* coloured on the Flats.

Most of the gangsters are big soccer fans and they play league matches on Saturdays. I cross the main road into Athlone and make my way to the stadium. You get used to the columns of noise from taxis and people outside, waiting for something, shouting about waiting and waiting some more, but today I hear it all. Like something is going to change and

I'm trying to collect what I can. Vengeance will play out while they are still having fun. But I shake my head at that thought – I can't doekom myself today.

Come with me down to Paradise Road.

As I get to the parking lot, I put on my red cap, majat Ray-Bans and pull my hoodie up. I see it. The Chopper, tied up close to the stadium. Its paint is unflicked – no stupid gang signs and letters scratched in with a knife or whatever. But trust these ouens to do something stupid like that soon.

I forgot to bring a bolt cutter, but I find the blerrie thing isn't even locked properly. That's how arrogant these new gangsters are. Arrogant, permanently high and always ready to bully people who don't want to be them. I pull the bike loose and get on. The seat is lekker solid. Was this thing made for me? Uncle Aalie knew that I'd like this one, but Nantjies was uitgevriet. What that ou did yesterday was just disrespectful.

The lady with a stall outside the stadium – slangetjies, peanuts and raisins, bompies, ghost pops – has seen me, and that's perfect. She'll shout at Nantjies-them, saying that while she was giving this old uncle his change, this ou sommer took his bike and he had a red cap on. So then they'll think: Doorlights. Charlie's ouense who have a thing for drugs and fashion statements. Then the twak will begin.

I glide through the broken streets of Athlone. The taxis are still at it, hooting at pedestrians like they're doing them a favour. I give them all a thumbs-up as I pass them by.

Klonkie, they all shout at me. *Boytjie. Kind.* But I'm mos not so small. Tomorrow I'm going to be a big man – thirteen, jong. And I'm soema living like a main ou now already!

I stop at Charlie's girlfriend's house and get off the bike, take my cap off. The note gets stuck on the frame and the bike goes over the wall. A few minutes later she'll find a present in her back yard, slightly scuffed with the fall, saying: "Take this for a spin. Love Charlie"

I'm running all the way back home, not stopping, even when an uninterested traffic officer asks me where the fire is. The fire is coming, soon. It's coming because one person can only take so much twak from a group of bullies.

Charlie's Doorlights are mad at me because I keep saying that I don't want to join. Now I keep telling them that their name is the dommet of the lot so I'll never want to be a part of it. I think they want to scare you – like the light shining under your door when they come to murder you. It's dom man! So now they call me names and beat me up when there's nothing better to do.

On the other side of Heideveld is Nantjies, the ou with the ugliest face on the Flats, with teeth that twist in his mouth like slangetjies. He loves to get his manskap to terrorise me while I'm working. They'll take the scrap out of my hands, throw it in the nearest bin, and then throw me in afterwards. My legs start running automatically as soon as I catch a glimpse of them.

And then there was that stunt that Nantjies pulled yesterday morning.

Everyone around here knows that I'm making my way up – saving for a Chopper of my own. And I'm doing it honest. Selling scrap, helping Aunties at the shop and that kind of thing. Looking for coins in the street. Now then yesterday, Nantjies decided to buy the one bike that I was eyeing for months – years even. He even left a note at Uncle Aalie's place: *Wêla kapêla, jy's uit.* The tears sat hot in my eyelids.

When I pass by Uncle Aalie's spot, I can't help smiling to myself. A lot can change in a day, ne? Now I'm the ou on top – the ou who left the note. It's Nantjies turn to cry. Uncle Aalie sits outside, waving at me. He's got the same build and head shape as Darryl, if a little bit shorter. Sitting tight inside his tweed jacket, he nogal looks like a boiled egg gone brown.

Back at home, I don't believe it. It sounds like Darryl is tjanking softly in Mummie's room. I can just hear him through the door. Do you know how embarrassing it is to hear a grown man cry like that? What can I do? I whistle a tune. He hears that I'm home, so he goes completely quiet. My ear is against his door and I am still and there's nothing I can pick up. Another job done well ne!

I go to the kitchen and make some juice with the concentrate. I'm taking a few more scoops than Mummie likes me to have and the spoon is shaking in my hand. It's been well-earned, man. I've gotten Nantjies back and it's going to be interesting to see how this whole commotion turns out.

There's a lot to celebrate today. The day I got back at my enemies who took me for '*n aapie*. I start singing out loud, soema. Not even worrying about how false it sounds. Something about better days coming, a young man being bliksemed and a woman sitting and crying. Something like that. It's a mooi song.

Mummie's room is tjoepstil.

X

As dusk begins to introduce itself and the wind grows tame, shots ring around Heideveld. It could be a car seriously backfiring or gunshots from the gangs. Maybe even police firing on protestors, but that seems the least likely today. Normally there is a buzz around a mass meeting – everyone usually knows that something might go down between protestors and police these days.

When the daylight has moered out of this place, I get a knock on my door. It's Jerome.

“Jirr, did you lose a fight with a wall again?” he laughs at me, pointing at my opgepofde eye.

“You're next ou,” I say, “The police are looking for you again”

Earlier, as I was leaving the Court to launch my operation, a police car stopped a few of us youngsters. They wanted to know if we knew where Jerome Claassen lived, and had I seen him around? Now I shrugged at them like I couldn't understand English. The others followed along. You must just act dom in front of these policemen so that they end up saying *jirr, these coloureds*. Then they'll leave you alone.

But Jerome is too smart for that. No, he'll recite his rights just there in front of the officers and threaten them with legal action. Now that is just asking for a klap out here.

He stretches himself on our couch, avoiding the middle part where it sinks in like the ceiling in my room.

"Don't worry man, they've got their hands full tonight with the gang fights"

"For something stupid as a bike, ne?" I say, smiling.

He shakes his head.

"I heard it was about one of the ouense's goose. The ladies make the trouble, man."

Not this time!

"So you not worried about the police?"

"No," he says, flicking a piece of fingernail from his mouth, "The Student Protest Association has my back. That's how you get through these times, my ou. You need a bigger guy looking out for you, or you're gone."

That's sieker true for some.

"Can I leave another shipment of books with you?" he asks politely, "Just in case the place gets raided next week"

"Sure," I say, happy that this guy wants me to help him out.

He leaps off the couch and comes back with a plastic crate. Here on the Flats they are normally used to cart Bashews bottles around. But Jerome, a head above the rest of us with his slimbek and brains, uses it for his books. They've got titles with big words like

Capitalism, Social Stratification, Pedagogy of the *wat-se-goed*... I put them down behind the couch where the fish moths vry.

“Thanks, comrade”

I chuckle. It sounds funny when he says that. Like I’m a part of his cat-and-mouse dinges with the police, making a difference. He runs out again and comes back with a couple of bompies. We sit at the kitchen table and slurp all the flavour of the iced juice from the plastic corners. It’s sour and cold and just the thing I’ve been wanting.

“You see all those posters in Athlone? For the new Parents Association?”

“Yes, I’m helping to start that up. It’s good to see the older people catching on now. You want to join the first meeting?”

I shrug. I’m mos not an activist. So I bring up the gangs again instead and I sink into my Mummie’s armchair.

“Today it’s serious. Doorlights and Nantjies-them? They never fight. You can tell that people are kwaad about all this” and he gestures at the lounge, but I know he’s talking about Heideveld and the Flats. It’s always about the bigger picture for him. He sieker sees area as an opportunity for resistance. Me? All I can think of is the wind in my krooskop on the way to Charlie’s girlfriend. That Chopper was something else.

“Eventually they were going to get in trouble with each other,” I say, “You can’t live so ugly with people and expect to be alright”

“But that’s what happened today. There was blood running in the streets.”

The bompie goes bitter in my mouth.

“Genuine?”

People dead? Is a bike such a serious thing to kill one another over? Jerome is still biting at the corner of his bompie. He tells the full story, second-hand.

Apparently he's heard it all from Dougie, a street vendor that shakes a tin for Homeless Dogs on the Flats (those words written by hand and held down with brown tape).

Word is that Charlie's mense stole the bike during Nantjies' soccer match. Nantjies' team lost 2-1 to the league leaders and he was sent-off during the match for choking the referee. He would be banned for the rest of the season. The day wasn't starting off lekker for him.

Nantjies goes to his bike rack and finds it missing. Now he's in die hel in – swearing so much that the spit is hanging from the corners of his fat lips. Who would dare disrespect him like that? They're walking down Lower Klipfontein Road when they see Patricia – Charlie's girlfriend – riding the Chopper in Gleemore Park across the road. She's alone.

She sees the group crossing the road. Normally Nantjies and Charlie don't give each other grief because Silvertown, Rylands and Surrey Estate separate their territories. But she knows something is up, so she gets ready to ride away at any moment.

“What do you want?” she calls at them while they're a few meters away.

“That belongs to me,” he says and points at the bike.

Here things break down in the story. You're not sure if Patricia misunderstands that he is pointing at the bike and not her, or if just seeing the three of them was enough to make her run for her life. One glimpse of Nantjies tanne is enough for me, though.

So she takes off – down South Avenue and then left into Thornton Road. Charlie and company, tired after a hard match full of fouls, chase after her but she gets away, finding shelter at a family member in Clevily or Maindy Road.

She's dik bang – the ouense were after her. So she calls her boyfriend Nantjies and tells him that she was almost attacked by Nantjie-them. Charlie calls his ouense together, saying they need to sort out Nantjies and his honger mense. Nantjies-them are already walking over to Heideveld to do the same thing.

The two groups intersect (accidentally) in Silvertown at the field in Linaria Crescent. Dougie the street vendor heard this from a bergie sitting in the doorway of the Baptist Church that overlooks the field. The gangs, seeing each other in the open, were taken by surprise. So Bobby the yster from Charlie-them gets sterk-gevriet and soema opens fire from the edge of the field, screaming

“GIVE OUR CHOPPER BACK”

Nantjies, taking cover, has no idea what he’s talking about and shoots him in the eye. Now both groups scatter. Bobby writhes on the floor holding his face, screaming, blood gushing out. He’s lucky that Nantjies used BB gun bullets or he’d be dead rather than blind.

Nantjies realises that his baby cousin probably swapped out his gun accidentally and wonders why he didn’t notice the weight difference. He asks one of his ouense for a proper gun. A small pistol gets passed forward to him. He takes aim at Bobby – hiding behind a twisted poplar – but the gun jams. He throws the gun at Bobby but his arm is nogals weak.

Bobby, with one eye, hits one ou in the arm and then fires the rest of his gun into the metal slide, sending the bullets ricocheting hemeltoe.

Ouense go down on both sides until the police sirens sound. Then the manne really scatter left and right and leave the injured mense on the floor.

“Six wounded and one arrested. Terrible how there’s so much in-fighting now – it’s the worst time, given that everyone needs to band together. We need to fight the apartheid system now, not our own people.”

“No one dead?” I ask, my voice trembling. He shakes his head and I give a sigh of relief.

“Why are you acting so nervous?” he asks. I don’t know how to say it. I’m in blerrie shock. The Chopper thing was meant to be more of a joke man. Like when you stick a page on your friend’s back at school. But what the hell did I expect? These two gangs are going to

be looking to pay back for this. Revenge upon vengeance, or whatever they say on those kung-fu movies. And they'll use real bullets, not BB guns. Snarls on their ugly faces. The dities I've eaten over the weekend suddenly want to resurface.

"I was involved, ou. I gave the bike..."

"Kyle, are you stupid? You can't play games with people like that!"

"What must I do?" I ask, whimpering, "Now I need to run away from here."

He thinks for a while. The crushed ice of the bompie gives me a brain freeze, but I'm not even worried about that.

"No, that's too suspicious," he says eventually, "You have to make sure that they don't suspect you, so just carry on with your life like you weren't involved. Can you do that?"

I nod, not sure what he's asking exactly. He thinks for another rukkie.

"How about you start hanging around me and the student protest association? That will keep you away from interacting with those guys and they'll not consider you a suspect. I think that will work well, my friend. My stupid friend."

Now I'm really nodding. That could nogal work.

"Only if you ouense have free food at meetings"

There's a voice in the kitchen. I skrik.

Darryl greets us. How much has he heard? It's the first time in hours that I've seen him again. Bags upon bags sitting below his eyes. No, you can tell that this ou is in his own world. Shuffling around in one of Mummie's big gowns (maybe it used to be one of his own), his eyes are a little red but he doesn't look upset. Not like you would if your son was messing with gangsters.

He shakes Jerome's hand. I want to ask about how far he's gotten with those papers in the room, but Jerome isn't finished with his story:

“Dougie says that the Moslem surgeon helping Nantjies-them says that they say they don’t think it was Charlie. Somebody saw an ou operating alone. So they already think that Charlie-them were framed.”

Now all the food is coming out. I trip into the bathroom and throw up right in the bath. It’s like my body has given in on something I was keeping in since Friday morning. *Yasterday, I’m really a dead man.* They know where I live. I tear off a piece of toilet paper and wipe my mouth.

Inside I hear Darryl asking Jerome if he’s missing school with the stay aways. He sounds nogal friendly, like he’s forgotten about me. Hasn’t caught on about what we were talking about. A sad, quiet man. But still a hypocrite.

“Sir, I helped organise the stay aways. I’m part of a student protest committee. We can’t go back knowing that the government is taking us for aapies.”

Most of the stuff I threw up goes down with the water. A blerrie waste of a bompie. I wipe the rest with rolls of tissue and throw them into the toilet. The stuff struggles to flush and I feel like disappearing from the earth forever. Then there’s a gurgle. I wipe my forehead and leave the room, my legs heavy.

“You’re right. But you know that comes at a cost, right?”

Jerome replies: “Any cost, I’ll pay it. Sir. I don’t want to be a second-class citizen in my own country, and I don’t wish it on others, either.”

I wait for him to finish his bompie and then he offers to throw my packet in the bin outside. I see him out. A cold wind greets us on the stairwell.

“*That’s* your father? He’s like the opposite of you”

“I know, ya, he looks like a whitey.”

“Not just looks, man. The way he talks, his gait... It’s not what you find on the Flats. That’s what happens when you’re away from this place, I suppose.”

We shake hands and I go back inside. Darryl is at the kitchen table with his notes.

“You have to give it to Jerome,” he says, “He’s a really good youngster. The best this place has to offer.”

I don’t know, I feel something like envy. Of all the times that I shouldn’t care about this mess of a man, it’s now. Bleddy passwhite. We’ll see what he thinks of me when I hang around Jerome like a true struggle hero.

X

But the police knock on Jerome’s door in the middle of the night, tear his place apart and then arrest him. Darryl is so angry that the policemen just let him shout at them while they work. Maybe they give him scope because he also looks white, I don’t know.

“You’ll go after dissenters with rights before the gangsters and drug dealers, you swine!” and so on. I think the police constable finds my father interesting. Who the hell in Heideveld says swine like that? They load Jerome in the back of the van. He doesn’t even say anything.

People stand outside their flats, watching this play out. Darryl notices them and grows quiet. The whole of the Court watches as the police leave with our golden protest boy. The back of the van is too dark to see through.

People are mumbling to themselves. They’re all looking at this strange light-skinned middle-aged man moping beside me. Do they recognise him from all those years ago, husband to my mother? Do they know that she is staying with her sister until tomorrow evening? Sieker. People here are nosy.

“Let’s get back inside” Darryl says coldly.

Nobody here knows the full story. Our golden youngster is gone; we are left with an old traitor. And this man has been given his due with a stupid son, the one who really fired the bullets in Linaria Crescent, Silvertown.

I climb into bed (I am getting too big for the mattress – my ankles stick fast to the edge) and try to sleep through the tossing and turning.

2

The front door slams half-shut, waking me up. Tonight I'll be greeting a gun barrel, I know. I listen for footsteps on the concrete outside our door. They get softer until there's nothing.

It's still dark. I think about looking for a knife in the kitchen, but what will that help against guns?

Mummie's bedroom is empty. That stack of preaches has been torn to shreds – they're scattered all over the show, cheap confetti.

I peer through the kitchen window. All I see is Darryl slowly crossing the road, his greying hair standing out in the near-dark. He's scrunched himself into his jacket, no neck. Is it so cold, or is he trying to hide his face? Music is gaaning in the distance, but people are mostly quiet after the police's performance earlier.

Darryl's Mercedes is parked in Uncle Joah's garage. When I was younger the old man would say that my father is busy sorting the whites out – and he would be back soon. A load of twak but he stood by him because Darryl was his church leader before he left. Apparently he looked out for Joah, especially after Aunty Mercia passed away. Nowadays you'll hardly find the man outside.

Joah is the only man with a garage in the area – he could put it up himself because he used to be a builder. There's always a car parked in his driveway because he lets people take him for a joke – they abuse his kindness. And Darryl was first in line this weekend. The garage light is on across the road but the door is closed.

Two jaffles rest on the kitchen table, cold. The cheese has gone hard but I'm hungry so I take it up. One goes in a Tupperware bakkie. My eyes are on the front door, waiting for

blood. The end of the gun (Charlie or Nantjies or both) shouting at my face, lighting it up. Me bleeding and awake, one jaffle untouched on the table riddled with bullets.

My hands are white with fear. I want to say sorry to Mummie, to ask someone for forgiveness but I know that's not how things work here. If the police don't get you, someone else will. If you don't become a gangster, you'll still feel them at the back of your neck and if you tell them to voetsek, then everything breaks. I look into the keyhole and catch a shift in light. Then I shout and rush for the door, Tupperware bakkie under my arm, ready to pee in my pyjama pants.

I launch through the door so that it rushes open and slams against the wall.

Hey shuddup! Some people have church tomorrow! Someone shouts from inside their flat.

There's nobody around – not even someone hiding in the shadow under the stairwell. That would be the best place to make a hit. I look down and find a small patch of dark on my pants. Bleddywill.

What is Darryl busy with? The garage is closed with the light still on and I didn't hear Darryl's Merc leave. Some of the light leaks into the street. It catches a broken Castle bottle that's shattered in all its glory. Green glitter smiles at me.

Further up the street a dog limps along the low fences. It looks like this could be its last night on this earth. Only three of its paws work properly and its jaw hangs down at a strange angle. How many years has it been alive? You can't tell with an old brak like that. He's been donnered and hungry too many times and maybe had too many little braks for it to be easy to tell. I turn away from the window. I want to feel sorry for it but I know there's nothing I can do. I launch a piece of jaffle at it but the thing goes running off.

The wind picks up as I cross over the road, pee pants and all. When the sun went down it took all the warmth with it. Everywhere is quiet and cold. No patrols, no gangsters,

no more police raids for now. Down at the taxi rank I can see a fire dying out in a petrol drum, but that's as normal as the moon overhead. Somebody is always trying to stay warm. A perfect little evening, Mummie would say. The place is also sieker licking its wounds after all the gang commotion earlier – tomorrow we'll all be able to talk about the damage. My foot clips something solid. A five cent piece goes into my pocket.

Bitter white smoke is coming out from under the garage. I lift up the door. It rolls up easily but the headlights hit me straight in the gevriet, right through a layer of fumes. Darryl is in the front seat of his Mercedes but I can only just make him out. His head is back, eyes closed. Prayer meeting gone on too long sieker. I tap on the window and skrik when some kind of pipe lands at my feet, leaking out fumes. Must've been hanging inside the car. I tap on the window again, shaking my head as my father groggily looks up at me.

I shout through the smog and tap at the glass for good measure.

“I didn't know Uncle Joah had sleepovers here.” I say and laugh.

It's a good comment – he must maar deal with it. He lifts his elbow from the lip of the window and looks at me with tired eyes. Doesn't even smile.

“You should be sleeping. Tomorrow your mother will be back.”

He opens the door and fumes follow him out. The stuff is sticking to his clothes. He's muttering something at me, rubbing his eyes and hair. Grey hair, very grey. Used to be straight and brown like a real white man's, Mummie said.

At least I know who to blame for my muisneste. Not that I'm going to say anything. I see he's got that hosepipe in his hand, rolling it up slowly.

“Get out of here” he says very softly. I've spoiled something for him. I pretend like I didn't hear him. You can get away with a lot when someone isn't thinking lekker.

“You want a jaffle?” I ask him and offer the Tupperware bakkie. He looks down at the toasted bread shaped like a discuss, his head twisting funny. Then he takes it from me and

very slowly brings the food to his mouth. He takes a bite but the smoke is doing him no good here. Choking a bit and then going into a coughing fit, a piece of the toastie falls somewhere into his lap. The car sputters, dead. Then he's at my shoulder, leading me out to the fresh air outside.

He leans against the garage wall, looking out at the end of the street. Short, shallow breaths. He closes his eyes and for what feels like a long time we listen to the throbbing music somewhere behind the Courts, cars revving further off and a siren cutting along the arterial road that leads out of the Flats.

Darryl sucks in air through teeth as climbs out of the car. He walks past me and down our street. Passes in and out of dull light. His suit grows darker and I feel something like fear. Maybe it's safer to ride around on a bike at night, but walking? No man. And I don't want to look for the trouble I avoided earlier. I catch up to him and try to get him to stop without sounding like I'm scared.

“Weren't you going to drive somewhere?” I ask

He doesn't answer that. Just coughs.

“A walk will do me better. You come along, seeing that you don't want to sleep.”

“Okay, let me just close Uncle Joah's garage door”

“Leave it open,” he calls back to me.

Maybe in Constantia or some other white place, ya, but not here. This ou's head is in the wrong place; it's making me confused, man! But if he wants to cause nonsense then let him. We leave Joah's garage open to air out. Low smoke spreads along the tar like it wants to do harm. I hope that he just wants to see the end of the street tonight.

The tendrils of cold coming from his mouth are similar to the commotion in his Merc. He looked like a sangoma inside that smoke. Even now, he's carrying that distant look that he had in the car, like he's thinking hard or praying.

“The Lord must be watching over me tonight.” He says to himself.

Now why does the Lord like some people more than others? I know that this man is a dirty man, but still he gets to be close to Him. I don't understand it.

We round the corner into Tawny Street. I catch glimpses of Darryl's face as we move into the half-light.

If one of us died tonight, we'd deserve it. I can't help getting that sentence out of my mind. It feels like the Heideveld response is lingering behind every poplar carving up tar and inside the streetlights with broken bulbs. A child much younger than me took off the back plate of a broken streetlight and got electrocuted as he rifled through the wiring. And they say he looked so surprised when he was dead – his eyebrows were sitting right on top of his forehead. I don't want to be the next story like that.

“This place hasn't changed much.” Darryl says like he's standing far away and looking at the big picture. It's true in many ways, but he's also looking in the dark so he won't see how many of the youngsters have grown up and become teachers and office assistants. He also can't know about the extent of the gangs these days and their rivalries.

Gangs and committees are all you'll find here these days. Coloureds always in groups these days, looking out for the smaller ouense.

Straight ahead of Darryl is the petrol station, closed. Along the side of the quick stop there's some political graffiti back again. Workers have to paint that wall every two months. ‘A symptom of our diseased existence’, Jerome calls it. We turn right, pass the bus stop and stand at the edge of Doorlights territory. He's got a death wish if he wants to go further.

“There's gangsters this side,” is all I manage to say. He takes a long look at me and nods, and so we turn around. I'm a little relieved. I'll feel much better when we're back inside the flat and that garage door is closed.

“Are you afraid of the gangsters?” He asks.

“They were busy shooting earlier on” I say. He must surely know what they do at night? But maybe he’s been away so long that he’s forgotten. I hear him clearing his throat.

“Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul.”

Still, no need to provoke them by walking around like some bulletproof saint. I know that’s sicker not what he means, but I’ll argue that from every angle until we get home. He turns, praise the Lord.

Back in our street, the night is still dark but not as quiet anymore. The drink has got people’s words slipping out from the windows again. When the ouens drink, they get loud and then do something reckless – lash out at a child or woman. Silence settles like a blanket. When they start up again, it’s drunken misery for what they’ve done. Tjanking and saying sorry, over and over. Jerome’s father used to perform like that and that’s why he got kicked out.

“Can’t say I missed this. People having a good time in a bad time. Never thinking of pulling themselves out of this ghetto.”

Now what – must they all reclassify now? Where does he want us to go? We find the garage door open still. I take a long look inside and I’m a little disappointed to find the place untouched. If someone had taken something I could at least say ‘*Ya, ya lekker for you*’ and laugh in my head. He starts pulling down the garage door. I can just *feel* he’s about to say something like ‘do not be afraid’ again. Bleddy reckless.

He closes the door, locks it and from the corner of my eye I see movement along the vibracrete. A figure jumps into our street from the main road. Another follows over.

“Here’s trouble” I say out loud and quickly cross over to the steps of the Court. When I’m safely at the front gate, I turn back and my stomach drops. Darryl is still in the road, sicker daydreaming while he crosses the road.

The ouens will reach him before he gets to the flat. I unlock the gate and urge him over with my hand but he's oblivious to the danger. Tucked into his jacket again, looking down at his feet and footsteps and the light of glass catching off the ground. Bleddy muisneste! The two figures finally reach him, but there's no sound. They catch him at the start of our pavement.

I watch as he turns towards them in slow motion. He lets out a noise and I close my eyes. In the darkness I ask my father's God why something like this is happening. I don't know this man but my heart is scuffed raw. I open my eyes and look for blood on the tar but find nothing. Rather, one of the ouens is giving Darryl a handshake. There is some light on his face and I can see he is a skollie, though I can't make him out. They're speaking softly – you can't even make out what they're saying. Mouths hardly moving. Meanwhile, Darryl is answering them like they're standing on the other side of the vibracrete wall.

“Yes I'm back just for the weekend – have you met my boy before?” he asks them and calls me over with a wave. I hurry inside, not lis to hang around with more skollies. Then again, maybe they're the ones Charlie or Nantjies sent to finish me off. I go cold all over again, slamming the door shut and locking it.

All for a bleddy Chopper. The bike isn't worth all this grief. I should've kept it for the day and let them finish me off afterwards – at least then I could've had some fun in the day. I want to pray like Darryl does for this to go away, man.

A knock at the door, firm. I cover my body with a pillow. If I'm going to go now I can at least be a little bit comfortable.

Kyle?

It's Darryl again. I get up and put my ear to the door. I can hear him breathing – no one else. Unless they're holding their breath.

“Who's standing there with you?”

“No one. Come on, don’t be foolish. It’s cold out here.”

I unlock and open the door slightly. Peer out with my swollen eye. Just Darryl. He pushes the door open and I go with it against the wall. I doesn’t even notice. Just takes off his jacket and misses my disbelief. I have to ask:

“What happened with those two ouens outside?”

“I recognised those two. Michael and Keenan. Back in the day we called them Sol en Gobelet. You know that show? They scared me half to death tonight but I recognised them immediately. I told them, ‘The last time I saw you was at your baptisms. I hope the two of you are living lives worthy of your calling.’”

“Michael and Keenan are real skollies today. Always stealing and doing drugs. They’ve both been to jail already.”

Darryl’s face goes hard or something. He doesn’t look happy.

“A real shame,” he says, but when he looks at me his eyes get lighter. He says thanks for the walk and goes to bed. I switch off the jaffle maker – imagine if the flat burnt down while we were away? – and go to the window. The two are still standing at the curb, smoking. They eventually kill their cigarettes and walk off.

Inside, alone, I remember that I’m a guilty man. And that two gangs are still sieker on my case. And I remember that my bed is sopnat with sweat already. I walked outside at the worst possible time and I was unharmed, but how long will that last? If they don’t get me tonight, it’ll be some other time.

Michael and Keenan sieker had a moment there while they were waiting for their entjies to die, thinking about what Darryl just said. Maybe they watched their whole lives play up until today, and when they walked off wondered how things had gone so wrong. Now I can wonder with them for the rest of the night. That blerrie Chopper.

The knuckle of Nantjies keeps hitting my eyelids when I drift off to sleep. I picture his ugly gevriet and him pointing a finger gun at me. He pulls down the bolt.

Bang!

Spots of black on the ceiling seem to be moving in the darkness. Clouds of evil. It is 2.30am and my heart is still sure that I will die tonight. I feel it rattling inside, shaking my whole body so that the springs in my mattress dance about.

The devil must've been leading me on then, Mummie would sieker say. And now all I can do is wait for my death. *Another young life claimed by gangsterism*, the community gazette may say.

But what was happening in Uncle Joah's garage? That's the only thing falling into my mind. I get up to take a pee in the dark, hoping I hit the bowl and not the edge. Darryl was enveloped in smoke, eyes closed. At peace for a change. Just like the Sunday school stories with Moses. I put my ear to the door of Mummie's room. No crying this time – he's snoring like he's got no worries. He must be feeling better after sitting in the Merc then. I could do with that, I know. I take the spare key out of the bowl in the kitchen. For the second time tonight I cross the street.

There is a chill hanging in the air outside, like the night-time knows something is going on here on the Flats. Luckily, Michael and Keenan are nowhere to be found.

I unlock the side door and step inside. No trails of smoke left in here. I climb into Darryl's car and sit in the passenger side. Comfortable. Leather seats greet you like nothing else – a million times more comfortable than a crate in a taxi and those bus seats, worn through with chewing gum and pencil drawings. It's even better than a blerrie Chopper.

This car will take you somewhere that a bicycle never could. Imagine all the scrap and the passengers you could take. And how much is this thing worth? I'd be the main ou, for real. I look at my face in the rearview mirror, ugly as a thorn. My head looks too small for my

face. And there's nothing distinctive, no lightness of skin or straight hair – I am just a body in those packs of children you find in the parks. Where will I end up? Newspaper clipping – another dead youngster on the Flats, gang-related? Maybe.

I shift over to the driver's seat. The streetlights shine through that tiny garage window straight into my gevriet. I close my eyes to pray but nothing happens, and I'm getting cold. How do you start praying and how do you start a car? I fidget with the handbrake.

I mos know I did wrong – that needs to be sorted out yes. And it can't hurt to ask some help from the Lord. But at Mummie's church, the people praying always sound ready. Like they already know what they gonna say. And the first words out of their mouths are so duidelik that you know the Lord is listening. What can I say to Him? The handbrake falls down and I get a massive skrik, but the car doesn't move anywhere.

I climb between the seats and lay across the backseat, hoping that will help a little more. All that smoke – was that Darryl's idea or did it just happen? Is it a pastor's privilege to have the fire and smoke – man of God like Mummie says?

Here the seats are less comfortable and smell of smoke. I lower myself from the seat and along the two footwells, but laying across them feels like bending backwards. Not meant for praying in, ne? This whole mission is getting tiring and boring. I probably haven't done something interesting enough.

So I try the boot. It's only been half-shut so I don't need a key. The boot is big, so I slip in easily and the door shuts on its own, properly. Darryl has packed some of his things from home into a gym bag and there are some books strewn about. I pull out a windbreaker from the bag, put it on. There's a blanket under the bag.

An image falls into my mind: me, dead, lying in a coffin – except the coffin is a boot and there are little flower heads all over my face and suit and people are sad but not crying. And I imagine that I'm suddenly not there anymore – I'm up, somewhere up, riding on a

Chopper on golden clouds and streets, kicking up dust from the stars. It's warmer and completely dark and I feel the urge to pray but my eyes grow heavy. Even balled up in the boot of my father's car, I drift off. Stars become dark.

I see that sad dog in my street. He looks ready to die. I bend down to pet him, even with the fleas running around his head, fighting for a place to drink. His coat colour changes like a river running – that's how much the etters are moving about. I lean in so that my eye nearly touches his hair. The fleas are actually spiders who come and leave by threads that catch the wind, narrowly missing my head. They go up and I put my hand over his head to see if he'll pull away but he just looks up at me. As my hand comes down he barks and I stop in my tracks. Then he speaks:

“Blessed.”

X

One of Darryl's bags hits me full in the face. Awake, I find myself moving in the dark. I'm lying down but I'm moving. Tiny pricks of light glitter from pinholes at my feet. Liewe aarde, I'm still in the boot of Darryl's car! It feels like my chest is closing up. I see the death of me – the rosaries and now the tears and Charlie and Nantjies popping wheelies in the graveyard, laughing at me. *Taatie tamatie, he died in the boot of car!*

Tears are running down my face as I start kicking against the inside of the boot. Where are they going to find me?

“Darryl! Darryl!”

The car begins to slow down. I feel the lurch as the car takes a sharp turn. Another bag in the jaw. I'm whimpering like a child – not a man. Not the ou who stole a gangster's bike. Just a boy, lost.

I am moving in the dark, but I am starting to slow. I hear wheels struggle against gravel. I stop. Once more, the suitcase hits me in the face. I punch it back, cracking a knuckle.

“Eina!”

“Shhh!” I hear from the outside.

The boot is flooded with light and an angel pulls me out. I want to leap with relief – I was lost and now my prayers are answered. I have come to a place of rest.

Then I am pulled out and slapped through the face. All the whites in Darryl’s eyes are showing. I have not reached a promised land but still I smile. I am grateful to be alive and sitting in the passenger seat instead of a coffin. I don’t know how to say ‘thank you’ in the moment. It hurts to smile at such an angry looking man. He pushes me into the passenger seat and I bounce right out onto the dashboard.

“What the hell are you thinking? Do you know what this looks like – me pulling you out of my boot?”

We are parked outside a rest stop of a petrol station covered with a corrugated roof. It’s early morning, I think. Other than a petrol attendant eyeing us, no one is in sight. I’ve never been in a place that looked so much like the middle of nowhere.

“Last night I wanted to pray like you, but I fell asleep.”

“What are you talking about? Are you trying to be funny?” he says and drags me out of the car. I give him a look, you know, to ask if I must answer all of those questions at once.

“Do you know what you’ve done?” He says and then klaps me at the back of the ear.

Now what must I do? The tears want to show but I won’t let them. He’s pointing at something behind me. A sign. Matjiesfontein, 5km. Where the hell are we? Darryl is crouching down speaking right in my ear, still pointing at the sign. His breath smells thick

with Fisherman sweets – the ones that the smokers use. I hear it cracking at the back of his teeth.

“Now you see here, boy, you’re a helluva distance from home now because you want to be funny. And I’m not going back anytime soon,”

“Can we phone Mummie then? Maybe she can get someone to pick me up.”

I see just there that he suddenly remembers something: I have a mother and that he had a wife. Eyes shift into worry.

“Stay in the car.”

He leaves me for a payphone box at the petrol station entrance. His footsteps crunch under gravel and get softer. A fat fly buzzes around me and the open door lazily.

I watch how he stands with the receiver in his hand for a long time, just looking down at it. Taatie. He sees me watching him and eventually punches in a phone number. Mummie’s sister in Bonteheuwel. A fly rests on my knee. I strike at it to shoo it away but the blerrie thing is too heavy so I end up crumpling it all over my leg. Guts and all that. Demmit, man.

Darryl is pleading into that phone, arms extended every now and then. Better him than me. I don’t even know how I’d explain this mistake to her. I find a used tissue in the cubbyhole and wipe off the mess.

I mos didn’t know he was leaving so early. I wanted to pray, man! But that won’t be good enough for Mummie. *You should know better*. The thing is, maybe I *did* actually know better – without knowing it. Because now I really am out of the way of Nantjies and Charlie. I suppose my prayer got answered. I’m far away from their anger and ouens and guns. But where am I going? I walk over to Darryl just as he puts the phone down.

“Can’t I speak to her?” I say though I know what he’s going to say.

“What did I tell you? You don’t listen”

We walk back to the car. When we’re inside, he sighs.

“I already put down. She didn’t want to have a reasonable conversation. And there’s no time for phone calls every five minutes – we’ve got to keep moving, because people are looking for me” here he turns back to start reversing, and he looks out with eyes I’ve seen in a tikkop’s head.

“Huh? What people?”

“Evil scumbags. Now I have to worry about getting you home safely as well.”

“Just drop me off at a station,” I say, “Then I can get a bus home.”

“You’re not listening to me, boy. These people are the worst you’ll find. They’ll be after you as well now that you’ve been travelling with me. And they’ll use you to get to me.”

There’s that cold feeling again. Am I getting sick now? Having gangsters and unknown skelms coming after you takes a toll mos.

“Also,” he continues, “We’re already past Matjiesfontein. I don’t know how many buses go back to Cape Town from here, since we’re over 200 kilometres away. We’ll make a stop in Beaufort West.”

Those places sound vrek far. The furthest I’ve ever been from home. I prod my swollen eye gently, hoping it will heal soon. Facing up to Nantjies and Charlie seems like a lot less effort than driving through the whole of South Africa now with this ou. I see I’m still holding onto the tissue full of broken fly. It goes out the window. Darryl gives me a look but I’m staring out at the dry fields rising and falling to our right. Jinne.

4

“Now when you turned white did you have to show them your tollie?” I ask on the way to Beaufort West. The clouds grew and now the rain is here, drumming heavy on the Merc’s bonnet and roof. I’m hungry, thirsty and need to pee and again the thoughts just fall into my head. Now in the last breath of the morning, these thoughts spill out of my mouth like a dream. Darryl keeps his eyes on the road.

“No, thankfully not. Though for some people it’s still humiliating. They check your hair,”

“To see if you’re a kroeskop?”

“And sometimes they hit you with a cane on your hands to get an ‘eina!’ out of you”

“That’s mos dom – I can tell them that without needing a klap”

He scoffs.

“It’s done to see what your ‘natural’ accent is. Because people put on otherwise.

Apparently pain brings the truth out best. How did you shout when they gave you that black eye?”

This man is looking for trouble. We pass a couple of signs before I pick up my train of thought,

“Elton says that the people check tollies because they –”

“I don’t want to hear about what Elton thinks, because it’s just not true. And don’t focus on those vulgar things,” he says, almost like I came up with that story myself.

“If you weren’t with me, things would be very different.” He says.

I click my tongue. Softly. Now what I can do? The sounds of the road fill our ears and thoughts for some time. Then:

“Legally, I’m white because I appealed at the Reclassification Board in Cape Town. I knew a guy on there through church so I had a favourable hearing. Plus, my grandfather is British, so I just showed them his lineage. No need for the pencil test or anything.”

“My great-grandfather is British?”

“Yes. Why are you smirking? You think having British lineage makes you a better coloured?” and he scoffs at me again. I shrug and look out the window, feeling the red in my face. Was I smirking?

“Oupa Clive was sickly in his home town and liked the climate in Cape Town. He liked your great-grandmother even more. They had seven children.”

Yesterday! Who knew the British could be so biased? Jerome used to say that big families was what happened when TV wasn't around, and I thought he was just talking about South Africans.

“Now wasn't it illegal?”

“Mixed marriages? Not back then. It's something like there were too many men for most to be fastidious.”

His arm is on the side of the door, looking a little more relaxed. He looks like he'd be a tidy one. Smiling. But I'm also here, staring through his thinning hair, reminding him of a past life. What does he do these days besides pray?

“Now why didn't you like being coloured?” I ask, bluntly. He must have grown up right here.

“It's not that I didn't like it – there's a lot that's happened and it's difficult to explain...”

He grips the wheel tightly. Checkmate. Or whatever you say when you trap someone solid.

X

My eyes grow heavy when the light gives in for the day. We've done nothing but drive, only stopping on the side of the road to pee a few times. Thankfully I haven't needed to do anything more yet. I annihilated the stash of sandwiches wrapped in plastic in his cubbyhole. Fancy things. They had cream cheese and lettuce and salami in them – not like the penny colonies and cheese slices I put on a roll back home.

“You're going through them too quickly! Have you got worms?” he shouted and shut the cubbyhole until our next stop. One per break. By the time I start drifting off, three are

already sitting lekker in my stomach. I'm smiling. The food and those mountains in the distance make me drowsy.

"Now listen," he says and pokes me hard on the arm, "You aren't just here in front for your own convenience. You have a duty as the passenger to keep me awake."

Almost like I wanted to be here.

"What must I do?"

"Talk."

"About?"

"Whatever you feel like talking about. I just need to listen to something. What was that thing you wanted to know earlier? About praying?"

I mull over my question a bit.

"Did you have to learn to pray like that?"

"Like what?"

I don't know how to explain it, so he just starts talking. He says that he wasn't just born a Christian. That he realised he was broken and asked God to fix him. Then he started praying.

"So God has been giving you stuff for a long time?" I ask.

"That's not really how it works. Yes He gives, but prayer is more of a conversation than just asking for things. In my years growing up at Pacaltsdorp..."

My eyelids begin to close again...

"How have you been dealing with the stay aways?" he asks, jolting me awake. I won't say sorry. Not when it sounds like he's doing an interview for TV. He does that thing with his voice – *I am only interested until an advert comes up* – that's impressive but annoying. Because he's just asking for white noise. Like when you leave the TV on after broadcast hours when all the interviews are done.

The needle on the fuel is hovering under the “E” when we stop at the Mobil station just outside Beaufort West. There is a helper at hand but Darryl just waves him away. He gets out of the car to shake his legs. I run in to the toilet inside the shop, past the man at the counter and give one of the longest pees of my life.

“A predicament,” he says, turning to me as I return, “Is this: Do we give this petrol attendant the opportunity to work – however menial and patronising it may be – because I want to honour his choice?”

He flicks out something stuck between his teeth – has he been eating without offering? “Or do we rail against the whole system to refuse his help? What do you think?”

“You’ve already told him you don’t want him to help.”

“Well noted. Well noted, yes.”

He must’ve had *something* to eat – why else would he be so chirpy all of a sudden?

“I think we’ve gotten some good distance on Lorber and his thugs.”

Lorber and his genote. Interesting, but that’s not as important right now.

“I’m hungry,” I say.

He gives me a rand and wants me to buy pies for the both of us. He’s the adult, but he wants a child to do the work. Then he asks if I washed my hands. I go back inside the shop with the money. He’s lucky if I don’t blerrie pee on his chicken pie.

The bakery display doubles up as the counter where you’re meant to pay and it’s manned by a dazed white man with red hair. 49c a pastry. Rolls and croissants and pies are placed in their separate areas. A lucky fly has snuck into the croissants section and he’s enjoying all of them in peace.

The attendant – Hennie on his lapel – only stares at the back wall, disinterested.

“Hullo,” I say and start for the back row, where I can maybe get something with that extra five cent piece I picked up the other night. Or last night, I think.

“Kinders, ne? Running through this shop with no respect.”

“Sorry,” I say. Then I want to klap myself – why must I give away that it was me running around? He’s perked up and looks down in my direction.

“Can I have two pies please? Chicken and steak and kidney.”

He takes out two chicken pies without looking at them.

“You’re not from here.” He says, punching numbers into the machine. It finally beeps back. Something in his voice sounds coiled back, like he wants to catch me out.

“Fifteen cents. Was it you that ran to my toilet?”

I place the one rand coin down. He picks it up and feels it, still not looking at me.

“No.”

“Come here,” he says

“Where?”

“Here. To my arm.”

I step over, very close to the man. Now I can see his stubble growing out of his chin, his clip-on tie and milky eyes. He lifts his right arm and puts it on my head. Starts feeling my hair. His hand is sweaty – I can feel the back of my head get warmer. His mouth is at my ear.

“You want to lie about it to me? I know your kind.”

And then there is an ugly sound that comes from deep in his throat.

Hot ’not!

I am flung over the counter. My kneecaps crack against the tiles, elbows slip on their way back up. The floor is cold and dusty. I’m back onto the customer’s side of the shop, scrambling up quickly. I take out a pyramid of toilet rolls and they scatter. Toilet rolls resting

over the pies making a mess inside their paper bags. Hennie cranes his head about for me, his face twisted with anger.

“You think you can just come in here and make trouble? Do you see the sign?”

Scrambling backwards, I manage to follow along the direction that he’s pointing to. A picture of a swan – a calendar stuck on December 1979. On the other end of the wall, a sign: WHITES ONLY. I don’t know what to say.

“Get lost you vyand!” he screams and feeling along the counter, picks up a few Wilson blocks and throws them in my direction. One drops right into the packet and I’m gone.

X

“Come again?” Darryl asks, like he wants to make sure I’m not lying. His zip isn’t up but I’m not going to tell him that.

“The man touched my hair and then threw me over the counter!” I say, tears streaming down my face. Luckily I’m not sniffing like a real tjankie-balie. Darryl isn’t even watching my tears fall down fast so maybe it’s not so embarrassing.

“That’s probably what I should’ve done to you when I found you sneaking around. Where’s my change?”

I don’t believe it. This man is asking for a klap and he’ll sieker get one before Pretoria. He’s waiting for an answer.

“He didn’t give any,” I say. “Just threw Wilson blocks at me.”

“No that won’t do – wait in the car” he tells me. Tears are drying on my face. I wish I’d held that back. Why must I cry in front of him? He’s the kind of ou who will make fun of you, I know. Or bring it up again later on. The thought makes me tjank even more. Through tears I watch him disappear into the shop.

There are sieker two ways to answer to that man Hennie and his level of taatieness. There's the white way where you can throw distaste around without protest, and then there's the "nie blankes" way of protesting to draw out distaste. I'm too far away to hear what they say, but I know how I want this to play out – it falls into my hungry mind:

"Hello," Hennie will sing with the false assumption of a fellow sympathiser. Orange-yellow hair waning away from the crown of his head coupled with his wrinkles make it difficult to guess his age. A hard life.

I hear a Wilson block being smacked on the counter. The man eyes it, mouth open, not following just yet.

"My son says you threw him with Wilson blocks instead of giving him change"

Some shock will flitter across his eyes. Almost like you're hearing the end of a joke and you didn't expect it. *You're very white-looking to have such a dark boy*, Hennie sieker thinks. Maybe the shame will be too much and he'll just give it over. He has narrowed his eyes very slightly. This is where you have to respond in the right way or he'll shut you out. He'll either grow tired of a stand-off or use some other external force – the law or something worse. Darryl holds his gaze.

Behind Hennie sits an A4 pamphlet in block letters: HAVE YOU SEEN THIS MAN? with a generic coloured-black man staring back. He looks like a normal ou, but the big letters tell you he did something bad. Back to Hennie, with the brown in his eyes swirling like petrol. The man sizes him up and crosses his arms. You can almost see fumes running off his eyes.

"This boy of yours went into the wrong toilets. There's a sign outside,"

What would Darryl say here? "Okay"? Or a, "Very well, but that doesn't mean you can steal from customers."

Then the man laughs – a sharp, vicious laugh. *Now I'm going to enjoy this*, he seems to say. Darryl realising that he's sold himself short. To show Hennie what he is doing so soon in the conversation is to put him back in charge. Hennie, working just outside Beaufort West at a stop that has separate toilets but no chicken pies, who finds it fair to take money that doesn't belong to him, can't be met with the truth head-on.

You need to lead people like him gently on a river of his own desolation, so that he sees the thing for himself in silence and gives in. That's the kind of person Darryl is dealing with. The baas. Better than all the browns and blacks on the ground.

This person must wonder "Have I done something wrong, now that the possibility stands veiled before me?" for them to change their minds. I see Darryl thinking about when he was white, when it was easier.

I see the man laughing again, enjoying himself. Petrol attendant clipping against the sun outside, watching, wringing out a squeegee. The windows of the Merc is clean. Behind him the cars drift by, as usual. No one stops here for long. And sieker with good reason. Hennie, with convincing anger, says "Get off my property now", and talks junk about the coloureds. They only steal and shoot and have babies.

And I see Darryl matching the zeal of his fellow white and enemy, prophesying that a change is coming soon. That his worst fears must come to pass because inside of them is actually something good. Copper and string and everything on the inside will be revealed and people will realise what they've done, knowing that the best is yet to come.

I see Hennie, with hands under the table, the petrol in his eyes dark, telling Darryl to get out of the shop or he'll shoot him. The blood rushes up to my head and I feel hot and cold all at once, jong. I close my eyes. There is a hand at the door. I hear Darryl sinking into his seat, away.

And then we are on the road, gunning it on the main road and away. A packet falls across my lap. A lekker, full steak pie. I look over at Darryl. He's digging into a croissant. Two more lay in the packet on his lap.

"Eat."

I draw the pastry out of the metal shell and take a bite. Jinne, it's moooi!

"Didn't that ou stry with you?" I ask.

"No. He was rather racist for a blind man, hey? He reminds me of a man my sister used to like when we were younger. The guy could only see vague outlines around him. Imagine living like that?"

I find the Wilson block at the bottom of my packet. The perfect liquorice toffee to end off a meal. And free as well, nogal.

"I think you're going to be staying with my sister until this whole situation blows over."

"Okay, but I have school."

"That's all very well, but do you want to die? If not, you'll listen to me. This isn't forever – it's just until things change. Stienie lives in Pretoria. You'll be safe with her. I'll drop you off on my way out."

Way out where?

The wax paper of the Wilson block doesn't separate from the sweet so lekker. The thing is probably expired or it got wet or something. I don't care – it was free, mos! I throw the naked toffee up in the air and it lands right in my mouth. In the corner of my eye Darryl shakes his head.

"It's Sunday today, so we'll stop at the first church that is open and looks decent."

I wonder what he means by ‘decent’, but he is focussing on the road again.

We end up at a church at the edge of Hopetown. The town has a nice name, you have to say. It has grown dark.

“The day’s been full of surprises – how about one more?” he says, almost like he’s cheerful or something.

Inside, there are wooden pews rather than the plastic chairs I’m used to at the Lord’s Peace Commission in Heideveld. That’s the church Mummie attends now and then.

The congregants are already singing by the time we are inside. I brush up against Darryl so that I don’t stand out too much from the suits and silver on display tonight. I’m still wearing my pyjamas from last night. We shuffle into a pew at the back, right up against an old tannie wearing perfume that instantly burns my throat. It peels off her coat and into my mouth and my nose starts to itch. Then I start sneezing.

“Stop it,” Darryl growls so fiercely that my body soema listens immediately. Yesterday. He makes it look like I was sneezing on purpose. I look around, but no one cares. The congregants are mostly old people. Coloureds. And they can sing. They go through three Afrikaans hymns that I’ve never heard before. I mumble along, trying to follow after Darryl and the rest of them. How does everyone know these except me?

Then comes an English hymn: *softly, softly, Jesus is calling*, which reminds me of Mummie again. I haven’t seen her for a couple of days, but I’m nogal oraait. I hope she is too, though I know she’s worried sick. Imagine – on the one weekend Darryl comes back, everything falls to pieces. She’s sieker with the church sisters, lifting me up in prayer. If only she had the smoke and power like Darryl.

The pastor eventually lifts both his hands and tells us to sit down. I tuck my slippers under my pew, out of sight. Some of that perfume wafts over to me and I sneeze into my sleeve. I don’t even look at Darryl – the ou has no mercy.

The pastor is much younger than most of the congregation. He's maybe closer to Darryl's age. He's wearing some kind of dress with royal purple material draping over his shoulders. What kind with that? He prays and then with a booming voice shrieks me out of any hope of dozing off:

“Children, what a time God is calling us to live in.”

It's as though he can see through the woman's hat and veil in front of me, locking onto my eyes. The eyes of the principals everyone likes – friendly but strict. *Children?* That could sicker only be me here tonight, ne?

He reads something about Israelites complaining about their lives, and then says that it was sin that separated them and made them afraid. Not that anyone here is an Israelite, but anyway. His hands are in the air, drifting about as he speaks.

“And who led the people of Israel out of slavery into the promises of God? Moses. Ordained to lead his own out of oppression and godlessness.

“Moses saw the Lord up close, he drew near to the pillar of smoke and the thick presence of His goodness,” handkerchief wipes at a sop-nat forehead, “And he saw his calling through! Will you see your calling through?”

Yes Lord's and amens ring around the wooden hall, lekker warm. You soema want to join in.

“Now what was Moses's greatest challenge? He didn't believe! ‘Who am I?’ he asked repeatedly,” (I watch as a fleck of spit catches on the man's lip and stays there, like a small patch of disease) “Because he was unaware of the authority being bestowed to him. And the anger of the Lord was kindled at Moses, but He was also merciful, and so Aaron was assigned as a helper.”

Where is he going with this? I look up and find a nest tucked into the corner of a ceiling plate that had been raised for some reason. Now don't the people in the church find

their hats and shoulders white on some Sundays? Those people who sit in the same place and never understand where the strond –

My head rings with a smack of Darryl's heavy hand. I look right at him, my left ear hot and angry. His eyes: *pay attention or else*. I settle back in my pew and glance at the old lady sitting beside me. She's facing the front but her eyes are tuned right on me. Her perfume never stopped looking my way either.

This is much worse than Lord's Peace Commission.

At what feels like the second hour of Moses's life story, I start squirming in my seat again. I count the hymns books in the pews and memorise all the markings scratched in them. *Joey. Heart. Geraldine; Superman Logo; Speech-bubble clouds with nothing to say*. But I can feel the warmth of Darryl sitting beside me and his gaze moves over me every now and then that makes me freeze with fear. So I sit still again and listen.

"The people knew that Moses was leading them by the Lord's will, and yet they grumbled!" (Another amen from a lady near the front – the same culprit going off after every second sentence). Maybe the services were too long for the Israelites as well?

I think about the Chopper and all the trouble it's gotten me into. Not looking around or anything – just in my mind. One blerrie bike. Beautiful and a mooi thing to ride around, even just for ten minutes. I look at Darryl without turning my head. He's cool.

I know I shouldn't be thinking of stuff like that in church, because it's selfish or whatever, but it's there. And anyway, is it wrong to love a bike rather than loving tik and gangsterism?

Then the pastor says: "You want what you don't have and so you scheme and kill to get it. You are jealous of what others have, but you can't get it, so you fight and wage war to take it away from them."

Darryl, you donder, I think, glancing at him again. You set me up.

The bicycle incident was sieker unnecessary, ya. Maybe even wrong. But I know they were gangsters and it's mos right if they wipe themselves out. *Confusion in the camp*, like the Pastor says. But he says that's where the Lord couldn't bless his people, because ouense were trying to rise up against Moses – take what wasn't theirs.

I think of Nantjies, Elton, Charlie, Doorlights, everyone trying to suck the little life out of the Flats. Bleeding mense dry, literally. There's always a man dead at the end of the week, laying in a field without his wages. Children going missing; faces in the newspapers. And then the police pull up with their “anti-terrorism” moeilikheid and scare tactics and the signs saying “nee, jy moet agter sit” even when the bus is empty.

And the dust, that blerrie dust that stands up and runs itself into the corner of your eye, so that you forget about Jerome sucking on a bompie in prison – hazel-eyed: “That's exactly what they want to do to us every day”. So people are protesting until the ouense listen. And check, now coloureds and blacks can ride most of the busses back home.

I know have every reason to be upset and I cross my arms at the thought of going up for the altar call at the end of the service. “Anyone feel the knocking of the Holy Spirit now,” the pastor asks over and again. Eventually he gives up asking and closes with a mighty AMEN we leave shortly after, the choir at our backs singing a hymn I don't know. I made it unscathed, just like back home with the gangsters and at the Commission.

The cold air outside helps me forget about a sinking feeling. Like I'm on the run from more than just Darryl's enemies.

Do not fear those who can kill the body but not the soul. What does it mean?

“You alright?” he's caught me thinking and I'm suddenly a bit scared.

“Are we sleeping in the car tonight?” I ask to change the subject

“You can take the backseat. I'll sit in your spot once we're out of the danger zone.”

What zone is that? The only problem so far was a racist shopkeeper back in Beaufort West. And we even got free sweets out of that. I slide through the gap between front seats and land on the backseat. A seatbelt buckle connects with my ribs.

“Interesting what he said, though I’m not sure he gave the full picture tonight. He uses Moses as an example to say: Don’t grasp for something out of entitlement. But what about living for justice? Surely we must speak up and act against oppressors confessing to be Christians?”

“He puts us at the mercy of the apartheid system without a way out, that preacher.”

I just say “Erh,” nodding like I understand. I think I understand... You can’t just let people walk over you.

“Sometimes I get the urge to just to do something when people go down that road of weakness... Just to remind them that they can go about their lives with dignity, you know?”

He’s smacking his palm against the steering wheel – jokingly I think.

“But I like him, that preacher. He reminds me of the minister that ordained me back in the day. Very loud.”

I lay on my stomach, head resting on my arms, crossed. Ribs paining. He keeps on driving.

Sleep comes eventually. Takes me back to my future bike, golden and beautiful. Later that dream is broken by Darryl murmuring in the passenger seat. He’s running away from something in his sleep and it sounds scary. I click my tongue at him and pull a makeshift blanket over me.

X

We wake up in the car – me on the backseat and Darryl in the passenger seat again – and find that the car won’t start.

“No man,” Darryl says after spending a couple of minutes getting rid of that pie in the bush. He could’ve just used a petrol station toilet, but he doesn’t want to risk anything after yesterday’s drama. I tell him I’ll rather risk it at another petrol station again.

“Have you ever shifted gears before? You know how to drive?”

I shake my head.

“Okay, then let’s try. You know the gear stick?”

He wriggles it around in place.

“You shift gears so that the engine can work smoothly. You get into first gear by pressing in the clutch” – it’s the pedal on the left – “Fully in and then moving the stick.”

“Okay,” I say, but I’ve forgotten it all already. He gets out and stands at the boot.

I try to start it and give petrol but the whole gedoente makes me very confused. Then he tells me to steer while he starts pushing. It’s slow going, sieker because we’re going uphill. “Push!” I shout back at him, knowing it’ll get on his nerves. He mos wanted to be out here. He tells me to turn the key and find the clutch but I have no idea what he means. I’m looking under the seats, in the cubbyhole, on the backseat...

“It’s not here!”

When his shirt is sopnat and we’re a few steps further up the hill, he tells me to pull up the handbrake. The thing goes up with an ugly creak and the car stops dead.

“Push this button in,” he says, pointing at the end of the handbrake, “To not break the handbrake, please.”

Ya okay. No need to be difficult, ou.

He taps me to move over into my seat and looks at me.

“*This*” he says, pressing down on the left foot lever hard, “Is this clutch!”

But he doesn’t give me another chance to get it right. He says he’s putting the car in reverse and then lets the handbrake down gently. We start rolling back. In the side view

mirror I can see a speck of a car heading our way. Our Merc is moving backwards quickly backwards when Darryl puts his foot down on the petrol. I almost shriek to death – the Merc is alive again and revving again! Darryl smiles at me like he’s the main one.

“Not a problem for –”

A car horn blares just behind us and sends both of us jumping in our seats. Darryl hits his head on the ceiling. A sleek-looking Golf roars past us, sicker angry that we were rolling backwards towards them.

“You’re the co-pilot, young man. You must say if there’s a car approaching!” Darryl shouts at me, rubbing his head.

X

My headache wears off quickly and I start to feel hungry again. But I must bring up food carefully, especially since I was so lasting over the pies. He wasn’t happy going in and sorting out my mess. So I take the scenic route with my words:

“Why were you looking through your notes in Mummie’s room?”

“I wanted to see if there were any sermons worth remembering. But I tore up most of them before we left.”

“Why?”

“They don’t seem relevant in the light of things.”

“Why?”

“Are you going to ask me that the whole time?”

But I want to know. How else can a person ask ‘why’? He scratches the back of his neck roughly. I soema feel my own skin pinching, that’s how rough he is.

“A preach is a very particular thing in my mind. It consists of two parts – exposition and exegesis. How I understand it – simply – is that the former means lifting out information

in the Bible to fit a particular message, and the other is expressing the context of the text so that meaning—”

The yawn is out of my mouth before I even realize it. I’m never going to get food if I keep this up.

“What I mean to say,” he goes on, “Is that those words of the past pale against the calling I was given. If I’m supposed to be revealing to you the immeasurable goodness of God above through my words, they’d better be good enough. Expressing weight and action. Weight and action – those two things are essential.

“You notice how fire weighs nothing? But it’s full of action – it will burn you through if you let it. That’s the Word – it doesn’t seem intimidating but it’s full of power. And that’s how the men of faith were as well: look at people like Moses and Gideon were before they met with the Lord. They were weak!”

“Moses wasn’t weak,” I say, remembering that he was a prince in Egypt. They taught us that in Sunday school, mos.

“But he didn’t believe God at first, right? When he was told to lead his people to freedom. Weakness doesn’t come from your upbringing, no, it’s in the way you think”

And he taps his head like it’s got a leak.

“Ya, okay.” I say, feeling junk that I forgot about Moses and looked stupid. He was a bit of a bangbroek in the beginning, come to think of it. But I also realize, too late, that Darryl has done magic again. He turned my question directed at him on its head so that I end up looking dom again. And I didn’t even get a chance to bring up food yet.

“Do you know why she kept all my notes? I’d have burned them if I were her.”

She probably knew you’d come back and uproot everything again. She mos knew you well. But I shrug and say ‘I don’t know’

“In any case, you keep things that you think will help you in time. Maybe she looked at them when she wanted to remember stuff or whatever. This car for instance,” he says, tapping the wheel (much softer this time) “Was a gift from my father when I left Pacaltsdorp. It’s my entire inheritance, I think. And I was tempted to sell when your mother found out she was pregnant. I was going to buy a bicycle to get around, but she insisted we keep it. And now look how right she was”

He’s smiling but that sinking feeling is back in my chest. I watch the fence lines move with the hills, let it take my thoughts and hunger.

X

“You’ve still got a job to do. Keep me awake.”

My eyes are open. Sun isn’t up yet. More crops behind fences, and just in the distance a farm house, all alone. We’re back on the N12, overtaking Datsuns and trucks at every opportunity. The rain is coming down erg now, making it difficult to tell what is what around here. Not that there’s much to see. Farmland gives way to more farmland, all fenced back and boring. The wire goes along and beyond the road, tapering off somewhere in the distance. Or maybe they never end?

Whoever these plots belong to sieker have no interest in them, but Darryl says that it’s just not the right season for planting yet. Or that sometimes people let the soil sit for a season, just so that it doesn’t get overworked like in Bible times. Sometimes there’s a few cows or sheep, but mostly it’s just hills on both sides of the road. Nothing worth stopping for.

“This isn’t your ideal start to the week, I know. What would you be doing today?”

“Look for scrap.”

“To sell?”

“Ya”

I'm not lis for a heart-to-heart from Darryl. We drive on for a few kilometres. I enjoy the silence. My cheek is tucked against the seatbelt and every now and then the sun pokes through the clouds. But Darryl isn't done, obviously.

"Something I've noticed already: You're always responding to things, never expressing how you feel beforehand. You're allowed to do that, you know."

"Okay."

"You see – a response. That's not you. You're not actually showing your character."

Silence. I don't know what he wants me to do. What is the right thing is to say so that he can get off my case?

"What do you like?" He asks.

"Collecting stuff is lekker. Selling it for scrap. Corrugated iron, fibreglass, paper. There's all kinds of goetes to sell around the Flats."

"Who do you sell it to?"

"Jehovah Jireh Scrap Station. It's Epping side."

"Epping? That's quite a walk. Is that why a Chopper would help?"

I nod.

"But how would you cart all your stuff on a bike?"

"I've got a contraption that I've already made. It's like a trailer you attach at the back."

"Sounds dangerous."

"No, it's clever. When we get back home I must show it to you. I keep it in Uncle Joah's garage."

"Ah. That place was a pig-sty – is all that junk yours?"

All mine, yes. The haul of the week: plastic containers, glass bottles, sheets of corrugated iron. Joah is patient with me because he feels sorry for me. He thinks I'm taatie

too. And he has no one to talk to except when neighbours want to park their cars in his garage.

Some of it is mine, I reply. Then:

“I also like to eat food.”

Perfect. Just then we go through a moerse big puddle of water in the dip of a road. Nogal scary because you can't tell how deep the ditch is until you're in it. The whole car almost goes underwater. Metal groans and beneath all that noise I hear Darryl swear for the first time. He floors the petrol and the car gets momentum again.

We jump out of all that water like one of those whales that get stuck on the whites-only beaches. He gives me a look of relief – what for? I couldn't care less if we get stuck or make it. He can suffer a bit more. He deserves it.

6

Take me down to Paradise Road,

Take me down to Paradise Road.

I can sing that song over and over while looking for scrap. And I whistle it when there's nothing to do. Darryl says that we can be in Pretoria by tomorrow if we hurry along. I remind him that we haven't even had a glimpse of our Enemy – maybe we don't need to drive so dangerously, overtaking trucks with a vengeance.

He's not interested in stopping for much, especially with the petrol station incident as he calls it. We skip past another petrol station with an ice cream shop that is begging to be tried out. There's a billboard lit up and everything, pointing to “The best ice cream in the Republic – homelands and all.”

“You want to fly over another counter because of ice cream? No, we won't stop.”

So now I'm whistling badly, waiting for him to snap. He's fixed forward, showing no emotion. Sicker not even hearing me. He mos never took the chance to remember what my voice sounds like, ne? And these days it's all over the place, breaking.

"Darryl, I'm hungry" I say, "I think I'm dying of hunger."

"You're not dying of hunger. You've already had another sandwich"

I click my tongue loudly.

"These brakes..." Darryl says in the dark. Through crusty eyes I see him pressing down on the pedal hard, panicking, looking back through the rear mirror. We're about to turn and we're not slowing down.

"Is your seatbelt on?" he suddenly screams at me.

"It's on!"

We tear along the dark corner. Our lights catch a car just ahead, still needing to speed up after taking the corner. Their brakes are working fine.

"Hold on!" Darryl shouts and drags the car off the road.

I'm lifted off my seat for a moment, eyes wide as tar becomes dirt, holding onto the door. We shake along the uneven ground. A massive ditch grows in the light and Darryl turns the steering wheel like a maniac. Just missing it, we head straight towards a blerrie massive rock. He turns us sharply back towards the road and I screaming like a child because there's another car coming around the bend now, ready to meet us.

"Hell!"

He turns us towards the ditch again and then pulls up the handbrake. It sounds like every creaking door on the Court is opening inside the car. The car complains erg and throws me forward so that my head just misses the dash board, seatbelt and all.

We finally stop. I take my hand off the dashboard and look up at Darryl. He's sweating, eyes closed. Maybe praying, but with no steam or smoke. The car also smells nogal funny.

Dust drifts through the trails of his headlights. He takes a look under the hood, but he's a pastor and not a mechanic, so he tells me to wait in the car while he looks for a phone. He switches off the headlights but leaves the inside light on. The clouds look ready to burst over him in the morning light. In fact, they eventually do. A light drizzle holds up until I can't see him anymore.

X

The sun will warm the place up soon, I hope. The car gets yskoud when it's off. I'm shivering inside even with a blanket, my breath cold and foggy. I am alone in a strange place, too miserable to sleep and still in my pyjamas. I lift up the boot cover from the back seat, looking for something warmer.

There's a thick, fancy suit that Darryl probably uses to preach in. Too priestly for me, even though it's heavy and warm. I take out a pair of socks and sit back in the passenger seat. Put them and put my slippers on again. No gloves for my frozen fingers. They wrap around the steering wheel. Now this is lekker. The key is in but the car is off. I turn it on. The car struggles a bit then switches on.

What was the thing Darryl taught me? Handbrake down...

The car starts to slide further into the ditch.

I should've been watching how he drives more carefully. The engine is growling but not doing anything to stop me from falling further down. I pull up the handbrake, forgetting about the button so the thing creaks like a busted door again. I'm breaking this stupid car. But it stops moving, thankfully.

I rifle through the cubbyhole, hoping that maybe he's got a cassette or something to listen to at least. There are more sermons and notes stuffed with the car manual. The manual! I lunge for the book. The pages are bent badly and dirty on the corners and I have trouble keeping the book open.

The manual is in Russian or Greek or whatever. I don't understand a word of it. So I throw the stupid book back into the hole I found it in and pull out a cassette. No name on the front or back. I slip it into the A-track reader.

I almost skrik dead when the radio bursts into Hallelujahs. And something about an ou named Michael on a boat. The song is alright but it's got nothing on Joy's Paradise Road.

Something on the other side of the ditch catches my eye. I climb out again and walk over to the hole. It's the bumper from another car – shiny chromium. The thing came clean off, but the car it belongs to is nowhere in sight. I look back at Darryl's Merc: it's in perfect condition except for some dirt and a ding on the front. The bumper in my hand bites with cold so I take it back to the Merc for my best haul of the month. After moving some of his bags around, I fit the chromium bumper in the boot of the Merc. Might as well look for a place to recycle it on the way to Auntie. I'll be a rich man because this isn't easy to find. But where did it come from?

I walk back over to the spot I found the bumper. With the treasure out of sight, I notice a clearing of grass at my feet. It looks like a set of tires crashed over here. I follow the darkened path, the ground giving way in small sections. I'm mos messing with my slippers here! And I must take care of them, because only Mummie knows when I'll get a new pair. Maybe I could afford the Chopper and some tekkies with the bumper. But that's sieker wishful thinking.

The ground suddenly gives way and I nearly slip into a gash in the ground. Flung backwards, a round patch of the blanket gets dirtied around my bum. My right foot is cold. A

slipper got left behind, but I'm not even worried because at the bottom of the ditch lies a car, wrecked.

There is a smell of petrol and blood. I scurry back to the car, almost forgetting about the slipper. I've made a mistake; I shouldn't have found this.

Something wet is on the back of my leg. I look down to find the blanket sweeping against the ground, dirty and sucking up all the dew. I get back in the car. I'm frozen on the backseat – not from the cold. What must I do?

X

A towtruck pulls up at the turn of the road that we drove straight off. I haven't moved. Darryl steps out with a man who looks dik upset about getting up so early. He's still in his pyjamas and gives me a nod when he sees I'm wearing the same. He opens up the hood. Darryl doesn't notice the car is a little lower in the ditch than he left it, but he takes a look at the fuel meter.

All this time Darryl is explaining to the mechanic how he went wrong – how this small accident wasn't his fault. I mean, the mechanic isn't even listening to this passwhite going on about the tires not being refitted properly at the last service and there not being a barrier at the roadside and a whole lot of strond. Eventually it just becomes white noise. He doesn't even notice the sun coming up.

“What do you think?”

“Wet brakes,” he says.

Darryl laughs like a fool. *You mean I overreacted?* The way the mechanic is chewing, you can tell what he's thinking. He pulls up his pyjama pants and gets some rope. The car, towed out of the ditch, looks up at us like it has a grudge.

“You're sure they aren't cut?”

He gives a grunt.

“Did you go through a lot of water somewhere?” the man asks Darryl.

“I don’t think so, no.” Here he looks at me but sieker doesn’t want to hear my opinion here. The mechanic has a look under the hood.

“There’s another car that crashed by that slope” I say, shivering.

He seems to creep inside himself now. I don’t know how to explain it. Like he is shrivelling up by his own will. A smaller man now with beads for eyes, he looks at me and then over at the dark.

“People inside? Alive?”

“I didn’t see. I didn’t hear anyone”

“What were they doing?” he asks, tiredly, like I should know.

A long silence passes. Aren’t adults supposed to make quick decisions when people’s lives might be at risk?

“Well we can’t take a chance,” he finally says, “If we say something we’ll leave traces for our pursuers as witnesses.” And he pulls up his jersey over his exposed neck, scratching it a couple of times first.

“We pray that they aren’t suffering. Listen, Kyle,” he says with his face almost in mine, “Don’t tell the man here about it. We need to get out quickly.”

I don’t believe it. His breath stinks erg but that’s not even the worst part. This man really is a coward. Running like a child, only caring about himself. The mechanic walks over, killing our conversation dead.

“The brakes might just be cold. I’ll have a look back at the shop.”

X

I feel a string attached to my chest, pulling at me as we are towed into town. The string is bloody at the other end but I don’t see it. Only smell. And fear. It disappears into the

ditch we left behind, into the husk of the car. Darryl talks like the sun has come out just for him, more relieved than guilty. What is wrong with him?

I watch from a distance as the mechanic does his magic from his tiny workshop. The place has tools I've never seen but could sieker use. Cutters that just melt through metal, handsaws and screwdrivers – magnetic – of all kinds.

Imagine how easy scrap collecting would be for him. He's got everything he needs for success. Tools, connections, raw material. But he doesn't see it, the mechanic. Green morning light trickles in from the fibreglass roof sheeting that covers the room. There are taps of rain, but not much.

"You've always lived here?" Darryl asks, clearly anxious to get moving. His face is sickly in the light, yellow-green skin hiding a fresh ugly secret.

"Never had anywhere else to go." the man says. Then:

"This boy here is following you all around."

"He must do that – he is my son"

The repairman gets all nervous. Sorry-sorrying and that.

"I thought he was a boy from one of the farms."

Darryl scoffs and the ou goes back to working silently. At the end of the repairs, Darryl gives him a few notes as thanks.

Then we are on the road again. I've got a small ratchet in my pocket – borrowing until I pass by here again one day.

X

Nothing but nothingness as far as my oegies can see. I wish there was something to draw my attention away from my coward bastard of a father, driving warm and dry while two people sit dying in a car a few kilometres back. I don't know if it was two actually, or if I just imagined that. I didn't see any bodies.

“This place is desolate, hey?” he says, winking. Like he’s reading my thoughts,

“That’s the Interior for you. Empty of substance and meaning at the glance of the eye.

But it’s a different story in early spring, when the wildflowers wait for no one. Strange to think that those plants are just under the soil, getting ready for their season of glory. Beautiful colours. I’m sure you’ll get to see it someday in better circumstances.”

I grunt, my head leaning on my left arm that’s pressed along the top of the door panel.

“What?”

I say nothing. What’s the point? The man does what he wants to. Talking about flowers just after he’s left people to die. And I’m just the witness.

You really my father? That’s what I really want to ask. How can we be so different? He keeps his bek, the coward. He is hunched forward, his eyes wide open and hardly blinking. We could’ve maybe gotten along well on the road – if not for the fact that he left two people to die in the field. And he left Mummie to raise me on her own when I was four. Like he’s addicted to verlaating people when they need him most.

He switches off the brights when another car’s headlights shine into view from behind the bend. We’ve only just left Ritchie and the mechanic behind.

He lived like a real hypocrite with the whites as a preacher, sieker talking about blessings. *Blessed are the white, for they will smell the piss-poor from a distance.* He was a real poephol to us, I won’t deny that. And not much has changed. He covers his eyes. A blinding light comes from ahead.

“That idiot…” he says, shielding his eyes. He flickers his brights at the car. No change.

Now that we’re far away from that ditch I think I see him for what he really is. Just plain selfish – nothing to do with thinking he’s better than us coloureds or anything. It’s just

easier to live white, man. He's looking for the easy road that he's been using since the beginning.

"What is this bloody ou doing?" Darryl shouts, readying to drag us off the road again. The headlights start veering into our lane. He sits up and crushes the hooter. Through the haze of the car's brights I make out an Isuzu logo just ahead stuck to a massive bakkie that is ready to wipe us from the earth. I close my eyes. The sound of screeching – and no crunching metal – opens my eyes. We are still on the road, driving along.

"Ma se –" Darryl says and taps me on the shoulder, hard, "Look at that license plate!"

I turn back but the plate and the rest of the bakkie are speeding off into the darkness.

"Their lights are shining." I say.

"That's their hazards. They're saying sorry. Trying to make it seem like an accident. Didn't you get the number plate? I told you to look."

I shake my head. How can he expect that from me? The blood in my head is slowing down, making me dizzy. I lean my head on my seatbelt and leave Darryl muttering to himself. This whole business of running away is making him lose his mind. But who could be after a pastor like him? A riotous prayer group? A murderous soup kitchen?

"We can't let our guard down for even a moment," he says, "No, I'll only be able to relax when I'm in Botswana."

No, it must have something to do with politics. That apartheid with a capital "a". Why else would he need to go so far to avoid 'them'? He has the air of a freedom fighter but he isn't as brave as Jerome people on the radio make them out to be.

I look into his eyes and only see nervousness. He is sieker something else entirely. *Verraier* of his people maybe? Double-agent, traitor. I don't like that idea. I don't care about him, but people at home will always link him to me: Kyle, son of a piece of rubbish.

This morning I don't feel lekker.

"It's because you're lacking a routine." Darryl suggests. He's pouring some salt into his hand. We're having Monday breakfast at a Wimpy in Kimberley, sitting right at the back of the building with a view of his parked car.

"Even with the school stay aways, you had stuff to do. Getting beat up playing marbles or whatever. But here on the road, there's no certainty. And I'm sorry about that. It's not the best way to be spending your formative years, I think. Though you might look on this with fondness one day."

Fondness. This man is taatie. He scatters the salt over his plate like seeds or something.

"I just think I'm a bit sick. Can we get a Panado?"

"No, that's just for placebo."

"Huh?"

"It doesn't make a difference – it makes you think you're getting better, and that's why you get better."

Huh?

"What's wrong exactly? Do you want to throw up?"

I shake my head. It's strange. Every time a picture of home falls into my mind, I'm upset. Something like my stomach, but it's not vomit.

"Homesick. And you've only been away a couple of days. We're not far from Pretoria, unwanted encounters and all."

I was doing fine before I found that wreck and the bumper. He orders some water and I take a few sips. It goes down but doesn't hit that empty spot there under my ribs, just above my hip bones. I'll need to pee again in the next hour. My plate is empty and he's still taking his time.

“Darryl,”

“What?” he asks, uninterested. A trail of yolk stains his chin.

“Did,” I start, waiting for another interruption but finding none, “The Lord put that car out there for us to find?”

He wipes his hands with the serviette. It looks like he’s thinking hard – that vein in his temple is rising up.

“We can deliberate over the past now, which will likely confuse our course of action, or we can move forward with the plan. The plan is,” and he points to his temple – to a vein standing ugly – “Here my boy. And it will be followed or we’ll be done for.”

He returns to his meal. I swirl the orange cooldrink in my glass, trying not to spill. Then, glancing up again, I find him staring at out the parking lot. He watches a man climb out of a bakkie that’s parked next to his Merc. A white ou with khaki shorts, a massive body and a small head.

Darryl watches intently, following the ou as he comes into the Wimpy and sits alone at a table the middle of the restaurant.

“I don’t like the look of that man,” Darryl says, “Remember that guy who swerved in front of us last night? It could’ve been that car.”

It could’ve been any car. We couldn’t see last night. Darryl leans in, looking me in the eye.

“I need you to do something for me. To see if he’s the tail.”

“What?”

“Take your juice –”

“It’s cool drink.”

“Your cool drink and spill it on him so that he needs to go to the bathroom. Then I’ll look for a weapon –”

“A weapon?!”

“If he has a holster or something. Don’t worry he won’t shoot you here! Too many whites around.”

There are three other people in the restaurant. I’m looking in his eyes for the joke and he’s waiting for a response.

“No,” I say.

“When he’s up, have a look at anything that he’s left on the table. ID, keys, whatever. Take a mental picture.”

And here he pretends to press down the shutter of an imaginary camera, completely serious.

“I don’t want to...”

He leans in and speaks with so much pent-up force that I never want to see him again. The tears that want to run are full of embarrassment.

“Go,” he says.

So I get up with my glass of juice and start walking to the small-headed man. I look down at the glass I’m carrying. Orange fizz sloshing about, dancing on the edge of the rim. Am I walking right? Are my slippers sliding across the ground too much? The glass is shaking in my hand. When I’m at his shoulder the floor gives way. I slip right on a puddle I’ve sieker made. There’s no grip on my soles and I fly.

As I’m falling down to meet the puddle I wonder – and I know that it is a foolish idea – if Darryl himself put it there. The rest of the orange drink lands perfectly on the man’s lower boep and crotch. He doesn’t see it coming.

“*What?!*”

He's up, staring right through me, a coloured klonkie lying on the floor. There's commotion as a waitress rushes over to wipe up the mess on the floor. She gives him a stack of serviettes. I pick myself up and find the man's finger in my face.

"You see why there must be separate places for them?" he says to the waitress.

Another white hand moves Boep's finger out of reach of my eye.

"He tripped," this man says, "The floor was wet" And he lifts a piece of linoleum with an army-style boot. The other man, now a bit calmer, starts padding the wet spots with the serviettes. Then he's mumbling all the way to the bathroom.

He's left his wallet on the table, but I don't dare look through it. Military Skoene and the waitress are too close. I feel a hand on my collar. Darryl moves me back to our table.

"He didn't have a gun," he says, "What did you find?"

I don't want to speak to this stupid man. Tears are running down my face and I struggle to wipe all of it away.

"That was some stunt you pulled there. What were you trying to do?"

Military Skoene is looking down at us.

"See that man's intentions," Darryl says, getting up.

"Well, he's probably working up some real intentions now. I reckon you two better leave before he gets out of that bathroom."

We're already at the front entrance, the money and tip left at the counter.

"Nice wheels, my friend." Skoene calls out to us as we're climbing into the Merc.

"What are your intentions?" Darryl asks him bluntly.

"I'm looking for a lift. Which way are you going?"

"Nelspruit, via Joburg" Darryl lies.

"That'll do. Can you drop me off in Christiana? It's on the N12. Should be on your way"

“What’s happening in Christiana?”

“Nothing much. I have some friends who can help me out. Times are tough.”

“Aren’t they for everyone?”

Darryl tells me to move to the back seat.

“Can I put this in the trunk?” he asks, holding up a suitcase.

I watch from the back seat as Darryl opens up the boot and – lieve aarde! The chromium bumper shines out at us in its glory. Darryl shuts the boot again.

“That’s an interesting keepsake,” Skoene says drily.

“My son likes his scrap,” he says, staring a hole into my forehead.

“Leave your bag on the backseat. He’ll have to make space for that.”

We drive, and I can feel the anger of Darryl hovering above my head. I hope it’s a long way to Christiana.

X

Even with Military Skoene’s bag splayed out, I make myself a bit more comfortable along the back seat. It’s much more comfortable than a bus, definitely. The inside of the Merc is still in perfect condition. He keeps it very clean.

It’s nogal a rich man’s car, and I’m pleased to be in it for however long it takes to reach that Auntie. And who knows, maybe he will leave it for me in his will one day? These cars look kwaai and can last forever if you look after them properly. Then there’d be no need for a stupid Chopper – I could just drive over Nantjies them and the Doorlights if they give me grief.

Darryl gets on well with Skoene, which is good for me. Now I don’t have to talk when I don’t feel like it. They end up talking about work, like grownups usually do. The man’s real name is Jan van Rooyen and he’s a journalist. He still needs to make a name for himself in the press – he’s spent most of his time dodging army duties.

“Ja, I deserted conscription duty after about a year. They were going to kill me, I know. I think around half of our group got wiped out during training. Stupid stuff. Friendly fire, rookie stuff.

“You ever heard of a book called *The Short-Timers*? It came out last year in the US. They’ll probably have it banned here, not least because it’s semi-autobiographical. US marine recruits going crazy even before being shipped off to Vietnam. That’s the kind of rubbish conscription brings. And the thing is, they want you to be crazy. That’s what gets to me.”

He speaks English with a heavy Afrikaans accent. You can tell he uses the language with pride though, like he’s fighting the system with words as well.

“So I’m working for the Daily Writ now. You heard of it?”

“No.”

“I don’t expect you to. We’re still starting up in Bloemfontein. I’m trying to get a fuller scope of the plight of the non-whites since the 70s. What’s it like to not be welcome in your own country? Or to be shipped off to a homeland?”

There’s some silence for a bit. I lean my head against my edge of the backseat.

“I can’t speak of the experiences in the homelands,” Darryl says, “But I’ll say that these laws aren’t right for coloureds. My story is a little more complicated because of my light skin, but my son has had trouble with finding non-white facilities on the road.”

Darryl starts talking about the trouble he’s found with coloureds as well. That in his younger days the people didn’t want to mobilise – they were content with the laws as long as they were more privileged than the blacks.

Why must he go telling those stories to a white ou? Luckily, Jan just goes back to his point about the government again.

“I can tell you, this apartheid state, they’re snakes. They tell the world that what they’re doing is in the best interests of everyone, but have you heard about the tests they get

up to? You've heard of our Bureau of State Security, now the National Intelligence Service? They're trying all kinds of science fiction. Poisons and experimental warfare, disruption –"

"It would be better if you didn't go into detail. We don't want to know. There's enough going against us as is"

"Fair enough. But I'm telling you, this place is a circus. A well-kept secret circus."

I roll down my window all the way and stick my head out to take a look at myself in the side mirror. My right eye looks much better. It will pass for an accident now rather than a beating. I'm more brown than bruised again.

"What are you doing?" Darryl shouts. Jan gives a laugh.

We pass a sign that says "Klerksdorp, 250km". Nantjies, Skollie and the Doorlights all far behind and still sieker fighting over the same territory today.

Now it's almost like I can see them from high up in the air. I can spit on the ouense who gave me grief. A whole lot of them leaning against that wall advertising the Indian dentist and the children's crèche. It's strange to think of all of them in this way, not having to worry about one of them jumping me somewhere to beat me up. I look over to Darryl. He's a little bit more relaxed. Rubbing my Wilson block paper between his fingers, hands resting on top of the steering wheel. He doesn't have much hair on his wrists, just like me.

8

We find out too late that there is unrest in Warrenton – and we're less than an hour away from Jan's friends in Christiana. The N12 is blocked with tyres burning. Darryl won't turn back so we go maar in.

"This doesn't look good." Darryl says. Jan is fiddling with a map, telling him to get onto the N18 and then take the Van Riebeeck turnoff.

A crowd of onlookers watch us turn into Botha Street. The town graveyard is on our left, gates open and ready to receive another body.

“Why are you turning here?” Jan asks.

“There’s a police station up top – just in case things get hairy.”

“The police are probably the reason for this, man!”

We crawl up Struwig Street and approach some activity coming from the police station. White and black officers are lined up with riot gear, facing the road’s long shadows. Then we go over the hill of the main road and see why they’re here.

A block away, a funeral procession moves slowly towards us, taking up the entire width of road. In the middle, six pallbearers lead the group and set the pace as they carry a dark wooden coffin. They are singing freedom songs – songs I’ve heard in Protest Park back home. (Who comes up with these songs if they don’t come from home, I wonder and scratch my nose. Darryl stops the car). Just below the many voices, a sound of a woman wailing. It makes my stomach cold.

“They’re singing that the dead man was a martyr.” Jan says, shaking his head. “Police are brutal, and if they have their way today more people will be dead.”

Then he looks at Darryl like the ou picked the wrong side just now. Choosing the safety of the police over the intentions of the crowds.

Darryl begins to reverse. The three of us turn to angry hooting coming from behind. Darryl sticks his hand out and waves at the car to reverse as well. A man in a veld jacket shouts out from his window in Afrikaans, “Just drive – they’ll have to move!”

So we turn into the Police Station, cordoned off.

“Check this skaap,” Darryl says after the angry man. The bakkie drives right up to the funeral procession and stops suddenly. We watch as six pallbearers just walk around him with their free hands raised above their heads in a fist. When the man starts hooting, pressing

the steering wheel so hard his tin bucket on wheels shudders, everyone just sings louder. The hooting cuts out those deep cries that upset me earlier.

“These poor mourners are the only people with any sense out here today” Jan says.

Then just beside us at the station, an officer tells another:

“They must just touch that car and we’ll have them all in jail tonight.”

“By whose authority?” Jan erupts from the passenger seat, ignoring Darryl’s shushes. Jan launches out of the car, his ears red.

“Can’t you see that these people want to bury their dead?”

“Mister, get back in the car” someone shouts back. You can’t tell who because of the helmets blocking their mouths. They’re checking his military skoene, sizing him up.

“This is the rubbish that you catch on as a force – you push people into a corner and then punish them harder when they lash out. Get lost!”

Then there is a shout from behind the officers and they spring into action – all of them forming a line in the road. Some are glaring at Jan. The policeman at the end is close enough to touch our car if he wants to. Then a loudspeaker with a moustache steps out in front, addressing the crowd now less than a hundred meters away:

“You people must stand back or there will be repercussions.”

It’s dik funny, the way the loudspeaker man speaks. Each word measured evenly because he thinks in Afrikaans and has to directly translate it. You can tell that if he didn’t have his men behind him, he’d never say those things. So I know he doesn’t really believe in what he is doing. But he does a good job of pretending to be upset.

Stones are thrown his way. Small, light ones that won’t do too much damage. But the loudspeaker ou doesn’t have a helmet so we watch him run all the way to the backline, yelling kaffir-this and that, before taking cover and giving orders to his men. He’s cowering behind a casspir when he realises that he is still using the loudspeaker.

The singing of the funeral has grown much louder, almost unbearably loud. It feels like something is going to burst soon. At the back of the procession, sticks are raised high up and move up and down together, like a strange wind blowing the dry grass back home.

“Final warning!” the man behind the casspir shouts. Jan runs out to the line and tackles one out before getting swallowed up by riot gear. Suddenly I don’t find anything funny anymore.

“What a fool!” Darryl cries.

There’s no space to turn between the casspirs and police cars, so Darryl starts to reverse the car out of the police station.

Then a shot rings out. Teargas or bullets or grenades, I don’t know. Darryl pushes my head below the dashboard. Now the strom is licking the linen – and I picture Mummie saying this to the three of us and wagging a finger. *You mos wanted to act sterk*. Something wet sticks to my forehead.

And then we’re in a house. The ceiling stark and smelling of ouma’s potpourri rather than teargas. An old white man waves us out, past his picture frames and dimly-lit passage. The itchiness in my throat rises and suddenly falls; a gasp before the cough, the breath returns to my lungs. We’re outside, moving backwards across the street. Darryl stops us and catches his breath, blood running up into a moerse thick vein on his arm and disappearing in the tear in his jacket.

The old man is on his stoep. His face shifts slightly – like he’s gone from being involved to just being someone who watches things go by. His arm is lowered. Gravel uncrunches itself.

We go over the vibracrete with our back legs. Darryl’s jacket hugs a dangling piece of wire which sews his sleeve back into one piece. The blood is back in his body. The wall

greet me as well – puts the thin pieces of skin back on my chest, upper arms, waist and right thigh. A whimper returns to its owner – surprisingly, it's me.

The sounds of bullets returning to their owners. Rubber or real, I don't know but I am moving closer. Another wave of fear greets without restraint. Dogs let go of the stragglers – I hear this, I don't see this since I'm moving backwards, back to the source of danger, back to the man and his casspir and the growling blood of people who I don't want to know right now. Will they greet me from the face of a newspaper, forever caught up in their deathsong?

Will the dogs cheer them on in the obverse?

I am moving back towards the car. My palms press down against the tar, settling little stones back into their places. With a rush, I fall into the passenger seat of the car with the door closing on me, pressing me back towards my seat. Darryl's hand guides me back – his face full of fear, saying things. Canister rattles at my feet.

I feel along the wooden handle, fawning over the cleanliness of it. It is an unnecessary thing, this wooden handle. But it is beautiful. The door finally locks. Darryl's hand at my shoulder lifts and I sit up to look through the front window. Gas sprinting back into a handful of canisters, a quick vibration and then they are lifted up nearly at once, flying through the air in different directions, back towards the policemen. Mourners returning to their positions in the march.

The tear gas canister climbing up my shorts, kissing me on the temple and then leaving through Darryl's window. The sound of glass unshattering. The megaphone going quiet. Songs find their way back to their singers. Anger and pain and fear grow smaller but never silent. Jan missing still. The policemen, at the edges, not taking their hands off their batons and guns and dogs, but looking less stiff as the moments pass.

I look at Darryl and feel the calm of it all. That feeling that things are going to ruk loose vrek soon comes and goes. I close my eyes.

“We have to go,” Darryl says, shaking me awake. It feels like my head is going to come off of my shoulders – loose and throbbing. My throat burns with fire when I groan to look up at him.

A thick layer of sweat slides down his forehead. His sleeves are rolled back and his left arm is bandaged up. It’s the edge of the afternoon and there is a silence in this old woman’s house – like there was a funeral or something.

“That was quite a performance outside there hey,” the tannie says out loud. She looks like a human doily – frills on her ouma dress and on the cap on her head and her wrinkles soema looks frilly as well. She very seriously hands me a glass of water. I say thank you.

“We need to get the car,” Darryl says. “We’ve wasted too much time here already.”

The ou tannie is waiting for me to drink it, so I take one massive gulp. Sugar water. Jinne, sugar water doesn’t taste as lekker as it sounds. It feels like my ears ringing once everything’s gone down. At least that makes my head hurt less. Darryl takes my empty glass.

“If we hadn’t picked up that flippen reporter, we would’ve missed all this.” He says. His bandage is held down by small plasters with flowers on them. I would normally laugh at that and point, but it feels like my brain is all scrambled.

On the way out I pick up an old photograph on a kassie at the front door, framed in the size and shape of an egg. A young woman and her dog. The photo is black and white, turning yellow-green in places and the dog has three legs. I think of the brak back home for a moment and the thought sits heavy in my stomach. How many days ago was that? Darryl thanks her with palms pressed together.

“Can I pray for you?” she asks, still very serious.

“You can.” Darryl says, a little bit surprised, I think, but not showing it. A pastor must sieker always be ready for this kind of thing.

She lays her hand very gently on his and starts to pray. The whole thing is maybe four lines long. I've never heard such a short prayer before. At home it's always a big gedoente, someone getting the mic and beginning with a YES LORD from the back of the throat. WE DJUS WANT TO THANK YOU and off they go.

But here it's just *thank you Jesus for this man and his boy. Bless them and protect them.* We say amen and thank you and we see the outside of the door. I turn back to find the old woman's face nearly pressed against her window, thin curtains parted.

Outside, shadows form in the ridges of vibracrete. The sun is taking all the warmth away with it. We make our way back to the car one road at a time, Darryl remixing his plan now with this setback. Jan is nowhere in sight.

"We'll probably need to find another decent mechanic like that guy near Matjiesfontein. My window got broken in the conflict. Did your passenger window break? I can't remember in the chaos"

"I also can't remember. I think the side mirror broke off when I climbed out"

"That poor car," he says and sighs, "You'll have to check my left blindspot while we're driving."

The streets look nogaal different – especially when you're just running through Uys Street and Van Wyk Road at the mercy of the dogs and policemen. Now just a few hours later, everything is quiet, almost as if there hadn't been a funeral or a protest. Maybe we even imagined the whole thing.

But no, some officers are standing about near the station. One of them taps on a metal railing with his baton, gently. Then we see the top of the hill and my stomach drops.

There's a husk of a Mercedes-Benz, scorched, staring at us. The dark around makes the shell of the car stand out even more, and in a way it's a mooi thing to see. But it can't be. Darryl is breathing loudly, walking right up to it.

The thing is past saving. All the tyres are missing – they lay charred further on in the middle of the road. Parts of the back seat have melted onto his suitcases but otherwise most of his luggage looks fine. He begins to unload the suitcases onto the pavement and leaves the piece of chromium in the boot.

The cubbyhole is in its chops. The beautiful wooden finishing, gone. So much for an inheritance. I pull at the metal finish on the passenger door and it burns me erg. A pity. I could've gotten money for this at the scrap station. Terrence might've paid more seeing that it comes from a Merc. But can I carry a piece of metal to Pretoria and then back to Cape Town?

The metal scalds Darryl as he opens the boot. He drops cross-legged to the ground, facing the wreck with head in his palms. His bandaged arm and the oil in his hair make him look nogal pathetic. He scratches the back of his neck and cries. Deep, uncomfortable tjanking. Looks around at the sky, waiting for answers or what to do next. His shirt is dirty, he's worn it for days and I'm sieker no better. We're sitting like bergies without a way to get away.

Then suddenly he's standing to his feet.

"Dear Lord!" he shouts, loud enough that the lady who helped us might be able to hear, "I ask that you put this car back to right standing. Fix what has been burnt out of joint. Repair the molecules of this machine so that it will take me to Paradise. I must be away, Lord! Heal the interior—"

Now a white constable with a thick moustache is standing in the doorway of the police station with windows pelted by stones so that every pane has a passion gap.

"Mannetjie!" the man shouts back, "Wat de donder skreeu jy?"

"—and convict the hearts of the men who think that violence is worth the end!"

"You shuddup! I will lock your arse up forever."

“Let’s go Darra” I whimper at his side. He puts his hand on my shoulder and shields me behind his body.

“But will you inherit eternity?” Darryl answers the moustache with some deep sense of authority. Then again, he turns to prayer: “Bring something good out of this loss—”

The constable walks up to my father, ready to grab him by the collar with two massive hands. His moustache is grazing my father’s forehead. Darryl says ‘amen’ and then looks the ou right in the eye.

“You want me to lock you up in front of this child?”

“Pay for my vehicle or arrange suitable transport”

The constable waves him away, walks back inside the station. Darryl follows after him like a dog.

Now I could tell Darryl myself that if he’s trying to avoid police, this is the worst way to do it. But I’m then just counting for spek and boontjies today. I walk back to the car. For a few quiet moments I sit. Strange to sit and watch my inheritance get charred up like a broken galley. Like one of those galleys the bergies make in the open veld. You find half of an oil drum and there’s something to keep you warm on a Friday night, something to draw ouense together. Then you talk and complain and smoke and go home, uitgeroek. I’m going to smell like that again today.

“Laaitie!”

A black man waves at me at the corner of the street. Blessed with a smile that could sell cooldrinks, he has his t-shirt bandaged around his forehead. The t-shirt sports a blood spot the size of a guava, still wet.

“Mondays hey!” he says, pointing at the wreck, “You in trouble?”

I shake my head.

“Did they arrest your voice today?” he shouts from the stop street, standing behind the pole like it offers some kind of protection.

“That man who was shouting and went inside...” here he points to the police station,

“If he comes out today, tell him that he can clean his throat at watering hole behind the station.” He gives a thumbs-up, tilts his head back and pours imaginary drink from his thumb. Then he then clicks his palate loudly – like two marbles striking each other. I nod again.

“I will see you there, my friend, and we will all rest.”

He salutes to me and just about rolls away. Taatie.

Darryl comes out some time later, fuming. I don’t know what to tell him so I mention that I spoke to a man and he looked injured.

“Now what – you want a medal?” he shouts and looks around at the street, away from me. I don’t hide my scowl from this one. The hell is his problem?

“What did he say?” he asks, still wound up.

“There’s a place to rest.”

He nods. Looks older and much more tired. His eyes still remind me of a tikkop’s. How much disappointment has he faced since I met him on Saturday? And will things suddenly turn for the better? Sieker not.

Darryl takes hold of the chromium bumper – the thing burns his palm red – and flings it as hard as he can towards the police station. The sound of a commotion as it rings against the barred window of the building – a mooi throw! And when that constable comes out again, he finds us gone. We’re running with a suitcase each, leaving the rest of that car to catch smoke forever.

We're only just over the main road when we see MADODA'S scrawled in ink above a run-down house-turned-shebeen. That ou I met earlier is waiting for us outside holding a drink with the tips of his fingers. He's still shirtless, but there's a new striped top wrapped around his head.

"This is the last place they'll look to make arrests," he says, "Because they know that we know it's the first place they'll look. You're safe here."

He's dik gesuip already. Leads us into a house that's been renovated into a big open room for drinking in. We have similar smokkelhuise on the Flats, but the ouense I know like to have a drink outside, even if it gets a bit cold. But here... Here the police just need to look over the wall of their station to see everyone in the yard.

T-Shirt disappears, leaving us to find our own spot in this place. He sieker doesn't feel his head wound anymore because he's singing over and over,

My skokiaan, my love. Imbamba my love.

Darryl keeps pulling me close to him. *Don't go out of my sight.* But the people here aren't even taking note of me – what must he be scared for? Outside – with the police – that's where all the danger is. They were the ouense who threw me with a teargas canister against my head, scrambling it. And he had a vet conversation with them, asking for trouble, shouting *compensation, compensation!* sieker just to confuse them.

I get dragged to the back of the room where the drinks hide in crates on shelves. A man is waiting for us to order. He's got the same colour skin as me, the same nose, brown eyes. He's got a bleskop so you can't tell what kind of hair he has. So why am I coloured and why is he black? Jinne, it hurts my head.

Darryl asks for juice for the both of us. The man gives Darryl a look.

There's a series of naked bulbs along the centre line of the room. These bulbs aren't lined up lekker, but they're bright enough, trying to give the place a warmth that it probably

shouldn't have. Maybe it's just nice to see grown-ups laughing with each other, not looking for a fight. Darryl gets some looks, but maybe everyone thinks he's coloured because of me.

Two glasses are set on the counter. The bartender, looking at us, calls to someone in the back.

"Philosopher, come and meet these two from the Mother City. You're from there right? You smell of the sea air."

He gives a laugh.

An old black man comes out from the back and makes his way to a seat beside Darryl, sporting a deep green tycoon suit. The suit stands out lekker against the orange of the room and the hanging lights. He's got a very serious look coming from his eyes – like he can trap you with the strength of his stare. He's using a walking stick and he taps the cement firmly. He taps in the space his front two toes should be.

"When you work in the mines," he says looking at me, "You make sure your boots are in working order, or you sue. These conglomerates make more than enough money to compensate their workers, but they'd rather not. Not unless you press your back against their clean walls – say *I am here*. I wish I knew that – there are many things I wished I knew. But you don't have mines down in the Cape, do you?"

"Only mine dumps," my father says, "The Cape Flats is one massive mine dump."

I think that's dik ombeskof coming from a passwhite. Ya, so now just because he didn't like it and left, he can talk junk about it. The old man chuckles as he sits.

"You're passing through. This isn't a place where people settle down."

This man has the air of someone famous – like he knows he is well-known. But I don't know him so he just comes off as a bit taatie. He hunches over but doesn't look weak, almost like it's just a habit rather than old age.

"We were on our way through, yes, but our car was written off in the scuffle earlier."

“That was your car? I’m sorry to hear that. The police don’t want us to get ahead.”

He gives Darryl a pat on the back.

“But now you’re like a black man in this country, needing to find his way with everything against him. It’s a good place to be in. And with your son. It’ll build character”

He stretches out, just missing a pool player’s cue as it makes its journey around the table. I can see that the table is slanted erg – none of the pool balls ever stand still.

“What do you think of this place?” the man asks Darryl

“Surprisingly jovial...”

“And believe it or not, an integral part in the struggle for this town. These men are the buffer between the police and the inevitable retaliation for today’s mess. Can you believe the coffin broke open at the one handle in the scuffle? Everyone could see that man’s shirtsleeves...” and he trails off with emotion. I feel sorry for him even though I don’t really know what he is saying.

They talk about Zimbabwe’s independence for a bit and the pressure the whities here in the Republic must be feeling. I look at the smudges I’m making on my glass. Shapes of hills, clouds and patterns. Everyone’s glass has a pattern on them here; everyone is sweating though a cold wind taps at the windows.

Conversation flows a bit like the drink inside here. Pour out a topic and watch the mense speak without restraint. It feels good to be here – that ou singing *Imbamba* was right. It’s a place of rest. Even Darryl seems to have calmed down since that car incident. He sits cradling his drink of juice, not finishing it.

What was all that about earlier? Was he really praying for the car or was something splitting loose from him? Because that whole scene would’ve looked very strange to someone who didn’t know him. Even me, I was wondering, why must he shout so? All spit, no smoke.

The Philosopher looks at me, eyes wide with a story:

“Boy, in the twenties I stood with my black brothers and sought to share in the potential of the country. You know our white neighbours were not willing? Here we are again. Now there are coloureds, Indians, blacks who need to ask together. Demand even.”

I zone in and out of his talk with Mister Philosopher. The man lost his grandson – and he was one of the ouense from the mass funeral. That grandson was found dead in his cell in Kimberley earlier in the week. Police said he tried to escape by jumping through a window and broke his neck.

“We had to beg the officers in charge to release the body in time for the funeral. ‘Very well,’ he said, ‘But no protest songs at the funeral. And no more than thirty can attend.’

“I knew I’d never go when Nonqwana’s mother agreed. If you can’t mourn in the proper manner, you’re not really mourning.

“He had no cuts on his face. No cuts on his face,” And here he wipes his face, but it’s too late. The tears have already slid down and peppered the bar table. He goes on:

“You forget when you don’t talk about the memory. Discuss it – see it from new angles. Experiences burn up with time unless they turn into stories.”

He turns to me again,

“And where are you off to, son?”

I look at Darryl, not sure what to say. Darryl answers with the truth this time. Pretoria, ya.

“To his Aunt. We’re more than halfway done with the trip, but now we’re short of a car.”

“You could get a lift with one of those truck drivers at the petrol station on Erasmus Street,” the barman says, “They’re always trekking goods up to Johannesburg and Pretoria.”

Darryl and the Philosopher nod, and the old man clears his throat. Darryl orders another juice. The barman puts two glasses down and Darryl launches one down his throat. The barman taps him on the shoulder.

“My friend, that was for the gentleman playing pool. Yours is still on its way.”

Darryl stares at him wide-eyed.

“But I don’t drink.”

The Philosopher chuckles.

Soon, Darryl is off. ‘Coloured people will only be free when Africa is free’ and that kind of thing. I swirl the juice in my glass, a bietjie bored. They’re talking about an ou named David Curry (which makes me lus for a lekker pot of lamb curry from Mummie, the meat dripping from the bone) and the Coloured Labour Party. He’s talking with his hands, waving them about until he sends a light bulb spinning about in orbit. Then he gives a look of embarrassment and doesn’t even try to hide it.

I’ve never seen his face so open and low before – and even still I feel like I recognise it. Like it was always just hiding behind his words.

Mummie’s mense at the church are very scared over alcohol and that, and it’s sieker because they don’t want to show themselves like Darryl here. He is ready to talk about anything without worrying. All this talk is just what the Philosopher wants, because you can tell that also he likes to be lekker loose with his tongue – even without the drink.

“Memory is a *snake*,” he says and then loses his train of thought, now speaking as though every second word is a question, “P.W. has new glasses? Have you noticed? He says he can start to see the inequality now.”

Some laughter from two ou ballies listening in on our right. I’m laughing the loudest, open-eyes, watching the ouens, trying to make it look like I know what the *yel* they’re talking about. Memory a snake? Luckily, he comes back to that point:

“The world is afraid of memory. And so sometimes the stick of time swings down onto its head and leaves it incapacitated. That makes us lose track of our pasts.

“Other times it kills it completely, rendering thought useless no matter how much we long to go back. We are then barred from the past.

“And yet, the fangs of the dead snake carry poison in them. When we stumble on its path we may still be bitten. And then a fragrance or figment or turn of phrase brings us back to a vague recollection, nostalgia or trauma or whatever. That’s where we don’t know how to remember, but we do it anyway. A half-awakening, deep as the distance of the Sun.”

He looks into his glass like it’s telling him something. Darryl looks at Mister Philosopher like he’s doing the same. And I’m looking at him – why?

Now Darryl is speaking and reciting scripture – *Can a man carry fire next to his chest and his clothes not be burned?* – and the pool table is gaaning, and there are arguments and songs that break out from the mouths of the drunkest men. In the shadow of the pool table, a five cent coin smiles at me. I don’t smile back. The last time that happened, the night ended badly. Every day since then has been just as terrible – going over counters, into ditches, seeing accidents...

It is suddenly late; the lekker mood in the place has gone. It is late because I know that I am a long way from home. And wherever Darryl is trouble will follow.

I pick up the coin. Darryl is mumbling something to the Philosopher and the man is struggling to stay awake. If there is a payphone nearby I’ll be able to get hold of Mummie.

So I leave Madoda’s without anyone noticing. I cross over the road and spot a payphone on the corner just before the police station.

My slippers are scuffed at the bottom, my hair is oily and I’m ponging erg. I know how it looks. Anyone still awake and wandering these streets are going to think I’m a bergie.

Policemen will want to lock me up. So I must maar phone quickly and leave – not catch any trouble out here alone.

The machine vriets my money. I dial Jerome's house number. It rings for a long time.

“Hello?” comes her tired voice.

“Aunty!” I say

“Kyle – you know what time it is?”

You can tell that her teeth are already out of her mouth, sieker laying in a glass somewhere.

“Can you pass the phone to Mummie please?” I ask, cutting her off. She mumbles and there is silence. I look around with the phone still at my ear. Empty streets. Cold air sneaks right under my vest, making my teeth move on their own. At least I've still got my own teeth. Besides the police station and the shebeen across the road, everyone's lights are off.

“Kyle?” Mummie's voice sounds on the other end of the phone. She's moeg and kwaad. I start speaking but it's more like a sprint:

Hello Mummie I miss you today we got into a moerse accident but Darryl is alright and I'm alright because why, we were in the wrong place at the wrong time now Darryl is talking to this ou – drinking juice but he drank the wrong juice now he's going taatie and...

I catch my breath and let out a nervous laugh. Silence on the other side.

“Hello?” I say. I know she's wiping away tears. She likes to tjank about everything.

“Kyle, you get Darryl to send you home *now*, you hear? I don't know what he wants and where he's going with you –”

“He just wants to leave, mummy. He's dropping me off at Aunty Francheska in Pretoria.” I say. Darryl will donder me if he finds out I talked about his plan, but at least that stops her voice hakkeling with tears.

“Tell him to let you take a bus back home. Where are you now?”

The call cuts before I can answer. Something feels sore in my stomach again. I want to make sure Mummie isn't sad just because of me. My pockets are empty – no hidden coins that I forgot about. Just that small ratchet – useless now.

I'm coming home, definitely, but it'll take a bietjie longer without the car.

"Hey!" someone calls from the dark. Police station side.

I don't check who it is – the people jaaging Darryl or policemen or just a dronkie – because I'm over the road and back at the shebeen, breath gone. Legs stiff.

"Darryl," I say to him, out of breath "We must go."

"Why?" he is dazed and sieker needs to sleep off that small glass of alcohol he gulped down earlier.

"I need the toilet," I say, speaking the truth.

"Now go, then" he says, nearly clipping another lightbulb.

"But the toilets are outside. I mos can't go alone. What if the ouense following us catches me?"

Here Darryl remembers that we're on the run. His face grows hard – he's asking himself how he could forget so easily. But memory is a snake, mos!

Darryl shakes the Philosopher awake. Tells him we're leaving. Then they shake hands, holding other's wrists and speaking in low voices. The Philosopher comes up to me.

"You have the eyes of an observer, boy," he says, "Don't let people get you down. You're not lonely; you're misunderstood."

I say thank you, not sure what to make of that. He likes to say confusing things, this ou. Darryl pays the barman with the last of his notes. I see his wallet, empty and sad. We slip out.

The day dawns – Tuesday – and there are no trucks to be found in town. The N12 has been cleared of protest activity, but we continue along the N18. The road is narrow coming out of Warrenton, just like the good one in the Bible.

“They won’t be expecting us to take this route – especially if that Jan has been caught and is made to talk.”

“Are we just leaving without him?” I ask, lugging a suitcase along. It’s not too heavy. Only holds a change of clothes and some of Darryl’s sermons that weren’t torn up.

“He caught on his own nonsense – what can we do? Get arrested as well?”

So we pass the Primary School, packed with children enjoying break time, sicker jealous of me not being in uniform and in class, and leave Warrenton for good. Warrenton, graveyard of the Merc.

But there’s a problem: as it leaves this town the N18 becomes a bridge over water and is too narrow for pedestrians to walk on.

“When was the last time you had a wash?” Darryl asks. He steps off the road and into the small river-vlei, through reeds, holding his suitcase over his head with both hands. He needed a wash anyway.

The water wakes you up – makes you remember why you like the warmth and summertime. I’m wide-eyed, freezing at the ankles. Ahead of me, the water is up to Darryl’s waist. I take a step and find no footing. So the suitcase follows me – headfirst – into the icy water. I’m flailing in the frosty river and Darryl is laughing open-mouthed.

“Silly boy! Look where you’re going. But you stank anyway!” he says, the tears streaming down his face. He’s not upset over the suitcase at all. So when he turns his back, I launch at him so that we both go underwater.

Water falls into my nostrils and I sputter like a baby but embarrassment and pride keep me going. I wrestle with Darryl, going for his neck. We struggle for a moment and the

bandage on his arm comes undone in the river. Then he takes me by my wrist and ankle, lifts me up out of the water and flings me back where I lost my footing. Water in the nostrils again. I come up, flailing. Looks at me like I've still got a lot to learn. I sit so that the water is up to my chin.

He nods towards the bags moving very slowly along the current. I catch them both like I've been swimming all my life. He takes one from my hands and, soaking-wet, walks over to the other side of the river. The cars on our right drive slowly over the N18. White faces inside their cars watch us curiously. Black faces on the outside of bakkies look on and laugh. Maybe they're also lis, I don't know.

"I think you've just had your first swim in the Vaal River."

"The water's lekker."

We open up the suitcase and find that water only seeped into the one I carried.

"Got a good wash. But tell me, why do you still stink?"

"No man!" I say, smelling my armpit; finding nothing but his laugh.

X

We walk to Jan Kempdorp. If we had driven there it would've taken less than forty-five minutes. The walk takes us just over six hours in the sun. Out here, away from Cape Town, the sun seems hotter. Maybe it's also the hard ground we're walking on the whole time. It wears my soles through. I take them off but then the ground is so hot that I just put them on again. Walking is for the better, Darryl says.

"This is monotonous, but we can do without additional unexpected disturbances."

"But you have proper shoes."

We follow the path of the road but mostly try to stay out of sight of cars. I think it must look more suspicious, but the dead-serious look in Darryl's eyes means he won't change his mind – we must be careful, he says.

That blerrie Chopper is in my mind again. I remember why I wanted one in the first place. Not so much because it made me look kwaai, no. Movement, jong. Movement. When the wind is moving through your kroeskop, then you're alive. Walking is maar for the ou ballies.

Then along the quiet road we see a speck in the distance. A person. As we draw near, Darryl tells me not to mention our journey at all to the man. Leave all the talking to him. I nod.

We pass him by with a greeting. He says nothing. He is a coloured man, very burnt and sad-looking, with a t-shirt so thin and oily that it looks like he's standing kaal-borste in the middle of the day. Shame man.

Then we hear him walking after us.

"Where are you two going?" he asks.

"To the next town."

"That's far if you gonna walk."

"We like it."

"Now then let me come with you. It's better than waiting heeldag for someone to drive past, sien jy?"

Darryl is mumbling to himself – I can only just make out what he is saying.

The same day I don't help someone, we lose our car. What can we lose now?

He's talking about the car we left behind in the ditch. Must be feeling guilty now. The only thing is, we helped Jan and that didn't work out either...

The ou catches up to us, walking in the road on Darryl's right. This is mos asking for trouble. Maybe Darryl thinks that the worst has passed – we can take a chance with a stranger now. He opens up the conversation, asking the ou what his name is and where he's from.

“I come from the Flats, sien jy?” the man says, turning around occasionally to make sure he doesn’t get knocked down. He’s walking in the oncoming lane like it’s his business. He carries on:

“But I first came down from Karoo side. My parents – hulle het hul baadjies omgedraai. Gave up their surname Mswazi to become Saais. Coloured is mos better than black here, ne? And I never knew.

“They should never have left. The Flats – that place isn’t lekker at the moment for a guy like me. We make fun of each other, we shoot each other. We lie and steal from each other. That’s mos not for me, sien jy? Do you miskien have a fifty cent for me?

“I was a sailor so I got to see most of the world. Rerig. You know that in the US they drive on the other side of the road? If we were there now, you” and I feel a sharp prod from him in the arm, “Would be the driver!”

I smile to myself like what he just said means something.

“There are fewer accidents over there because your right eye must be your dominant blind spot eye. Then you’ll see more of the other drivers when you want to change lanes. Mal ne? The Americans think of everything.”

“There are many accidents in the US,” Darryl says, “It’s a big place. Bigger than South Africa.”

The man is upset, he stiffens in the back for a moment. He doesn’t like being interrupted. A car hums past, not slowing down for us even though the ou stuck out his thumb. The hitchhiker finds his way again.

“Ya, I know. I mos said I’ve been there with the boat! A blerrie ugly thing, the S.S. *Dingese*, but it turned the mooi girls’ heads. The look of those American women with their styles – when they looked at you, you say that you’re a rich man!”

Laughing all over the place with his fists. He finds his way through his story again.

“What I’m saying is when you get in an accident there, there’s proper doctors to help a man out. Not like here, where you must wait for a non-white doctor even when the whites have room.”

“Funny enough, the US has segregation issues of its own right now. But you’re right, out here it’s a real mess.”

He clears his throat like he’s thirsty. Darryl doesn’t seem to notice – we’ve got a bottle packed away in one of the suitcases we’re carrying. Both are dry again. You’d never think we went for a swim with them both earlier. I don’t want to bring it up – just now I get shouted at for being too generous or something.

The cover of clouds is saving us, I think. I can’t imagine walking like in full Northern Cape sun without a Vaal River nearby. We are at that point where there is nothing to say. But still, the hitchhiker is eager. This is a man who talks like he’s being paid for it.

“Father and son walking together. That’s lekker. My father was blerrie useless. Drunk-drunk-drunk. They klapped him and his friend with the dop on that farm and he never got loose afterwards. Every weekend the same story.

“Piss-dronk elke liewe Vrydag aand. He come home looking for a fight. And every time my Mummie must find something to defend herself with, take up something to soften the blows. She had to wait a long while until I was big enough to hit back, sien jy? Poor woman.

“But for her, every week she treated him like a man. The next week was gonna be the time he’d stop and act like a real husband. She treated him like a king, man. And I always wondered why,” he adjusts himself in the middle of the seat and I wonder if he’s left the story on a cliffhanger. But he clears his throat and carries on:

“I think it’s taatie-ness, man. She taatie and my father taatie and they pass it on to me. And I look at my friends and neighbours and newspapers – even that Reverend Boesak and all – and I see that all coloureds are taatie.

“But just before you walked past me I realised something. Coloureds are the most South African of everyone in this country, right? Because South Africa is mos a mix of mense, ne? We the most mixed! And if the most mixed are taatie, then the whole blerrie country is taatie, sien jy?”

13

We get to Jan Kempdorp and collapse under the shade of a massive tree. It reminds me of the ones back home. They grow in rows along the streets and climb into people’s yards. Those ones get knuckled and twisted with the wind but this tree is perfect.

Our hitchhiker friend tests a branch and then climbs up high. My legs are sunburnt and moeg, man! And I’m so thirsty I’ve forgotten about it. Too tired to think; te moeg om te drink. Cars give us looks from the road but I don’t care. I sleep with the peace of a bergie.

Something drops at my feet and I skrik wide awake. Grasshoppers, second-hand. The kind of shoes you want at school to look kwaai. Now I’ve got a pair of my own thanks to Darryl.

“Donations” he says.

The shoe is two sizes too big but I’ll grow into it. And it beats walking around in slippers. The sun is about to go down and Darryl’s prodding some beans in my face to eat. Wrapped up in a serviette are a couple of vetkoeks.

“You want the beans on the vetkoek?” he asks and hands me the tin and the serviette. I drink the beans right out of the tin, cutting my lip on the ridge. Blood mixes with the bean sousies, but it doesn’t make it taste worse. When last have we eaten?

The man in the tree is whistling to himself, sieker full and ready for bed. There's a jug of water that we must return before we leave as well.

Then I unfold the vetkoeks and take a long look at the golden fatty fried dough, knowing that I've never wanted something so much. More than a Chopper, even more than getting away from gangsters and Lorbers and whoever. I bite in and want to cry, because the vetkoek bleddy *melts* like it's made of something that came down from heaven. Something that Moses-them ate together. The man in the tree laughs at me but I don't even care what I look like. Darryl is in his own world, doesn't want to eat.

The night isn't warm but I'm too tired to worry. Still, Darryl takes out some of his clothes and gives them to me as a makeshift blanket. He lays close and, after looking up to make sure that the ou is asleep, says:

“He gives us some food for thought about his life and his traumatic coming of age, but no name. Interesting fellow.”

He looks to me and you can tell he knows what I think about him: *taatie tamatie*. We sleep under the shade of the tree.

X

I wake up to Darryl kicking the tree stump until his soles look dondered. Our friend is gone and Darryl's suitcases are missing. He stops when he notices I'm awake. Wipes his nose and puts his hands over his hips.

“Earthly possessions, yes.” He says and nods to himself.

I try to get up but my legs don't want to work. It's like my brain has forgotten about them. Sitting up against the tree, I look at my left and right leg and wonder if I'll ever be able to walk again.

“Don’t be dramatic,” he says and lifts me up. It feels like my legs are there, but they’re wobbly and full of pins and needles. I’m leaning all my weight on him. Then suddenly he lets go and I fall hard onto my palms in the dust.

“Come on, man, don’t play around like this.” He says, lifting me up again. Then, just when I feel secure, he pulls away from me again and I fall hard onto the ground. Now a stab of pain shoots up my wrist and I can’t stop myself from whimpering.

Darryl lifts me up again and now I’m hitting him in the back, begging him not to drop me again. He bends down and lifts my body so that I’m wrapped over his shoulder.

“You’re growing, you know that?”

“Really?” I ask, sniffing.

“Yes – I can feel it!”

But when was the last time you picked me up, I wonder. I look up and see an old tannie staring at us as leave her town: a coloured boy slung over the back of a white man (or maybe he’s coloured as well? Is he brown because of the sun or because of God?), the two of us following the road.

The whole world is against us. Those are Darryl’s words when he’s not humming a hymn. But I don’t feel so hopeless – even with my dead legs. Ever since we’ve been walking we’ve gotten closer to the safe place. With the Merc we were always getting pulled sideways. The car doesn’t start or it doesn’t stop. Or it attracted the wrong attention. Or it speeds past ice cream shops. No that thing made us move too quickly.

Thankfully for Darryl, a truck pulls over for us along the way and takes us into Vryburg. I don’t know how Darryl would’ve been able to make it that far with me on his back, and I don’t think he knows either. But he’s got a plan and he’s set on seeing it through. My legs have a chance to rest properly in the truck, so by the time we step out into the town I’m ready to walk again.

Darryl has his eyes open for Lorber. That's the one who's hunting him, he says. Every car, every bend and stone might be his waiting place. He even says that the coloured one was probably an agent to get our morale down. I don't know what to think.

We are tired but on the lookout – *if someone starts shooting at you, just run over the fence and keep running until you see Botswana. Take your chances at the border.* Darryl points to mountains in the distance – that's the direction to run. But all the mountains look the same, man!

Lorber is high up with the apartheid one – he's connected. So we must watch ourselves. We watch and he sings hymns sometimes. His words carry away from us,

Only remembered, only remembered

Only remembered for what we have done.

“Can I ask something,” he asks breathlessly, not really waiting for a response, “What do you think of this whole struggle? Apartheid and the freedom fighters? What do the young people say?”

I've been looking at the empty fields for some time, so it's good to have conversation.

“Nothing. It's lekker not having school but eventually that also gets boring. Then you want to go back.”

He puffs. Wrong answer, sieker.

“Are you following the news?” He asks, “Do you go to protests?”

I shake my head. I'm too busy.

“With scrap?”

I nod and he laughs at me. I don't see what's funny, other than his shirtsleeves being rolled up tight since Vryburg.

“If I were in your shoes I’d let this time and feeling of change seep into my pores, invade my consciousness. You realise that you are living out your golden years in the face of change? It’s slow right now, but unrelenting.”

He gets lost in some thought or whatever. We pass a telephone pole that’s fallen over, wires missing.

“You really have no thoughts on the apartheid government?”

“Why must I?”

I don’t want to fight. I’m just a klonkie. I want to sniff out copper and make money. I sigh and that puts him off the subject for a moment. Why must he make a person feel like they’re not doing enough? Like he’s the shining example of a godly man...

“I... Have to ask this, my boy. I’m sorry, but I must have an answer. When a casspir rolls into Heideveld or you hear that a boycott will continue for another week, what goes on in your mind? I must know. You are the future, after all, and you seem dangerously closed off.”

Here he is looking at me with so much expectation that the answer just falls into my mind this time. I don’t even have a chance to think before I’m saying to him,

“The whities in charge like to lie and say that things aren’t as bad as the coloureds and blacks think we are – like they doing us a favour – but that don’t even make me so angry. I just think about the forced removals and that if it wasn’t for all that, you would still be with Mummie.”

“Mummie this, mummie that... You talk about her a lot, you know that? Almost like she runs your life”

“Huh?” I say, not believing the strond coming out of his mouth. I’d hit him if he weren’t so much bigger than me.

“Really, that’s what it sounds like from my point of view. She’s restricting you as a child”

“She’s not!” I shout, even though I don’t know what I’m saying, “Scrap collecting is my thing. Mummie doesn’t like it, but she lets me do what I want.”

“Ya, okay, comrade” he says. I can feel his spite on my forehead like sweat. Baastid.

“Here’s my thought,” he goes on, “If you’re really the young man who doesn’t care about what other people think, you won’t need to bring your mother into all this. Can you do that, big man?”

I don’t say anything. I just start humming.

Paradise Road.

X

We get another lift to Biesiesvlei, and one more all the way to Centurion. The ouense are very nice, giving us water when they see how thirsty we look. Black guys, coloured guys. Listening lekker to the radio. Paradise Road comes on both times and I’d sing at the top of my lungs if not for the two grown men talking about serious stuff.

Night comes again. Darryl keeps murmuring in his sleep. I have to prod him in the ribs all the time because it freaks out the driver. He sounds like a guilty man, just running and running and running. All that stuff he don’t want to talk about in the day comes bleeding through his thoughts at night. I actually feel sorry for him – even though he’s been such a poephol.

When day arrives, we’re in Centurion. I struggle to keep my eyes open. Darryl reckons we can walk the rest of the way to Pretoria, so we don’t look for more lifts. That makes it seem like we were looking for it the whole time before. Wasn’t it maar just the Lord and His angels helping us along?

It is Sunday again, Darryl says. One more church service before we get to Aunty Stienie. The morning is showing its face. My feet are numb, moving without me thinking about it. Darryl turns to me with tired eyes:

“You see how fragile life is? There are very few edges to feel along. I mean, look at the beggars in this country.”

He’s searching for something in this quiet moment. Eyes are fixed on the vanishing point in the distance. I’m getting a bit tired of all this talk, but it’s better than a moody Darryl. He sieker wants to get a sermon in before another pastor today. He goes on.

“They find themselves comfortable in difficult situations because they are undaunted by negative repercussions – failure to have a living wage might be more like a reprieve than a crippling depiction of impotency in living life.

“Free-fall for you and me – individuals who are expected to make much out of their lives – that is a far more terrifying drive. One that I believe the homeless and destitute are blessed in not having. They’d be too worried about more pressing issues like food and shelter. Let what I’m saying not take away their inherent claim to humanity – after all, Jesus calls the poor blessed.”

Where is he going with all this? It feels like we are walking in no particular direction as well. He makes Pretoria sound close, but it’s not in sight just yet. Still he carries on.

“I am always in the process of forgetting. This is what I am realising, and I’ve realised it again today. It is the story of today and yesterday and goes back to the day I was ordained in Pacaltsdorp.”

The edge of a town greets us in the distance. Pretoria? He shakes his head. I’m not really following him so lekker anymore. All his words seem to be becoming one long

sentence that's impossible to take hold of. Before, you could at least climb on and off at set points, like passing through Cape Town on the train.

“I am obsessed with fragrance – I am only fixed on the wrongness of my state.”

He looks over to me, “My boy, I wish there was some gift that I could give you right now. What is it you want?”

That Merc flashes in my mind, but I say “water”. My lips crack blood when I say it. I feel his hand on my chest, holding me back. My legs carry on walking in my mind. We've stopped on the side of this dirt road in the middle of nowhere. Darryl crouches down on his haunches and brings his palm to his mouth. He spits, rubs it together with his fingers and gets up. I feel it on my forehead – shaking like a drill, massaging it – and I hear him pray.

Not knowing where to look, I settle on his closed eyes shifting behind their lids. They are like those smooth billiards on that pool table in Madoda's.

And I don't know how but with all my feeling I receive it. I take in every word he is saying – even the words I don't understand – and I agree softly. *Yes, Lord.*

X

The church we visit in Atteridgeville is a solemn one. Solemn is the right word, ya. Only a handful of people attending watching a heavysset pastor up in front, struggling in his suit. He licks his thumb every time he flicks a page in his Bible.

“The Israelites were led by Moses,” he says, and I give Darryl a look. Is this our sharing notes with that pastor in Hopetown? “And they knew that they were God's chosen people. The Apostle Paul tells us in his first letter to the Corinthian church. He says that ‘all our fathers were under the cloud, all passed through the sea... they drank the same spiritual drink’. But! ‘with most of them God was not pleased, for their bodies were scattered in the wilderness’”

He goes on to urge the few of us in the small church hall to seek what pleases the Lord.

“I urge you,” he says, “Not to follow the god of self! Self-enrichment, self-preservation, selfishness... The Lord knows we need generous people in this land today.”

It’s noga! true, ya. I’m looking at Darryl to get an idea of what I should think of this. He’s barely sitting still. Shaking in his chair like he’s got a disease. If that had been me last week I would’ve gotten a fat klap from him! So I focus on the stage again. The pastor steps down and we sing one more chorus.

Then my soul... Shall fear no ill;

Let Him lead... me where He will.

I will go... without a murmur,

And His footsteps follow still.

We leave early. Darryl says he’s worried about activity.

“Activity?” I ask. He nods. Just activity. When we’re a long way away from the church, he turns to me again:

“Not a lot of people attending this morning. If I were that pastor, I’d be worried.”

But what about the goetes he had to say? That was mos solid stuff – even I knew that. Maybe people didn’t like listening to the truth. Not right now, at least. He hurries us along because he says we’re too close to rest just yet.

X

“Pretoria. Praise the Lord” Darryl, clearly relieved but not showing it on his face, says. “Not much walking left, my boy.”

The place is pretty. Colourful trees are dotted all around, leading up to the main road. We stop under a massive tree with purple flowers. The nuuskierige sun is back, drifting through heavy clouds, and welcome on my face. I’m burnt a bit but it’s still nice to stop and

enjoy the feeling of light. I'd forgotten about that over the past few days – the same way that you forget how food from three days ago tasted like.

You know that these trees are alien? Darryl says. They're beautiful but they're not good for this place, he says.

Then he closes his eyes for some time. I've been sleeping lekker but his mind has been racing for 'n paar days already.

What I've been wanting to say is: You're nogals strange, hey? I don't know anyone like you. Why do you do the things you do? How can someone so interested in trees and goetes just walk out on the people who need you most? How can you be a man of God and so selfish as well? What is it about a father that burns a face so?

Then the clouds take over and a light rain comes down. Lifting my head to the sky, I open my mouth wide as I walk but I catch almost nothing. The small drops land on my lips and just leave me thirsty.

X

So we walk past a corner shop in Eerserust, my mouth watering, and we bump right into Aunty Stienie. What are the chances? She lets out a small shriek of surprise and then Darryl soema goes straight into a hug. You can tell by her face that he stinks. She's cradling a baby on her hip. A coloured girl with blond hair, believe it or not.

She wants to know what we're doing here. But Darryl's mos not ready to explain everything here. He says we're visiting Pretoria for the day. Sieker true. His hands are in his pockets and he's checking out the other coloureds on this street corner, tikkop eyes bright.

Aunty Stienie remembers to hug me as well. She gives me a big one even though I stink as well. She's nice.

“Your mother called me earlier in the week. She said you were kidnapped.”

“But as you can see, Kyle is fine”

She's looking at my hair and sweat and thin arms. Then she's telling us to follow after her and the baby. She looks back to us as she's speaking.

"Now, broer, what's the plan? You trying to make life more miserable for her?"

"No. No. Misunderstandings abound and I just haven't had the time to set things straight. But I'm so close to getting out of here, now."

X

"You always get what you want. I don't know why I'm always ready to help you out."

Darryl's given her the short version of our story – minus all the drama we got involved in. An ou named Lorber is chasing him and I need a place to stay.

She says we're in her street, a couple of blocks away from her place. You can see a pale green wall already. The child is drooling on her shoulder.

"You buy a car now?"

"No, I still can't drive yet."

"So who is parked just opposite your place?"

"I don't know – a neighbour, probably."

Darryl stops in the middle of the road.

"You don't know who that is? Stienie?"

She turns back to us.

"What do you mean?"

"Well, there's someone sitting in the car, waiting."

He's right. The exhaust is also running. The car is idling, waiting for something. One of those big sedans that only the whiteys drive. She stops with a strange look on her face.

"And you think that it's for you?"

He pulls her back by the wrist so that she's listening closely.

“There are people looking for me, Stienie. I’m on the run. We’ve been running like dogs ever since Cape Town.”

Aunty Stienie scoffs.

“Now what – you think there’s a conspiracy or something? Why would they wait at my house?”

“You don’t seem so surprised to see me,” he says and his arm tightens around his sister’s wrist, “So how did you know that we were coming here?”

“What?”

He’s pressing harder on her wrist, squashing the bone. She starts a shout but doesn’t want to wake the child. He asks her again like he’s some police officer. Aunty Stienie’s eyes grow big.

“Let go of me, bastard!” she says and flings her arm away. He lets go.

“You’re working with Lorber, hey? Trying to stop me from getting out.”

She turns on him with such anger that her face seems to change. She looks a lot like him now.

“Listen here, you selfish man, the world doesn’t revolve around you. Raak wakker, man! Coming here with all the authority of a hypocrite.” She says and shushes the baby on her shoulder who is now complaining a bit, “You running like a dog because you act like a bleddy dog. Thinking about nobody but yourself. Look at what you’ve done to this boy!”

She’s pointing at me. He takes a swipe at her finger pointed and she jumps back. The baby starts crying properly now.

“I can’t take you into my house in your state. Are you on drugs or something?”

“How can you understand the *invisible* things?” Darryl asks. He takes my hand and we turn. Then he kicks his feet back in her direction, lifting up some dirt. This man has lost it.

I turn back to see Aunty Stienie pointing back at us. She's standing beside the white man who was waiting in the car earlier on. My stomach drops – Darryl was right. But then she passes her baby to him and he gives the child a fat kiss on the cheek.

Looking back is a weak thing to do, Darryl says to me. We leave while the clouds start to gather again, my hand in his.

16

“What are we going to do now?” I ask. A deathly silence meets me. Blerrie Mondays, man. Rain is coming down erg, burning my face. We are climbing along a koppie, trying to stay off the main roads. A mist is coming over us, sieker because we're a bit higher up, leaving Pretoria for good.

When was the last time we've eaten? Aunty Stienie would've at least given us something for the road if we'd gone into her house.

“Are we stuck here now? Can I go home?”

“Shut up, be quiet. I'm thinking.”

But he's not. He's just walking on ahead of me. Clouds are coming over fast.

The strangest feeling comes over me so that I think I'm homesick again. But then I double over and throw up a clear stream of liquid. The grass soaks it up so it's not a mess.

“You're slowing me down.” He says. The ou is ready to snap at anything he doesn't like. He walks ahead of me, not stopping.

Still, I'm trying to stay just behind him. The grasshoppers are giving me blisters because they're too big. They cut right into my greasy socks. So I take them off and hold them in my hand. And I turn to find Darryl gone. The mist has covered everything – I can't see more than a metre ahead.

Which direction did he walk off to? I shout out his name. Nothing. There's no way he can hear me out here in the rain. But I soema shout again. And again. The rain laughs back at

me. I'm in the car boot again, but cold this time. And even more weary of my father than before. I shout again. It is dark, just as before. Is this the smoke I've been praying for all this time?

A bolt of lightning comes down and strikes so close that I fall to the ground. Grass and mud on the side of my face and rain trying to wash it off. Blood in my body, in my head. A ringing. A feeling that I will get what I have deserved, that I will run and continue to fall into bigger problems. My heart is sore for Mummie because she'll never see me again. My heart is sore.

Then my heart and the rest of my body is lifted up against the rain. A hand pulling my arm so hard that it feels like one of those donkey bites you give each other as children, twisting the skin on your wrist with both hands. I look up at Darryl and find concern, regret.

"I thought you were behind me," he says, as though it settles everything, "I thought you were just behind."

His shirt drifts back into grey as the rainfall takes him. I don't let him out of my sights. We walk until evening becomes day becomes evening again and my legs don't feel like I control them anymore.

X

I watch as his shadow pulls along puddles in the road. The neon cross above the church flickers out every now and then. Anglican? It looks like an older building. It doesn't have the grey bricks of the New Apostolic churches on the flats and it's probably not Baptist. NG Kerk? Pinkster?

"It's nice here," I say.

"Don't let the outside fool you. This bishop here, we go way back. I can't stand his arrogance and cowardice, but maybe he'll find it in him to help us."

Darryl knocks on the massive church door for a long while.

“Paul!” he cries out. And again. His voice echoes into the night towards sleeping houses. I look around the area. This is the easiest way to attract unnecessary attention. It’s late and we are making a noise.

The door cracks open.

“Hello?”

“It’s Darryl. From seminary.”

“My,” the man says as the door opens, “The Lord works in mysterious ways.”

“Good to see you too.” Darryl says, but he says it to the ground and not to the man’s face.

He shakes the hand of a coloured man in a dark robe. Paul is probably my father’s age and has his hair cut in the style of a salad bowl. He is sieker trying to look like a monk. Are there monks in South Africa? And does he use Brylcreem or something tune his hair so?

We step into an old dimly-lit foyer. Light leaks in from the main hall. The stairs to my left disappear into darkness.

“How long has it been, Darryl? Nearly two decades?”

“I’m sorry for the unplanned visit, but I have something to discuss with you. We’ve come through hell just to get here” Darryl says angrily, almost like this ou is responsible. Paul gestures to the main hall but tells me to take a seat at a bench in the foyer.

“I’ll be back now-now,” Darryl says. They disappear and close the main hall door behind them. I sigh. My legs are still moving along in my head.

Just beside the hall door rests a bowl of wafers for communion. Is it free for anyone to use? I get up and I take one in my hand. It’s been a long while since I’ve had communion at Mummie’s church. This wafer looks more or less the same. Smells a bit like an ice cream cone. I put it on my tongue, careful not to chew. There’s a proper way to eat it. It sticks fast and melts into my spit.

I got a fat klap back home after Mummie found me dipping my wafer into my small glass of juice to make it taste better. So now is the best time to enjoy it the way *I* want to do it.

The wafer tastes a bit like air, but it's still better than nothing. So I empty the bowl, stuffing my face with wafer before putting two or three handfuls of it into my pockets. I then take three little glasses of grape juice just to rinse it down all at once. Except it's real wine and not grape juice.

The stuff is down my throat already before I can spit it out. This place is definitely not like Mummie's church back home. If she saw real wine, she'd call Paul's church *a bunch of wine-swines*. They sieker used real wine in Jesus's time, so I don't know why she so goes on like that. The stuff is bitter and it burns a bit.

The priest (or pastor or monk) comes in suddenly and I choke. There's a big glob of wafer struggling to go down my throat because it's so dry. I look up at him with big eyes. What now?

"Your father just fell asleep in the pew. Do you know what he wanted to say?"

I shrug.

"I'll let the two of you stay here tonight. I've got some work to do for tomorrow's sermon anyway, so I'll be upstairs. Feel free to rest in the hall."

He passes by the empty wafer bowl.

"I'll bring down a sandwich later on."

My mouth won't move – too full. He's not as bad as Darryl made him out to be. I watch him go upstairs and then I hurry into the hall. Darryl is sleeping with his mouth open, his head leaning back against the wooden pew. Then the stuff goes down all at once, fast like throw-up but going down, and I cough non-stop, tears coming down my face.

The sandwich reminds me of that lunch Darryl packed in at the beginning of the trip. The escape. Whatever it is. I eat it slowly because I don't want to vomit it up again later on.

Darryl is awake again, looking a bit more like himself. He says no to a sandwich. I actually can't remember the last time I saw him eat.

"What did you preach about this Sunday?" asks Darryl, propping himself up.

"The parable of the prodigal son."

"That's the one sermon I didn't tear up back at his mother's place," he says, looking over at me. He takes off his shoes while he's talking, "The prodigal returns home expecting to be treated as a servant, but he is welcomed lovingly as a son. Beautiful."

He picks at a blackened toenail. Tries to pry it off.

"That's half of it yes," Paul says, closing the windows in the hall, "I spent most of Sunday morning unpacking the story of the older brother. Now there's a tragedy."

"Why?" I ask and Paul smiles. He was waiting for that.

"The older brother was living *in his father's house* and still managed to miss the plot completely. He angrily confesses that he wanted the inheritance for himself, just like his younger brother. So the younger brother changed, but the elder couldn't see his missteps."

Darryl pulls the nail clean off. A small drop of blood pops up.

"Always looking for a new angle, hey Paul?"

"Well we've got to look at the full context –"

"Always been trying to make up for past follies..."

Paul scoffs. Old stories you're bringing up, he says. Then he turns to me:

"Your father hasn't gotten over the things that happened in Pacaltsdorp all those years ago."

"What are you talking to him for?" Darryl bursts out, his foot still sitting naked on the end of the pew. Paul starts his story anyway.

Years ago, he and Darryl returned to their hometown after studying theology. They intended on starting a mission school that could serve as a new hub for the unreached towns surrounding Pacaltsdorp. They wanted to kick off a new move of God.

“Did you ever meet Darryl’s father?” Paul wants to know. Uncle Clive, better known as Pastor Clive.

“A bitter man. Always wanted his own way,” Darryl says, putting his dirty sock back on, ignoring that speck of blood.

Apparently Pastor Clive had a voice so loud that people swimming in Skaapkoprivier could hear him pray on Sunday mornings. Backfiring car? No, that was just Clive saying ‘amen’.

Pastor Clive was getting old so and so the churchgoers imagined it fair that Darryl would take over one day. But he didn’t want any new movements encroaching on his ministry. He held on like Saul.

“His church was getting on, you know? Many passing away from old age. A new move of God was needed. But he was certain his work wasn’t done yet.”

Darryl got back home and it was like he had never left. Not in a good way.

“My father put me on the bench, you could say. He was testing me. And I was passing well, until he found out about Cassandra.”

This is the first time I’m hearing about how Mummie and Darryl met. Pacaltsdorp, far away, grows real in my mind. A man and woman finding each other, never knowing how badly it all would turn out.

They grew up together on neighbouring farmlands so they knew each other from young. Darryl was a few years older, so he they didn’t hang around together much after childhood.

“When I came back, though,” he says, “She’d gotten so beautiful...”

“And when Clive found out, he cut Darryl off.”

“The bastard... Her family wasn't churchgoing and she wasn't baptized when we were still courting. But she wanted to... What an unnecessary mess. Because she eventually got confirmed in the church, but my father was convinced we'd done things the wrong way around.

“He came up to me after her baptism, and said in the softest voice I've ever heard: ‘The two of you are trouble – how will you stand on that judgement day?’ and I think he cursed me right there.”

So Darryl left forever with his young wife and settled for humbler times in the Cape. And Paul took over Uncle Clive's ministry after the old man passed away. Darryl wasn't at the funeral.

“I only stayed in Pacalts for a short while,” Paul says, “I always imagined Darryl would return one day to take up his father's inheritance.”

“The Mercedes was enough. Why would I want to go back, Paul? When we settled into Mowbray, in a place of our own – yes the place was draughty and we kept getting sick – but one evening I realised the weight of expectations that I'd left behind.

“I was supposed to be Clive Junior, golden-child, and everyone seemed to know who I'd become. No, I got out.”

“And look where we are now.” Paul mumbles. Darryl's eyes go dark – they were open like a drunk person's but now they're closed. He's done talking, I know. So I settle back in my pew – Darryl's dirty windbreaker makes a lekker pillow – and let these two ouense's words swirl around my head.

X

Paul wakes me up.

“Not to disturb you, but are you good at catching creatures? There’s a moth in my study and I don’t want to kill it.”

Walking to the study, I could hear the faintest sound of wings beating. It sounds like a small bird. But then when we get inside... Blerrie hell there’s a moth *the size of a bird* crashing into Paul’s study desk.

“He’d seem like a waste to swat down. So much moth.”

I walk over to it and cup it in my hands, one-time. The thing’s wings beat against my palm gently, tickling it.

“Very good. Just throw it out of the window.”

I go over to the window overseeing the back of the church and let the moth loose. It sits on my hand for a moment, maybe wondering if the outside is so kwaai after all. The darkness of the night means that he’ll probably be hanging around the church anyway. Then it takes off and I watch it climb into the sky past the low surrounding wall and disappear forever.

“Wonderful,” Paul says, closing the window. He asks me how I’m doing while he packs away his notes.

I’m fine, I’m fine. That’s mos the right answer ne? I could be better here in Pretoria, but also much worse. I’m not hungry and there’s a place to sleep and drol tonight. I don’t need much. I’m mos a man now, sieker.

“Kyle, are you going to catch a bus home? Or a train?”

“Darryl says we need to leave first.”

“Leave where? The country?”

I nod. Sieker that ne? Paul sighs and puts down his notes.

“What has he gotten himself into?”

“Lorber and his ouense are chasing him from Cape Town. They supposed to be evil.”

“Who is Lorber?”

“He didn’t say. He says it’s for my own good.”

Quiet. The church is letting in moonlight from the outside and everything is still. Everything except my leg muscles. I look up at him and know there’s more to say. In any case, he’s helped us both already so I’m sure I can tell him the story. I take a deep breath.

“It hasn’t been *so* bad. We lost the car – that was junk. But we getting there. It’s just that I’m sieker missing school now and I haven’t told Mummie anything in a while.”

“She’s probably worried sick”

I groan as I get up. My legs feel like they’ve been on fire since we’ve stopped walking.

“That’s the journey catching up with you,” Paul says. “You can get some rest in the hall. I’ll be heading home now. I’ll open up for the two of you in the morning. Feel free to make something for breakfast from the little fridge here.”

I watch him lock the massive front door and hear his footfalls reach his car. Then I walk back into the hall, my legs stiff and tired. With a sandwich in my stomach, I go to sleep next to Darryl nogals quickly. And I dream of Mummie and Aunty Stienie. Matching doekies, lipstick done, eyebrows sharp with anger. They’re in my face, saying “no” heeldag. Asking me where I am, what I’m doing. I mean, demmit, I’ll come home eventually!

18

Darryl’s screaming wakes me up in the morning. He’s having a nightmare or something. I try shaking him awake but he’s writhing around, eyes white.

“Darryl!” I keep shouting at him, just like I did on the koppie, full of mist.

He suddenly skriks awake and looks at me for a long moment. Blinks slowly a few times like he’s mad.

“We have to go,” he says, wiping a trail of spit from the side of his mouth.

“Paul locked the door last night when he left.”

“Then we’ll go through a window.”

He’s not thinking right. Holding his neck like it’ll break soon. Scratching the back of it raw. I’m feeling nogal hungry. I could do with something in my stomach first.

The massive church door opens. Paul lets some of the cool wind inside. He’s got one of those long breads cradled in his arm, holding his massive Bible and notes in the other.

Heaven-sent! We follow him into his study.

“Sandwich?” he asks, getting out a small breadknife and plate.

“You can make a couple for the road. We need to be off.”

“So soon?” Paul says, worried. “What about your story? Why did you come to me for help? Why did you run away from the Cape?”

“Nobody said anything about running away,” Darryl growls at him. But he’s looking at me. I try not to look like I piemped on him. Arms behind my back, looking at the patterns in the wooden boards I’m standing on.

Paul has cut the roll in half and is buttering each side. Thin slices of cheese go on top.

“You can tell me, Darryl. Please, for your sake. I can see you’re carrying a heavy burden.”

He gives us the plate. This food looks nogal dry but I’m too hungry to worry about that. Darryl relaxes after a couple of bites.

“I made some enemies back in the Cape and I need to leave the country.”

“State police?”

“Yes and no. One guy named Lorber. He’s high up in the police.”

“And he wants to lock you up? You been politically active again lately?”

“This Lorber, he knows what I’ve done. He phoned me last Friday and said he’ll kill me. He’s the one man in South Africa that you can count on getting that done.”

“Has he tried to make advances? Because sometimes people talk –”

“I feel his anger wherever I am. He’ll come up from the ground to get his hands on me... There’s that Proverb ‘For jealousy makes a man furious. And he will not spare when he takes revenge’”

“But that Proverb specifically regards adultery.”

Darryl sits down and catches some of the light from the window. Bags under his eyes like he’s wanting to go shopping. Black-black, making his eyes all muddy. Everything around us is quiet.

“Lorber was my neighbor in the Southern Suburbs. He had a wife...”

He takes a breath. He is thin, broken a bit in his kop I think, but we are in a church. Father and son. He looks over at the window and then gets up.

“What’s this?”

Out along Victoria Road, running behind the church, a police car rounds the bend. Followed by another. Darryl runs to the other corner of the room to look at the window facing the parking lot. Quiet. Then the two cars turn in, sirens off.

“What are they,” Darryl shouts, pointing at the window, “Doing here, Paul?”

Paul butters an off-cut of the roll that he gave us. He looks up at the window, standing with the loaf and the knife.

“I... Had a realization this morning. This boy needs to go back to his mother. She’s worried sick, Darryl. And the police will take care of the matter in the right way.”

“Did you help him with this?” Darryl asks me. I don’t know what to say.

Then he moves across the room like a shadow.

“You can’t help but take things away from me, you swine.”

He grabs Paul by the shirt collar before the ou can shout. Hits Paul in the mouth.

Butter knife clatters on the boards. I shout. Some blood drips from a cut in the man’s lip. He

doesn't even wipe it, just looks at Darryl. His piece of bread is spoiled; it hit the floor butter-side up.

"This boy is my matter!" my father says and he shakes the man until I start feeling dizzy. I grab Darryl's arm to make him stop but he throws me off.

"You're not in the right mind –"

He smacks Paul's glasses off of his face.

"Who can help us get Kyle a passport?" he growls. He's like the devil here and I'm scared for Paul. The poor man is dizzy, speaking very slowly.

"There's a protest meeting at Westbury High today... Jinx will help you with documents and transport to neighbouring SADC..."

"Where?"

"In Main Road, just two blocks..."

The man closes his eyes and I start to cry. This ou mos didn't deserve this treatment. Darryl is taking off his robe, moving quickly like he's in with the worst lot of thieves. A Michael and Keenan maneuver you'll see on the Flats. The man lies in his office now just in a vest and an underpants. There are new shapes in the wooden floor. Wooden patches of spit and blood.

"Kyle, I don't want to do this but Paul is an idiot. He's set us up."

Now dressed like a priest, he opens up the window for the back of the church.

"You jump out here. You'll fit." He says and fixes his collar.

"And you?"

"I'll distract the policemen. Wait for me outside. Stay close to the wall. And stay hidden, or I'll kill you."

Then he rushes out to meet the policemen in front. I turn to the window. Climb up to it and hang by the sill. Paul is still splayed out on his floor in his onderbroek. Shame, he didn't deserve this. I drop down.

The window is much higher than I imagined, so I land on my ankle and it's blerrie sore. I try not to shout out. Hobbling over to the edge of the wall, I can make out Darryl in the outfit and three policemen. He's pointing to something inside. Isn't that making it more difficult for us? But he hasn't been lekker ever since we left Aunty Stienie. The thread of his plan in the hands of an old friend lying in his underpants. I hear the policemen shouting faintly as they rush inside. Then the sound of the front door closing.

A hand grabs my mouth and I scream into it. Darryl's face, worried, looking around at the streets. He takes my hand and we jump over the low wall together. My legs are beginning to pain again.

"They thought I was Paul, the heathens. I told them that the man and boy they're looking for are holed up in the bell tower with a gun. Then I locked them inside when they went up."

He takes my hand and drags me down Ray Street, not even noticing my sore ankle and tired legs.

19

Westbury Secondary School is in the Main Road, just like Paul said. If I were him I'd have given the address of a police station. But as it stands, we're scraping through past police and we're nearly into the Promised Land. Exile.

Pavement gives way to road to pavement – we avoid the vibracrete. My feet hitting the dirt through my socks, since I didn't have a chance to put them back on. I need new shoes again.

Hundreds of students are inside the gates, trickling onto the field for a meeting. We make our approach. There are ouense taking photos with their cameras around as well, but they avoid us when we pass. We sieker stink badly – I don't know.

People are standing around a small raised platform on the school field. When was the last time I saw so many people in one place? Back home on the Flats, sieker. Everyone is out on the streets on weekends like all the houses were turned inside-out. Looking for something to do; ready to start trouble. Here it's the same, except everyone is here with a good reason. Singing songs from Protest Park.

We go up to the first person who looks like a student leader. A coloured bra with a solid bleskop. He stares at us, not sure what we're going to ask.

“Do you know a man named Jinx?”

“Huh? Jik?”

“Jinx.”

He shakes his head. We move on to the next person. Nobody knows. Then there's no time left because the songs stop and someone stands up on the makeshift stage, flanked by moerse big speakers. We are all being ushered to the field to sit down. Darryl and I stay on the fringes, eyeing everyone.

“This is a waste of time.”

A young man next to me overhears him and tells him to hou his bek.

“Do you know a Jinx?” I ask the man.

“Jinx? Ya, she's the one with the mic” and he points to the woman addressing the crowd.

“She's Jinx?”

“Ya. Jacinda. One of the student leaders.”

Darryl sighs. We need to wait until this event is done before we can chat with her.

She leads a freedom song with an outstretched fist. Everyone sings along, even Darryl. I feel no good junk for not knowing any of the words. Then just as the meeting is about to get underway, about ten police vans pull up on the school grounds. The regulars are here: Loudspeaker Man, Riot Man, Angry Dog... They all storm in with batons – everyone except the dogs. No warning, the bliksems.

The boy – “Hou jou bek” – is over the fence but a police dog catches him on the calf. We’re surrounded already.

I look up at Darryl and see pain in his face. *My fears have befallen me.* This is exactly what he wanted to avoid. It’s almost funny. He grabs my hand and weaves through bodies. He runs low, sieker trying to avoid the police.

To my right, students are being beaten and thrown into vans. Girls pulled by their hair. A man falls over right on top of me, so that I lose Darryl’s hand. I’m under the action, feeling shoes and knees all over my body.

I feel a hand pull me up by my shoulder.

“Come!”

I’m dizzy from the fall. He picks me up and tells me to follow him. More screaming and dogs and eyes of angry men who want to control the people even though it’s sliding away from them. One of them swings onto the head of Darryl, connecting it like an egg. I scream – a flash – and jump the man. It takes him by surprise and we both go over.

I don’t know where the strength comes from, but I klap the man and then pull Darryl up. His head has been split open – blood is streaming from the top. Dazed eyes. Not so much taatie. I take my shirt off and wrapped it around his head like that dronkie back in Warrenton. A flash again.

Men are guarding the front gate so the mass of students are going to the other end of the field. But while we were running here, I saw a small chainlink fence tucked out of sight. I

pull Darryl along and we run against the stream of students. The police are on the chase, not far behind.

We round a tree and I chose well – no police cars on the other side of the fence. Some clever students have already hopped over and are busy clambering into a cream Datsun that's revving in the street. I don't believe it – Jan is driving! I've never been happier to see a familiar face. One that looks like it was properly donned back in Warrenton.

Darryl launches me forward. I jump onto the fence and flip over it in one motion. Adrenaline is one helluva help. When I land on my shoulder I don't feel anything. I turn back to find Darryl being pulled back down the fence by the policemen. He lashes out at them and they back off, nogals confused to see a priest looking so vicious.

As I stand up, I know that the journey is done. We have reached the end and it was a shorter one than he expected. Darryl, framed by grey chain-link, has run the race and finished with fear. He looks back at me – and still I see embarrassment and dread – but he is also smiling with sadness at me. He is saying that I must carry on alone, though I don't know the way.

The policemen go for him again. He roars and puts up a fight, swinging like a madman so that they back off again, but he's cornered right up against the fence. His fists are raised.

“You think you all know what you're doing, you bastards. You're wasting your time on the Cape's biggest fraud. I! Me!” and now he's pointing at us, not looking away from the four ouens, “Those people on the other side, they're your real problem!” and here he laughs so loud that the whiteys still don't know what to do.

“You can smite me, but the Lord will not be struck down!” he says with all the might of the prophets. Then he launches forward and gets moered by the batons. They go for his

head first, beating him up until he stops moving. The policemen, seeing he is on his back, eyes swollen shut, start climbing the fence.

A tug comes from behind – a young man pulls me into Datsun. There are about six people in the back, so I just lay across the laps of people I don't know. My head isn't even light – it just feels empty. I hear the screeching of the wheels as we pull off and see Darryl lying face-down still. The car is moving and I sleep.

20

1 June 1980

Mummie wakes me as usual to ask if I want to go with her to church. She's in a hurry. I look up at the ceiling and hold the blanket to my neck, letting the edges grate my skin, remembering that this is my room, my bed. Forgetting the dreams of blood in my head.

I, Kyle Jantjies, am back home again. Rosemead Court, my bricks and stairs, flanked by council houses tucked away by National Roads and fields and whatever else. Enamel bakkies under the washing line, tannies putting clothes up and simple children pulling the goetes down. People looking for something to do. Waiting for trouble. Darryl told the Philosopher that the Flats was a dump, and in a way I see that he is right. What else can you call the place? Verwoed and company mos dumped them here because no whities wanted the Flats.

She is leaving the flat and looks surprised to find me calling after her. I say I'll be ready in four minutes. We might be late now, but I think she's just glad she's not going alone today. She doesn't rush me. Just waits at the door, arms folded, tutting.

X

We are ten minutes away from church. At the corner is a house with a sprawling frangipane tree. The petals fall onto the pavement. Mummie picks one up and twirls it in her hand. She

walks with it until we get to the steps of Lord's Peace Commission and then lets it fall. I even turn back to watch the wind drag it into the street.

Inside, two old men and two old women shake my hand. They are no longer friendly and smell of perfume and they're eager to get to the next outstretched hand until they reach mine. Even old people around here have seen the picture.

"Oh my boy, you've been through so much"

"Bless you, child."

I have to think and act like a Jerome Claassen now, because everyone says that's who I am. I'm the hero they needed, they say. Kan jy dit glo? Grown men and women fawning over me.

The picture. It travelled from the spool of a photographer at Westbury Secondary School and landed in the Daily Writ. Jan Skoene's newspaper had the headline: *Boy struggles with police, helps priest.*

The story caught on and found its way to Joburg, then the Cape. Now it's in shop windows, barbershops, smokkelhouses – but just the picture. Everyone knows the story, so they'll speak about it rather than reading it over again.

The picture: A young man with fist raised high, beating back a policeman while holding onto the collar of a priest, Blood trickles down the man of God's head. His face is not visible. The young man snarls at the policemen surrounding them.

I came home a few days after the commotion of the image landed. Jan had put me on a coloured train from Transvaal to the Cape and I met Mummie at the station. Darryl should've just used a train, bleddywill. I watched the same hills and mountains from the opposite side and it was different because I knew that I was returning like Moses.

Now, standing in this church in my corner of South Africa, I know – and I knew this as soon as I saw that blerrie picture – that I can never tell anyone that the priest is my father

and that we stripped Paul to his underpants in his own church and ran like dogs. He didn't come forward either, at least not yet. Maybe he will one of these days.

The offering box goes around and a special offering is made for the striking residents from Bot River, Grabouw-side. That's mos a long way, but it's nice that the church is trying to help them as well.

Their Pastor Rodney opens the meeting by reading from 1 John 4. He keeps taking his reading glasses off every time he makes a comment, then puts them on again to read. The verses are about loving you brother – that's how you know you're not in darkness – but also about other confusing stuff. I'm sukkeling to follow. The ou Paul wrote:

I am writing to you, little children, because your sins are forgiven for his name's sake

I am writing to you, fathers, because you know him who is from the beginning.

I am writing to you, young me, because you have overcome the evil one...

I think of Paul back in Joburg. What is he doing now? Eating a sandwich? Hopefully not sitting with lasting bruises still. Darryl sorted him out solid.

Eventually we finish off with a couple of hymns – I know neither of them – and then there's time to chat after the service. Mummie is swarmed by people this morning. Because of me? Some strangers talk to me like we've been friends for years.

“How did you get back here, boy?” is what everyone eventually asks me. I just say ‘The Lord’. Because it's simple and true. They're happy with that explanation. They bring their handkerchiefs to their face, laugh with delight because a boy was lost but now he is here.

Pastor Ryan shakes my hand and says it's good to meet me. We've met before, but he sieker doesn't remember.

“We look forward to seeing you again,” he says, “There's an evening service as well...”

I smile but they mustn't try their luck.

X

We get back to the court in the early afternoon. There's still time for a quick run to the scrapyard. I'm not sure if it's open on Sundays but it beats staying at home alone for the afternoon. Plus, Mummie says she wants to clean. It's better to stay away then, or I'll be roped in for vacuuming, washing windows and blerrie dusting. I don't have lis for that.

Mummie didn't say anything about school, so I take it that I won't upset her if I don't go through tomorrow. The boycott ended a month ago and everyone is back to their work.

Everyone except for Jerome, who is still missing. His mother has grown frail. Just sits on her stoep. I make a duidelike jaffle for Mummie and me at home.

X

Uncle Joah catches me walking down the street. He is closing up his empty garage.

"Hullo boy!" he calls and waves me over. "Want something to drink?"

The inside of his house smells like a window hasn't been opened in a year. Very musty and dark. Curtains always shut. Shells of dead moths hanging from them, wrapped up in a layer of dust. I cough.

We drink Oros together at the television. He is rubbing his knee.

"I've kept some scrap for you. It's taking up a lot of space – I can't get any cars inside anymore."

"Isn't that good though? Then people won't have to bother you with their cars anymore."

He's quiet. Maybe he still wants people to bother him. Shame man.

I take a box full of copper from him and say that I'll see him around. This worked out lekker. I'm holding a goldmine of goodies – I'm thinking I could at least get R5 out of it. Maybe even 10 if that ou Terrence gives me an advance. I'm taking a gamble that the place is

open on a Sunday morning. Funny that I've never found out before today. The box is nogal heavy but I think I can make it to Epping without putting it down.

I turn right into Duinefontein. Then my blood freezes and I almost drop the box. From the end of Klipfontein Road I spot Nantjies riding at me on his bicycle, the wheels blurring. It's a new bike – much sleeker than a Chopper but with less character. These gangsters can buy anything they want. I have no chance running with this box so I decide I must maar try and act sterk. Take my punishment – the bad stuff I deserve. All of this because of a bike.

“Jy!” he shouts and rides up to me. I stop at the edge of the pavement, trying not to look scared. But I'm thinking of grabbing a handful of wire, throw them with the box and then running off to a hiding place. I must just I remember the good spots.

“Last time I checked you, there was bakleierei going on here. You lucky that you left at the right time – almost like you knew something was gonna go down. Like a prophet. Now you the main ou.”

I want to laugh at him. Giving out compliments now? Is he trying something?

“You and Charlie come right now?” I ask, trying not to give anything away.

“Nee, wat! Charlie left before I had a chance to moer him. He mos went to the army.”

“Last time I checked he wasn't white” I say. Nantjies looks at me with genuine surprise coming from his tanne. Like I should know now, because I'm mos the face of the Heideveld struggle.

“Didn't you hear P.W.? He's letting coloureds and Indians join now. Then you get special concessions. I think Charlie wants his police record cleared. The whities are darem desperate now – too little of them and too many freedom fighters here and on the borders.”

Nantjies sounds like he's been following this whole thing very closely. He always came across as a smart ou, even with his two ugly teeth sticking out of his mouth like arrows.

“Where you going?”

“Epping.”

“Be safe, there’s a new gang of druggies setting up there. They’re morsig.”

Then he calls his ouense and he starts riding off – they jog behind him like a dik versin cycling team or something. But the feeling on my chest is still there – it’s been there since that Saturday. I hate that feeling.

“Nantjies!”

He turns his bike around and waves his ouense on. They don’t wait for him.

“What?”

“I was the one who stole the bike. That’s why I left.”

He lowers his face to his brake handle, scratches his nose without lifting his head.

“I schemed you could’ve done it. That was cold.”

“You ouense pushed me to do it.”

He scoffs.

“I’d sort you out, blood for blood,” he says, turning his bike back around towards his ouense, “But now you’re untouchable. That picture saved your life. Everyone needs you now,” he says and rides off.

I stand with the stupid box of parts in my hands. A piece of wire has been cutting into my palm, almost drawing blood.

X

Jehovah Jireh Scrap Station is gone. The warehouse is now just an open field with a sign of a construction company. Coming soon. I always thought that place was going to fall in on itself. The people in charge must’ve figured it would be safer to just start new.

I walk down but there’s no point. Nothing to hold onto or take back home. A heap of rubble stands behind where the building would’ve been. Other than that there’s no trace of the scrap station having been here at all.

Is this what the Group Areas Act felt like for Mummie-them? The place I spent most of my free time thinking about is gone. Every passageway and brick amounted to nothing.

One of the regular homeless scrapmongers is lying in the shade of a poplar tree. I set the box at her feet. She is ponging a bit with sour sweat.

“They sold the warehouse space after some of the new druggies tried to rob the place.” She says and rifles through my box for anything that catches her eye.

“Terrence took two bullets in the chest but he didn’t go without a fight, jong. Did you ever see the gun he keeps in that shelf by the gate?”

I didn’t, which irritates me. I thought I was a good observer and I thought I knew that place best.

“Now it sounds like Terrence shot two holes through one of them and they never found the missing pieces. The other ou got away.”

She points back to the field I was standing in “Two dead just there. I loved staying here with the trees and the shade, but I must maar move soon. You can’t live so close to death.”

She says the next closest place for scrap is in Maitland. I give her the box because that’s too far for me to walk today. No point killing your legs just for a R5.

X

I take a taxi back to Athlone. It’s just a ten minute drive but my legs are really struggling today.

The whole place has changed a little. Nothing you can see – just a feeling. People ready to mobilise. You can catch conversations of trade unions and mass solidarity in the streets. And there’s the posters of protest lines: *Pupils are for freedom. Freedom is for all.* They’re stuck on lampposts, sides of shops.

The driver hushes us from the front. On the radio, a newsreader says that the SASOL plant sabotaged today is probably going to cost the government hundreds of millions of Rands. That's nogal erg, but maybe now they'll listen.

As we pull up to a red robot on the drive home, I spot a dog on a mound of trash. Scrap and all that. It has three legs and patchy skin like the dog from that night I left with Darryl. Same colour and shape. A little older as well. And leading six young pups along. Seeing them sniff about together, looking for food and a place to rest, I start to tjank right there in the middle of a taxi.

Something is shoved right under my nose. A tissue from the ou tannie sitting next to me, tears in her eyes. Bless her, I didn't even notice her. She looks like every ou tannie I've ever seen – always shuffling away to the shops for the niece or nephew she's raising on her own – her blouse a nameless pastel.

“You must be strong, boy,” she tells me, “Jy's nog jonk.”

I nod. Everyone around is pretending like nothing is happening. So I hold the hand of an old tannie I don't know. Her skin is rough – hard-working hands – and she has a beautiful blue ring on her middle finger.

I get off at the stop and nod at the woman again shyly, squinting at the low sun in my face.

X

At home the gate is open. The door shut. I know that my fears must have overcome me – Mummie lying dead in the kitchen, nightie shorn, and I shake as I enter the house. Lorber and the rest of evil. I'll be gone like Jerome.

It is dark and quiet. I step inside, shaking. All at once figures step out and rush me.

I shriek like a child. Sadie – a girl from my class and Sunday school – is laughing, shouting SURPRISE. Nothing is making sense. I must laugh – everyone is here to see me. But it has been a long day already, so I just end up snorting loudly. It sounds nogal taatie.

The whole of the Lord's Peace Commission is waiting for me in the flat. I see Auntie Francheska and Sadie and Pastor Ryan with the church members and the choir. The flat is at bursting point – people I don't know are leaning against the doorways and squeezing into our home. Behind the lot is a big handmade banner – one of the church aunties must've made it – with the words Happy Belated Birthday on it. The table is clear.

There were papers scattered about that table before. Darryl's sermons – all gone now. I remember the pages being held in a hand but not the writer. The congregants stand open-mouthed, looking at me, holding onto their spouses and their plates arrayed with daltjies and koesisters.

Look at you!

Mummie gives me another hug in front of everyone. She's tearing up again and wiping my face like I'm the one crying. Her hands smell like some fresh brand of Jik.

“Look what they've done to my boy. They hurt him but he's strong.”

She holds me tightly but I'm hearing the flash of the cameraman. It rings and doesn't stop. The tears are flowing – an uncle laughs: die trane loop! – but I'm not ashamed like when I got thrown over the counter by the blind man or when we were stuck in that protest outside the police station. The thread of her black shawl is stretched and sits against my skin. My eyes are closed.

Thoughts run ahead of me: colours of the road and the stubble of an officer and a very small flame starting in the cubbyhole, building, eventually consuming a Merc. And the feeling of growing very close to someone – the light snuffed out suddenly. Guava spot; a man smiling, mouthing “rest”. Or “blessed” miskien. There is blood in my head. I weep.

Look at you, my child. Your head is heavier; you've grown. I draw you in like a hen to her chicks and you aren't even shy in front of all these people! As though you've become soft. Boys around here like to rail against their parents, act tough. But you've been through too much to stand on your own. What did that man do to you?

Darryl Jantjies, born like Adam in the dust. If I could trace the lines that led to that man's fall, I would have some relief. Golden boy turned wild, maybe even rotten.

Even while I hold you to my chest I think of the man that looked nearly just like you thirty years ago. Your face is changing, as his did in the Dorp when he tended to his Uncle's kraal. Kaalvoet in cow dung on those icy mornings to keep warm. He waved at me with his mud-covered hands when I passed him by to find work. Cabbages and mielies and chickens, ever breeding.

I told him one evening behind the shed, drunk with the season, "You are the master of your own destiny" and he took it in like it was an offering. As though he could hold my words in his hands like water.

This was before I really knew Jesus – my family would join on Easter and Christmas and was busy otherwise. We were still young and Darryl would insist to stand beside his father for the opening prayer. Such a defiant little klonkie in his suit, very serious.

Some nights I lay and wonder if I have led him astray with those words. It sounded right in the moment. *Master*. He was never satisfied because he never could never make that a reality. There was always an unjust law or poor treatment by the rich dragging him down. I knew this then, but I didn't know how things would turn out. How was I to know?

You're holding on so tightly that my ribs are creaking. Like a lightness of breath, birth pains. My aarde! I hold. I hold fast to a thought: *this love we give one another is not*

sufficient. It is not patient, not kind, does not yield to grace. You must listen to me as I look at you – I know it is confusing. I know that you are getting chastised even while I am loving you. Look into these eyes and see that the thread you pull is insufficient – you will break as your father did. Hold me now, yes, but know that I will hold you accountable for the idle words spoken under this roof. Now that you are close I don't want to see you leave again. I must wait.

Cameras flash disrespectfully – Oom Pietie is nearing the need to load more spool for his weapon – and smiles are full. We are together again. Together and I know one thing. While you were running around the country, you forgot about me. Your father's selfish, foolish streak abounds – I will pray that it doesn't come to pass!

He ran away, you know, under the light of the church. He ran away because of me, mostly. There is only space for one coloured Predikant back home. And you mustn't wait on trying to outlive the father – he joked that he got that from the parable of the Prodigal Son.

He forsook his Afrikaans – never spoke it again in the house. He forsook his father's measured prose – broke the sound barrier a couple of times. HALLELUJAH, HALLELUJAH. Speakers cutting out – sound man running to turn some dials, but all the while my man is carrying on. The saints, moving on.

And he packed little – saw a newspaper clipping of the city lights – only telling me we'd left for good when we stepped out of the train. I thought it was a holiday. All my photographs in those books with the ornate borders are probably sitting in my room where I left it, or burnt up in some ash heap. I loved a pretty picture.

And so when Oom Pietie says 'cheese', I struggle not to respond like all the other coloured aunties, smiling and becoming false. No, I know this moment is special. I feel those tears on my shoulder blade. Sit up and listen – you're so prone to wonder! There's no way to tell this to you without you yawning. So look! Child, I am not old.

You're doing very well with all the affection this afternoon, but you must let the other people have a chance to hug you as well. Jerome's aunty wants to take your head into her hands and say something fragile and precious. You look scared and overwhelmed, but you must feel the weight of coming home. Thirteen doesn't come around every day and when it gets forgotten by tragedy then we must make even more of a fuss! You have been through so much and you have returned. If that isn't hope for all of us here, then I don't know what is.

At thirteen, Darryl was already fixated on the two of us being married. I think he was in love with the idea of making his plans become reality. I also think I may be bitter after all these years of reflecting. I'm a flippen mirror, or I was up until he left. Everything related to him and his precious work. The town back home drilled that into him.

What will people say? My mother used to ask all the time when I was growing up and wanted to do my own thing. But now forty years later I see that people will talk about whatever makes their ears itch. It actually shows you what's in a person's heart if all they think about is skandaal.

You know what people should talk about more? The thing of grace. Nobody speaks about it unless they talk about praying for supper. But it's a thing that comes from God. And I think it's what keeps us from being animals.

People say that something is graceful when it is delicate or pretty, but one verse has been stuck in my head for years: Grace enables us to say no to sin. Grace does that! Not just words or determination. So it must be something stronger than we like to admit.

Even Darryl the Preacher used to overlook this, I realise now. Sometimes when he was preparing a sermon he'd be reading something beautiful aloud and pass right over it. Then I would stop him and say 'Look. Read that again.' And a light would leave his eyes and he'd get short with me. I can't say what it was. Embarrassment? Or the burden that he must always have something to show for being a man of God?

“If you don’t make it out there, nobody will,” his church leader told him and he took that as gospel. His shoes and suit sang that on every Sunday morning, midmorning, evening service. Naturally, politics was calling but he chose the pulpit. He knew what was expected of him and it destroyed him.

When we were kicked out of my great aunt’s place in Claremont in 1970 – that almost broke me. It was the same story for all the coloureds, but just a question of time: you got the letter for removal and then you waited in fear until the van came to dump you on the Flats. There was always the hope that there’d be a mistake and maybe you’d be one of the last families to stay in the neighbourhood before the whites moved in.

Darryl would not wait for that. I know he saw that van as a humiliation, and a symbol of the people of Claremont not banding together properly against those evil laws. He petitioned, went round to every house in the neighbourhood, pleaded with men and women to write letters and march to Town and make things difficult. They just saw an angry coloured from the plaas. It was humiliation.

He sits in the kitchen – that kitchen had a massive window to let in a flood of gentle light – head in palms. He says,

“Must I plant a bomb to be heard?”

His hair is going grey already. At his elbow is my great grandmother’s crystal sugar bowl. It is catching the light and throwing it around the room, unaware of how desperate life has become. You are already stretching my womb.

I know what these people in this room expect of you, Kyle, and I know you’ll never live up to their hopes. Hold me closer. Did you hear the gunshots earlier? Have you heard from Darryl? Do you know how grace arrives into this world? Maybe it’s been here before us, like Wisdom. And the opportunity to extend grace to others is bursting at the white/non-white seams here in this Lowveld, stretching to cities and through fynbos and gold.

We must be unacquainted with it, I think. I notice everyday how we pass by the chance to help someone out. What is that? Tell me what it is, if not selfishness.

On Saturday, May 1st 1970 Darryl pulls up right to the front door and tells me to pack for the day. We're moving to our assigned flat in Heideveld early. I have no time to think about the things we need and the things I want. Everything blurs except for the face of a man who has had enough. The eyes in his head are largely white and they shine with shame. I kiss him on the neck but there is no response. His foot wants to be pressing down on the petrol.

In the haze I forget my great grandmother's crystal. I start to cry in the car. It grows into a deep sigh. I have no idea where she's gotten that beautiful set – the heirloom is lost and will change hands from today. That, or meet the ire of another bulldozer.

When he leaves us a couple of years later, he leaves me a note. *I am going to make a difference from inside the beast of injustice*, he says. He doesn't explain it but later I'll hear that he's living in a white area in Claremont and that he'll be ordained soon. Now many coloured communities have woken up – people are not taking nonsense from apartheid anymore. Every township has a thing to protest and the unions are involved, the communities won't back down. He should've waited. But no, he got what he wanted and it destroyed him. Dead, like Moses, at the border of a promised land. Bless him for the good work, but still a tragedy, I think.

I remember needing to feed you in the dark, your cries. Not wanting to turn on the light – I never wanted to read again. He signs off with Matthew chapter 10, verse 37: *And whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me...* That was a difficult thing to forgive. He must've been very low to have needed to twist the Word like that. He lasted two years in Heideveld with me and then disappeared forever.

Why recount this if it hurts? It's been sitting in my mind all day. I struggle to recognise it and leave it alone for good, this history. Now I see it in your face, my child. And

so I'll hold you close though I know not the way, and even if you move as Darryl did I'll hold you still. I am not pleased, though I love you with all my heart. I am not pleased with the way life has shaped itself out, and I have an inkling that things may turn disagreeable again.

And I come to know that even in the light of this musty room – everyone smiling, waiting on some glimpse of heaven that never comes from a man or woman's devices – I know that one day when everything rolls back, I will bow down to the Great I Am. I kiss you on the forehead, hard.