

Holiday Town

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

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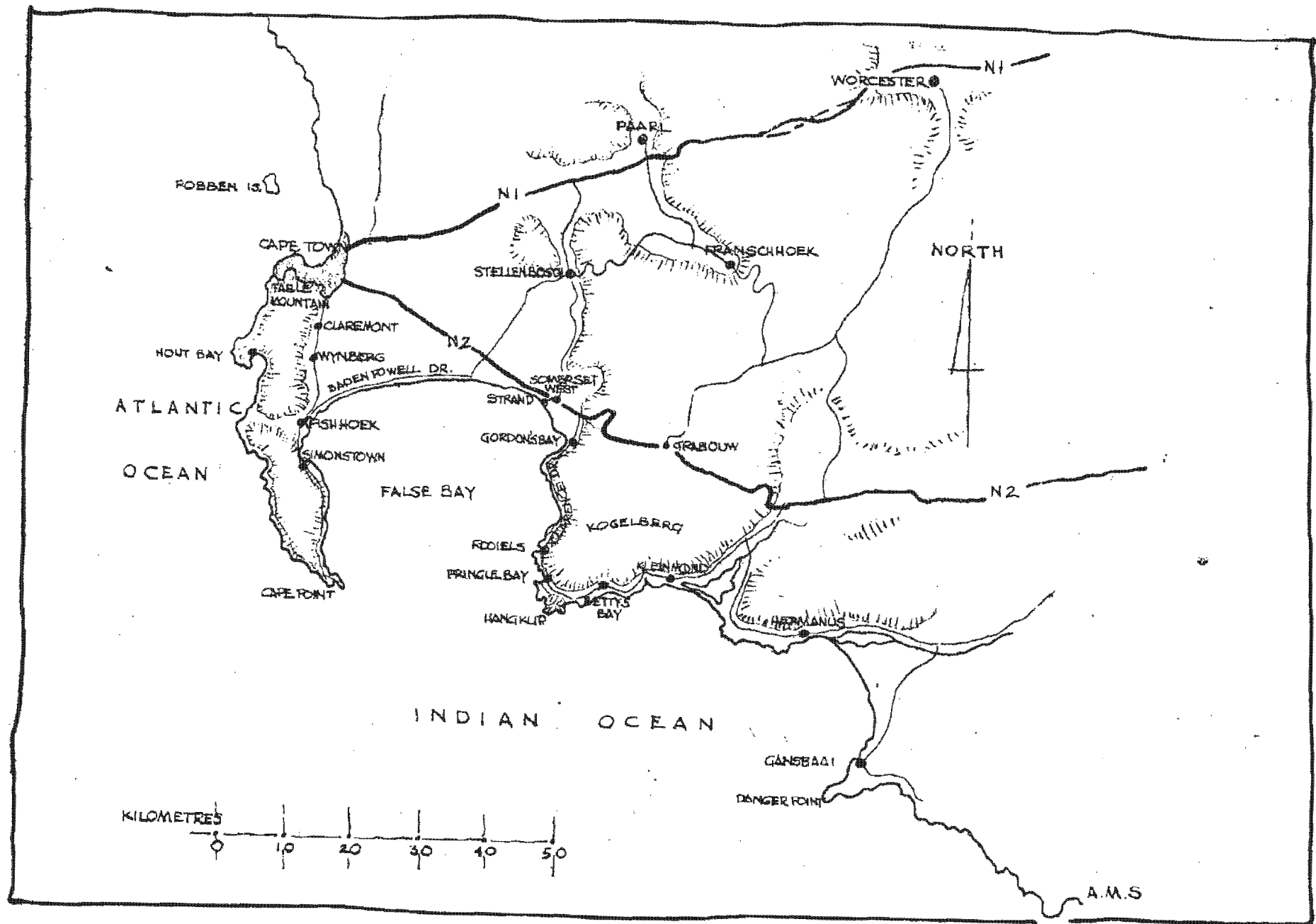
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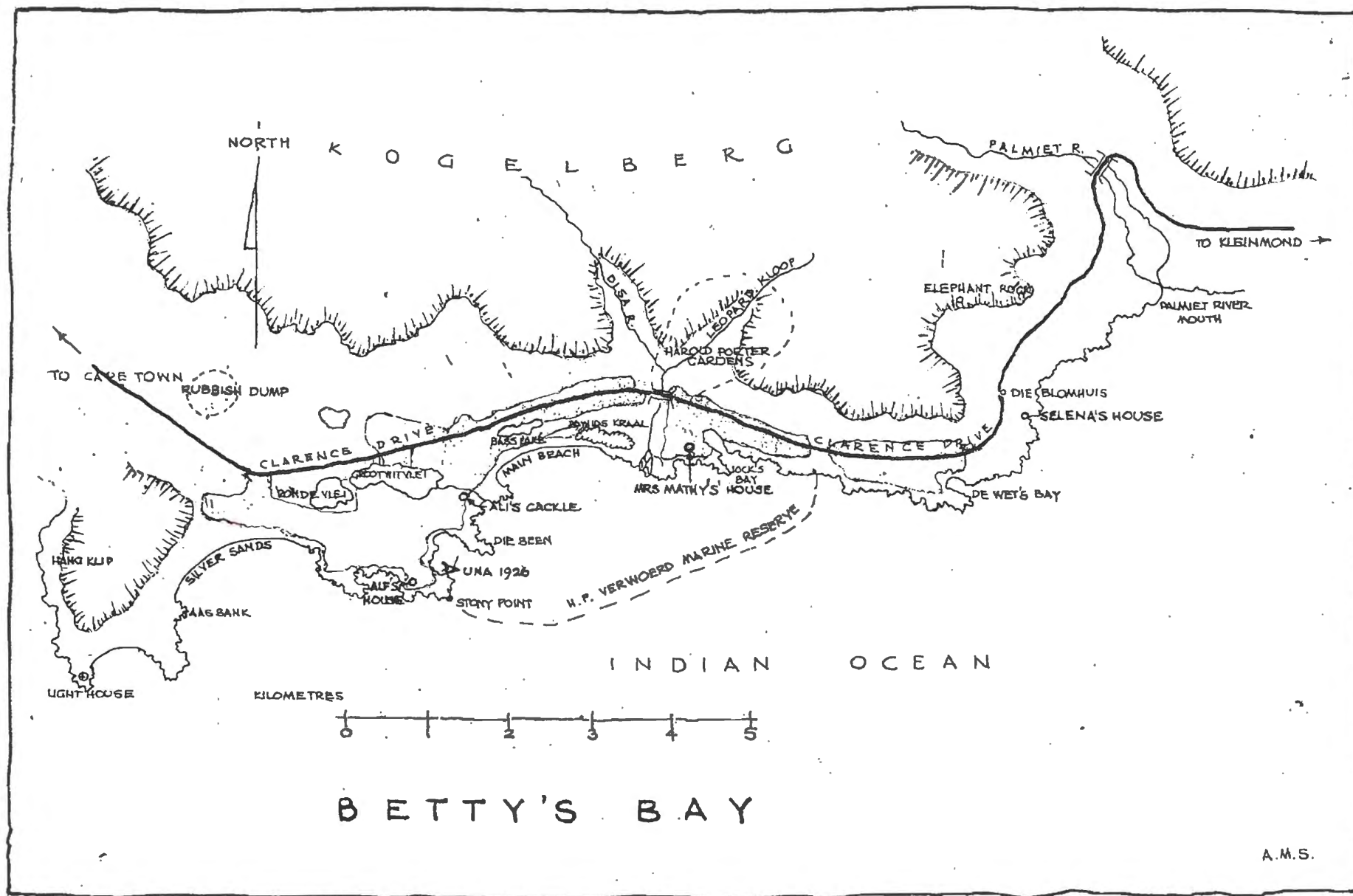
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Author's note: Betty's Bay is a town about an hour from Cape Town. All of the towns, cities and topographical features which appear in this book also appear on maps, but the settlements have been fictionalised to an extent (most of the buildings and establishments do not exist) although their individual spirit has been retained. The issues raised are real. The characters are not. The story takes place at the beginning of the 21st century.





Betty's Bay

On a windless day in the holiday season Betty's Bay is often seen as more than a sum of its parts. Its name seems fitting, and only a little trite. The beach is white and the sea is blue. If you go out beyond the breakers and float on your back you can see only the mountains. In the holiday season the locals melt into the landscape. They become nothing more than shop assistants and waitresses. There are coffee shops and art galleries in Betty's Bay, restaurants and a confectioner. There is a beach with warmer water than the beaches in Cape Town and there is the Harold Porter Botanical Garden. There are three lakes in Betty's Bay.



Ali bears an unfortunate resemblance to Rod Stewart. He is in his forties but he looks older. He has an untamed mass of fraying, grey hair and acne-scarred cheeks. He is the owner of Ali's Cackle, a pub which is built in the shape of an *alikeukel* or giant periwinkle. The walls emanate from a central column, and form two tight turns of a sloping spiral which spill into the double-door entrance. The only light comes from the portholes which are situated just beneath the stained pine ceiling. If there were significant windows in the building, the bar would look out over the kelp beds and towards

Hermanus. The bar itself is curved and it is sturdy and shiny and clean. Cleanliness, however, is not an attribute of the establishment in general as Ali is only able to afford a maid once a week. She came on Monday, which is already four days ago, so the urinals smell of sweet, cheap wine and the floor is layered with beach-sand and dead moths and bottle tops. Ali knows that he will have to sweep the place out before the weekend.

He stands up from restocking the fridge beneath the bar and is surprised by a woman in a white cotton dress who stands in the doorway.

“What can I get you?” His voice is unhealthy.

“Mineral water.” Her thick, curly hair is seized by a gust of wind. “Still. No ice.”

Ali obliges. He is trying to work her out. It all makes sense: mineral water; succinctly cut dress; precise breasts; bow shaped shins; kempt British accent. Except for one thing: her hair.

She puts the water on the bar and takes a box of cigarettes from the small, black handbag which she holds on her lap. Dunhill Infinite Lights. She struggles to open the box with only one hand, but eventually she offers him one.

“No thanks.” Ali smacks his chest with an open hand. “Doctor’s orders.” He leans over the bar and lights her cigarette. She smokes self-consciously, like someone who has only just picked up the habit.

“Where you from?” asks Ali.

“Franschhoek.”

“What?”

“You know...it’s near—”

“I know. I just thought you were from England.”

“I spent some time there.”

Ali notices that the ash of her cigarette is about to break and fall. He passes her a shell which sits on the bar. It is the size of an outstretched hand and its inside glistens blue and silver and pink. The dim light of the pub can be seen through eleven small oblate holes at its deepest corner.

“What’s this?” She turns it over. Its outside is bleached white with calcification and ribbed with concentric gnarls. “It’s amazing.”

“A perlemoen shell. Everyone here uses them as ashtrays.”

She doesn’t take the hint, and ends up ashing on the bar. “What’s that?”

“Abalone. It’s a big slimy thing which plants itself on a rock and hardly ever lets go.”

“Delightful.”

“You can have it in steaks or you can slice it thin and fry it in batter. There’s also an old recipe for it, where you stew it in a pod of kelp, together with white wine and cream.”

“Does it taste good?”

“You’ll either love it or hate it...it’s worth eating if you don’t have to prepare it yourself. If you go through the rigmarole of shucking and scrubbing and rinsing in vinegar and tenderising with a spiked wooden mallet you’ll have lost your appetite by the time it’s cooked.”

She finishes her drink.

“Another water?”

“No thanks.” She zips her handbag closed and puts it over her shoulder. “Can you tell me where Bass Lake is?”

“Going for a swim?”

“No. A friend of mine lived here for a few months. He said I should take a look at it.”

“It’s the only lake in Betty’s Bay without any bass.”

“He always called it *that*.”

“Its real name is Malkopsvlei, which means mad-head’s vlei, in Afrikaans. At the turn of the century there was a farmer, Mr. De Wet, who used to bring his cows to graze at the la—”

“And everyone thought he was mad?”

“Sort of, but the story goes that he grazed them on the eastern side of the lake, which was very muddy, and the cows got stuck in the mud with only their mad-heads protruding from the lake.”

She giggles. “What did he do?”

“Old Mr. De Wet was also a bit of a mad-head – instead of just taking his cows to one of the other lakes, he brought in wagonloads of beach sand until he’d created a safe grazing place for his stock.”

“My friend said it had a lovely sandy beach.” She stands up. “He could never work out where it came from.”

Ali walks her to the door. “Just drive towards the mountain.” He points. “And take the first right. You can’t miss it.”

As her car is driving away, he hears another female voice: "You won't believe it..." Cathy, the barmaid, has let herself in through the back door. She is tall, with a long neck and pointy shoulders. "The bloody septic tank is overflowing again."

"I know. I've been keeping that door closed."

"Sorry." Cathy holds her hand to her nose. "Is Sucking Suzie coming?"

"Should be here any minute now."

"Thank God. We'll need it fixed by tonight."

While they wait Cathy sweeps the floor and Ali restocks the fridge. Cathy goes to the storeroom to fetch a case of Windhoek Lager.

"How was school?" asks Ali.

"Fine. I made the team for hockey tour."

"Well done. Where you going?"

"Potchefstroom...for national schools' week."

"Awesome!" Ali laughs. "When?"

"June holidays."

They both turn towards the door when they hear the bass grumble of Sucking Suzie's engine. The large truck which was once white but is now smeared a rich brown comes to a halt in the parking lot.

The driver jumps down from his seat and wipes his hands on his overalls. "The tank's in the back garden, right?"

Ali nods.

"Will you direct me?" He motions towards his *handlanger*. "I don't trust him."

"No problem."

The truck drives round to the service entrance and the driver edges it onto the soggy lawn. The wheels seep into the soft soil but they do not plug. Ali stands behind the truck and beckons the driver towards the tank.

The driver leans out of his window. “You sure it’s okay?”

“One way.”

The driver gets out of the truck, again, and shouts at his handlanger: “*Maak hom vas*, Albert.”

Albert takes one final drag of his hand-rolled cigarette and tosses the *stompie* on the lawn and crushes it with his boot. He attaches the thick pipe to the tank and turns on the pump. Cathy cannot bear to listen to the gurgling sewerage, which sounds like a catfish in a swamp and smells worse, so she takes refuge inside. She has never been able to watch beyond this point, but she knows that the whole operation shouldn’t take more than twenty minutes. That should give her plenty of time to wipe down the tables and chairs, and sweep out the bathrooms.



Rainbows form when the weather is bad.

The northwester brings warmer currents to Betty’s Bay. It channels through Disa Kloof where it gains momentum and bends trees. It brings rain which does not fall downwards, but attacks the two fishermen – Ali and his friend Herman – from the right-hand side. The rain mixes with beach-sand and works its way under their oilskins and

into their ears. Even the seagulls cannot fly in this wind, and they huddle together on the flat guano-blotched rock directly off the point.

Ali walks to the shallow breakers and fills Herman's bait bucket with water to thaw the frozen mussels. While he waits for them to defrost he baits his own hook – the redbait has been in the fridge for a few days and it has ripened well. Its juice is bright ochre and it stains fingers and shirtfronts; his tackle box; and even the white ghost cotton which is used to fasten the bait to the hook. He casts his line into a calm pocket just beyond the outcrop of rocks. He locks the spool on his reel and puts his rod in the length of beige PVC tube which has been spiked into the sand as a rod holder. By this time the mussels are soft and ready to use, and he pries open the shell of one of the larger specimens. "You just want me to put the whole thing on?"

"Ja. Start with the smooth thin bit, and bunch the guts around the point of the hook. You'll need lank elastic."

Ali complies and the hook is adorned with a puckered lump that looks like an old petticoat. "Where do you want me to cast this?" he asks.

"I'll do it."

"You sure?"

"Just point me in the right direction. I'll be fine."

"Where d'you want to cast?" he asks again.

"You know. The usual."

"The channel to the right of the rocks?"

"That's right."

“Okay, let’s go.” Ali walks slowly, carrying the rod on his shoulder. It’s string-bound base pokes out behind him and serves as a guide for Herman to hold onto. When they come to the point where a small stream runs into the sea causing the sand banks to erode, Ali turns Herman to face the ocean. “Just put it straight in front of you.”

Herman releases the spool, and holds it still with his thumb. He brings the rod back over his right shoulder and allows the sinker to hang about a foot below the tip. He thrusts the rod forward and relaxes the pressure applied by his thumb, sending the glistening lead weight outwards in a perfect arc, before it splashes into a dark green patch of water. Herman sees none of this and he does not know when to jam his thumb back onto the whirring spool. The line comes to an abrupt halt, but the spool moves just as quickly as before, causing a terrible overwind. Herman plucks at the tangled mess. “I’ll have to work on it.”

“It’ll come with time. Let me sort that out for you.” Ali takes the rod, and within a minute he has cleared the knot and it is ready for use again. “Want to try that one more time? I’ll shout when I see it splash.”

“Okay.” Herman repeats the process and this time, aided by his friend’s advice, executes the cast with precise aplomb. With such a cast his bait must be anchored just above the sandy bottom, in the churning water around the rocks.

The men walk up the beach, towards the dunes, and stand, holding their rods, in silence. Eventually Ali speaks: “It’s beautiful today.” His hair is coated with a film of gritty moisture. “They’ll be biting soon.”

“When’s high tide?” Herman is twenty years younger than Ali but he can fish. He is tall and his collarbones protrude, creating a third dimension to his small chest. He wears sunglasses in spite of the rain and his curly black fringe sticks to his forehead.

“Four thirty.”

“What’s the water look like?”

“A swirling black stew. Perfect.”

“I just wish it was warm up here.” Herman shivers in spite of the poncho he’s wearing. Fishing for *galjoen* is never pleasant. Both of these men know this. The colder and wetter and windier it is, the more chance one has of catching *galjoen*.

“Jesus! There’s someone walking, alone,” Ali says, “From Dawidskraal.”

“Must be crazy. Who on earth would want to be out in this weather?”

“Us.”

“What does he look like?”

“I’m not sure it’s a he.”

A long period of silence follows. Both men hold their rods horizontally in an attempt to reduce the bowing of their lines in the wind. If there is too much slack in the line, it will be impossible to feel the bite of a hungry fish. Both men wait and shiver. Neither of them has had a bite, their baits have instead been plagued by the slow tugging of crayfish. Crayfish get to the bait first and scare the fish away. Herman and Ali are miserable, but they know that when the tide comes in they should be able to catch fish.

“Any luck?” The solitary walker has reached them.

“Nothing yet,” Ali replies, without turning to look at the questioner, “Just crayfish.”

“Ja, there are too many bloody *kreef* these days.” Herman faces the nearby horizon.

“Wait a minute.” Ali turns to the woman. “You were in the bar yesterday.”

“Of course.”

“Why you out in this weather?” Herman has not shifted.

“I needed some fresh air.”

“You call this fresh?”

“I actually had a reason for interrupting your fishing.”

“It’s no problem really,” says Ali.

“No seriously,” she insists, “I found a Hessian sack about five hundred yards back.”

“What was in it?”

“I don’t know. It was in the water.”

Herman reels his line in, frustrated. “Bloody poachers.” He hands his rod to Ali, who puts it in its holder. Herman takes his cane from where it lies next to his tackle box and walks down the beach, towards Stony Point.

“What’s got into him?” she asks with a clenched jaw.

“Perlemoen poachers. He can’t bear to talk about it.”

“What do you mean?”

“That sack you found is probably filled with *perlies*.”

“Aren’t you going to find out?”

“Good idea.” Ali puts his rod in its holder, leaving his bait in the water. “Let’s go.” They walk away from Herman.

“Tell me about this poaching?”

“The waters around Betty’s Bay are a marine reserve. The H.F. Verwoerd Marine Reserve to be exact.”

“What?”

“The old bugger had a holiday house here.”

“Seriously?”

“It’s still in the family. They sometimes fly the *vierkleur*.”

“Unbelievable.” Selena shakes her head. “You were saying...”

“Was I?”

“The marine reserve. Poachers.”

Ali pulls the hood of his rain coat lower, to shield his eyes from the rain. “It was chock-a-block with *perlies* the size of dinner plates. But the poachers have moved in with scuba tanks and boats and taken out sack-loads from the reserve.” His voice trails away, prompting a question.

“What do they do with it?” She has wedged her hands into the pockets of her anorak, and she stoops as she walks.

“It all goes to China. They dry it and use it as an aphrodisiac.”

“Rhino horn, bear’s testicles, perlemoen. I’ve heard it all.”

Ali nods. “They’ve got a shitload to answer for.”

“And the crayfish?”

“What?”

“Your friend was saying there were too many.”

“Oh, ja,” he says, “Betty’s has always been *perlie* country, but in the last ten or fifteen years crays have trekked in from the West Coast. Crayfish are filthy scavengers. They eat sea urchins which protect baby *perlemoen*, so it’ll be really difficult for the *perlies* to get going again. Thirty years ago catching a *kreef* was something special. These days they’re a menace.”

“But the police...”

“We’ve got two cops here, Koos and Wilhelm, and between them they have a 9mm revolver, two sets of handcuffs and a speed-trap camera.”

She laughs and peers into the shallow water ahead of her. “We’re just coming up to the place now.”

“I don’t see anything.”

“There.” She points to the breakers. “That dark thing.”

“Oh,” Ali mumbles, “It’s deep.” He wades into the water and drags the sack onto the shore. It bulges and stretches at the seams. He kneels next to it and slices it open with his fishing knife. He sticks his hand into the sack and laughs. “It’s wheat!” The woman laughs with him. “Good old fashioned wheat.”

“What a joke.”

“I know.” Ali is still chuckling. “Herman’ll feel like a right ponce when I tell him this.”

“I’ve got to be going,” she says, “My family’s expecting me in Franschhoek at seven.”

“Drive safely.” Ali washes his hands in the sea, and shakes the woman’s hand.

“I’m Ali.”

“Selena. Nice to meet you.” She walks towards Dawidskraal.

Ali returns to the fishing rods. Herman is lying on his back in the sand. He has taken his sunglasses off and the rain batters his scarred eyelids.

“Have you called the cops,” asks Herman.

“What for?”

“The sack.”

“It can wait.”

“Don’t be a fool...”

“You’ll never guess what was inside it.”

“What?”

“Wheat,” Ali pauses, “The staple diet of the western world.” He laughs.

“Must have fallen off a ship.”

They fish for a few more hours. They only speak occasionally. When it is too dark to thread a line through the eye of a hook, Ali packs their bags and they leave. They have caught nothing.

“Wanna come round to my place this evening and have a few beers?”

“Aren’t you working?”

“Ja, but we can keep an eye on the pub from my *stoep*.” Ali lives across the road from The Cackle. “Hardly anyone comes on weeknights.”

“Tempting.” Herman stands still for a second and inhales the sea air. “But I’m buggered and my mom’s cooking for me.”



When Selena gets back to her car she puts the heater on its highest setting and takes a box of cigarettes from the inside pocket of her jacket. By the time the car-lighter has popped out, the windows are already steamed up. She puts a soggy cigarette in her mouth and tries to light it. It smoulders and smokes (or does it steam?) but it won't light. She takes another from the box and tries again. Same story. She presses a button on the centre-console and her window opens. She throws the cigarettes as far as she can and closes the window immediately. Claspings her hands together, she puts them on the back of her head. She leans forward, resting her chin on the steering wheel, and cries. The dashboard is soon sodden with tears and rain.

“What’s wrong with you?” She sits up and examines herself in the rear-view mirror. She rubs at her eyes and scrapes her hair back, out of the way of her face. “You’re a bloody wreck.” She snivels, drawing some of the mucus up her nose and into her throat. “You don’t even smoke, you fool!” She takes a tissue from the cubby-hole and wipes the mirror clean. She forces herself to smile. Her lips are almost purple and her eyes are red, but the rest of her face is bleached white. Her smile becomes a hysterical sobbing laugh, which continues for longer than she would have liked.

Eventually she feels fit to drive. She demists the windows and puts a CD in her car radio. Acts Two and Three of Verdi’s *Rigoletto*. The rain falls at right angles to her windscreen, but her Volvo doesn’t struggle against the northwester. The music calms her and she even begins to forget that she’s cold.

She likes Betty's Bay. Likes Ali, and his stories. Maybe she should give Rupert a call – he's been bugging her ever since she got back from Italy – and tell him what he wants to hear. That she'll make a documentary for him. Maybe she'll do the research and let someone else direct it, but she knows she's ready to start working again. He'll jump at the offer, and only then will she throw him the curveball. She'll work for him, but on her terms. She doesn't want to do fashion, or adverts, or in-house instructional videos...money isn't an issue. She wants to get back into environmental stuff – she's hardly given it a moment's thought since she left varsity, and she regrets this. She'll tell Rupert about Betty's Bay, about the perlemoen and the crayfish and the poachers. If he really wants her back, he'll accept.

She's had enough of finding stupid crutches to help her deal with it all: smoking; walking in the rain...neither of these achieves anything and, what's more, they're both bad for your lungs. She can't even hear herself giggle over the music. Act Three has just begun and The Duke of Mantua is singing *La Donna è Mobile*. She realises that it's the first time in ages she's been able to take her mind off Giuseppe (Bottega, not Verdi) and the police investigations and the court wanting her to testify, but in so doing she remembers all of these things. She turns the radio off – this woman is more than a feather in the wind – and concentrates on the road, using only the clutch to brake into the corners.



If it weren't for the hand-painted flag which flies above Emily's, the gallery would go completely unnoticed. It's in a low face-brick building, slightly below the main road. The flag is eight foot high and three foot wide and it is in the shape of a penguin. The building used to be someone's home. The oven and fridge have been taken from the kitchen, but sculptures of birds and animals and nudes sit on top of the cupboards, almost touching the ceiling. Mrs. Mathy has put the otters and whales in the sink. A watercolour painting of the dunes at Blesberg covers the hole left by the oven.

"Hello." A man with a stretched Johannesburg accent hangs on to the doorframe and peers into the garden. "Hello. Is anyone in?" He's wearing a faded golf shirt and a peak cap. A blue sarong is wrapped around his waist.

"Sorry, I was just feeding the birds." Mrs. Mathy comes in from the garden carrying an empty brown paper bread packet, which she crumples and throws into the outside bin.

"Is it okay if we come in?" The man gestures to his legs, which are flecked with sand. "Spent the morning at the beach."

"Of course you can." Mrs. Mathy laughs. "What are holidays for?"

"You must be Emily." The man's wife shares his accent.

"Emily was the previous owner." No one in Betty's Bay knows Mrs. Mathy's first name. "I didn't see any reason in changing it."

The woman opens one of the cupboards and finds it filled with welded tortoises.

"This place is amazing. It's like Ali Baba's cave."

"I allow..." Mrs. Mathy spreads her arms wide. "Anyone to exhibit here."

“This painting is just divine.” The woman, who is wearing a thin white beach dress over her bikini, runs her hand along the frame of the only painting in the room.

“It’s not for sale.”

“Not even –” The man reaches for his back pocket, but realises he doesn’t have one.

“No. It’s just the right size. I don’t have anything else that’ll cover that hole.”

“I’ll get someone to board it up.”

“If you do that.” Mrs. Mathy puts her index finger to her temple. “You can have the picture.”

“Thank you so much.” He finds his wallet in his wife’s handbag. “Can I give you a deposit?”

“Take it. No money.”

“Please let me give you something.”

“I painted it. I hate it. You can have it.”

At the end of the passage there is a white door with a porcelain sign which reads ‘TROT’S ROOM.’ Beneath the text is a painting of a green steam train. The husband opens the door but he cannot enter the room, because the floor is piled with dogs fashioned of wood and limestone. The occupants of this battery-style kennel form a pyramid, which comes up to the husband’s chin. The dog (for they are all of the same animal) is small, with the harsher canine features which arise naturally when pedigrees are abandoned. His tail ends in a hairless stub before it can achieve elegance and his face is tarnished by a kidney-shaped blotch. The women wait in the hall.

“Who’s Trot?” asks the man.

“The dog.”

“Whose dog?”

“Used to be my son’s. He’s dead now.”

They gasp. “Your son?”

“The dog. He died in a fire. My son was blinded trying to save him.”

The man is silent.

His wife speaks: “Doesn’t he ever sculpt anything else?”

“No,” Mrs. Mathy mumbles to herself, “Couldn’t find anyone else to pose for him.”

The trio moves to the living room, which is still fully furnished. Even the crochet armrest covers remain. There are no sculptures in this room, because it is filled with paintings. Paintings of trees and paintings of penguins, bushveld scenes and stormy seascapes. Acrylic sunsets and watercolour sand-dunes, some gilt-framed and others block-mounted. They hang on the walls, they rest on the couches, they lie on the floor. Some of the paintings are good but a greater number are not.

“How much is this one?” The husband has found a lumpy oil of a herd of zebra, which rests against a hat-stand.

“You can only have it if you take the one in the kitchen as well.”

“We will, don’t worry.”

“It’s a thousand rand.”

“Deal.” He smacks his wallet from his left to his right hand.

“Would you like me to package them for you?”

“No thanks. It’s only five minutes.”

“Oh really?” Mrs. Mathy studies them closely. “I’ve never seen you around.”

“We’re from upcountry, but we’ve got a house here.”

“Whereabouts?”

“At Sunny Seas.” The woman pulls her blonde hair back and secures it with her sunglasses. “You know the double storey house with unpainted plaster walls?”

“Everybody knows it.”

“I know. We weren’t sure what colour to paint it.”

“Three years is a long time to make your mind up.”

“Well the thing is,” he pauses, “We were either going to paint it grey like the mountain or blue like the sea...”

“Or green like the fynbos.” His wife completes his sentence.

“Then just last week I was explaining this to Lucas.”

“He’s a neighbourhood kid who often comes over,” his wife explains.

“And he said ‘Why don’t you just paint it white like a house?’”

“So,” Mrs. Mathy asks, “You’re going to paint it white?”

“That’s right.”

“Isn’t he cute, darling?” The woman leans against her husband’s chest.

“Who?”

“Lucas.”

“Well, I think it will look like a bloody hospital,” says Mrs. Mathy, “I hate white houses.”



On Tuesday evening Alf – Betty’s Bay’s solitary intellectual – and his daughter Cathy have supper with Ali and the Mathys. They eat seafood. Ali has managed to procure some perlemoen from a friend in Kleinmond with a commercial licence. He slices them thinly, coats them in batter and fries them in a *skottel* for a minute or two. The perlemoen is served with plain rice and lemon wedges, as anything more would destroy it.

The perlemoen is followed by a main course of crayfish, which are cut lengthways and basted with garlic butter and cooked on the *braai*. There are enough crayfish for everyone to get two halves.

“Where did you get these?” says Alf.

“Out at Aasbank.” Aasbank is so called because it is a rock which is covered in live red bait.

“Lots?” he says as he chews.

“Plenty. It was a cakewalk.”

“How many did you get?”

“Five.”

“That’s a bit naughty,” says Mrs. Mathy. The quota is four.

“Ag, there so many *kreef* these days.” He shrugs his shoulders. “It’s the *perlies* we’ve got to worry about.”

“Can say that again.”

The crayfish is served with rice, homemade mayonnaise and a salad. They drink white wine, and are soon onto their third bottle.

“You know that house they’re building next to ours?” says Alf.

Everyone nods.

“They’ve just painted the roof.”

“Bad?”

“Guess.”

“Orange?”

“Green?”

“No,” says Alf, “Both. Stripes.”

“And,” Cathy adds, “They’ve screwed a full scale model of a blue marlin onto the front wall.”

“You can’t be serious.”

“Dead serious. I saw a dolphin lying in the yard this afternoon.”

“If we could have it over again,” says Mrs. Mathy, “We should have elected an aesthetics committee.”

“We’re a democratic town.” Alf pours himself another glass of wine. “We don’t force people into doing things they don’t want to.”

“Democracy relies on some sort of base intelligence.”

Ali laughs. “You can take a Dutchman out of the bush, but...”

“Democracy...” Alf struggles to make himself heard over the commotion.

“Doesn’t rely on any intelligence at all. It should but it doesn’t.”

“I’m not a politician...but you can’t take the bush out of a Dutchman.”

“My father’s a Boer,” says Herman.

“And look at you,” says Ali, “Look at those bloody sunglasses.”

“Piss off. I’m getting new ones anyway.”

“When?”

“This week.”

“Where?”

“With Chantelle. In town.”

“That reminds me,” Mrs. Mathy shouts above the conversation, “We’d better wind this thing up. It’s late, and I have to be up at five to take Herman to town.”

“Come on,” Ali says, “It’s not that late, and anyway I’ll take Herman. I’ve got to go through that side sometime.”

“What the hell for?”

“The usual...work.”

“Are you sure?”

“You know me...if it was a problem I’d tell you.”

“Thanks so much.” She gets up from the table and hugs Ali over the backrest of his chair.

“So...are we gonna carry on with this party?” Ali refills wine glasses and turns to face Alf. “You must be pretty bleak about that new house.”

“Which one.”

“The one with the roof.”

Alf nods. “We should be going.”

“You haven’t touched your wine.”

“It’s a school night.”

“I guess you’re right.” Ali laughs. “I’ve got an early start too.” He gets up from the table and slaps Herman on the shoulder. “See you at dawn’s crack, bru.”

“Sparrow fart.”

“The very same.”

Cape Town

Ali arrives at Herman's house just after six o'clock. He parks in the driveway, so as not to wake Mrs. Mathy, and goes directly up the stairs which lead to Herman's room above the garage.

The door is not locked and Ali lets himself in. Herman is already dressed and his bag is packed. "You didn't have to," Ali says, "I would've helped you."

"I can look after myself. Had to learn to while I was in Worcester."

"Ten points to you. Shall we go?"

"Let's take Skank."

"Why?"

"It'll do her good. She's done nothing for months."

Skank, Herman's lemon yellow Ford Escort is older than its owner. Ali moves the seat closer to the steering wheel. He pulls the choke out and turns the key in the ignition. Skank starts first time.

"That's my girl," says Herman.

Skank's pleather seats are hidden by synthetic tiger-skin covers. A mini disco-ball, which has started to moult in the sun hangs from the rear-view mirror. The floor and glove compartment beneath it are scattered with the silvery glass panels of its pelt. The dashboard is home to a family of the ugliest sculptures. A shiny glazed tower of frolicking dolphins in purple, pink, turquoise and yellow. A red-faced Santa Claus complete with admiring bimbo on his lap. A poly-resin flaxen retriever puppy pawing at

a passing butterfly. They sit there to remind Herman that he remains an artist even though nobody buys his work.

An hour later, when Ali and Herman pull into the sloping paved driveway which overlooks Fish Hoek, Skank's bonnet is coated with a mixture of insect corpses and dew. Chantelle appears at the front door and stands on the *stoep*. "Herman." She rubs her eyes before collapsing on him in embrace. "You're early."

"Wanted to miss rush hour." Herman is overpowered by the smell of tequila and cigarettes. "You've met Ali."

"Once." She shakes Ali's hand. "How you doing?"

"Good thanks," he says, "Shall we get your *boet* moved in?"

Chantelle walks up the steps to the front door. Ali follows her, leading Herman by the arm.

"The house is a tip," Chantelle says.

Ali looks around the passage and the living room. Single shoes peek out from beneath armchairs, and empty chip packets and cigarette boxes lie in the fireplace. The glass table is smeared with syrupy residue which has obviously spilled from an Amarula bottle which lies on its side. "Big night?"

"Let me get you some breakfast." Chantelle opens the fridge, and gathers four eggs and a packet of bacon.

"I've already eaten," Herman says, "Why don't you get some sleep?"

"I feel like a terrible hostess."

"You're my sister. You're allowed to be."

"We've eaten," Ali lies, "Promise."

“Okay. Just make yourself at home.” Sea-Breeze, Number 11, Warbler’s Way is the house where Chantelle and Herman grew up. Chantelle goes to her bedroom where she still sleeps in the bottom bed of the bunk which she and Herman used to share. “You can take mom’s room.”

Herman opens the fridge, and reaches for the top shelf in the door. The first few depressions he pats are empty. He finds that the eggs are on the right hand side of the shelf. He takes two, and puts them next to the stove. He turns the front knob forty five degrees in a clockwise direction – full power, he hopes – and walks to the kettle. He lifts it and its weight tells him that it’s almost full. He flicks the switch, and listens as it begins to hiss within seconds. Returning to the stove, his hand hovers above the plates. So, he tells himself, the front knob is the back left plate. He’ll get better at this, but it’ll do for now. The kettle has boiled and he takes a small saucepan from the cupboard beneath the stove, knocking a lid onto the floor with a clatter. He doesn’t bother to pick it up, and he stumbles on it as he walks to the kettle. He decants the boiling water into the saucepan, taking care not to burn himself, and lowers the eggs into the water with a spoon. He places the pot on the back left plate and waits. He likes his eggs soft-boiled. Four and a half minutes. Should he count to two hundred and seventy, one crocodile, two crocodile, three croc? Or walk to the end of the road and back? Or go to the loo? If only he smoked. He decides to make a cup of tea and drink it. That should be about right. The search for a mug and a teabag is over by the time the kettle has re-boiled, and he already knows where the milk is. He half-sits, half-leans on the counter and drinks his tea. He can hear the eggs rattling against the metal of the pot. As he finishes his tea, he realises that it’s too late to make toast. He’ll have to make do with bread – it mops up the yolk better, anyway. He

removes the pot from the hob, and puts it in the sink. He flinches as what little water is in the sink boils instantly. He turns on the cold tap and allows it to fill and overflow the saucepan. He leaves it running for at least a minute, until the eggs are cold to touch. He peels them, and mashes them with a fork, on to a slice of bread each. He does not bother with salt or pepper or sitting down, and he spills on his chin as he eats. The eggs are a bit underdone, he doesn't like the whites to be runny as well.



Herman has not been to Chantelle's house since the accident. He wouldn't say he's been dreading coming back, but it is strange. It's been nearly two years but he can still remember everything about that night.

In 2000 the whole of the peninsula was on fire. The city breathed heavily. Its people sweated and its mountain burnt. The dry bush and grass cracked and jumped in the flames. For some the fire meant sleepless nights and aching backs, but for many it was nothing more than flecks of soot on their shoulders in the day and a welcome change from TV at night.

He knew about the fire but he didn't realise it was so close. Chantelle was at work and he went to bed early and he slept easily. He was woken by Chantelle banging on his door and screaming about the fire.

Then he realised that Trot was sleeping in the studio, in the garden. Dressed in only his boxer shorts, Herman ran to the garden and tried to open the newly fitted door

which had not been planed since the winter. He kicked at its base but it stuck and he was forced to barge at it with his shoulder. At the third attempt he broke through into the smoky darkness and tried to orientate himself. He could hear Trot yelping, but the dog was running about the room in a frantic panic and was almost impossible to pinpoint. Herman held his hand to his mouth in an attempt to filter the air, but he coughed nonetheless as he felt tears pour from his stinging eyes. He stood still for a few seconds, gathering himself, and then ran towards the gas heater where Trot usually sat. The dog jumped into his arms, squirming with fear, and Herman knelt next to the heater and stroked and comforted him.

Suddenly a yellow flash filled the room and everything was quiet.

He'll never forget the smell: it was as if someone in the neighbourhood had strayed from their Friday afternoon routine and was *braaiing* later than usual. They seemed to have burnt the meat.

He remembers being doused in water. He remembers Chantelle interlocking her fingers with his and clenching them into a fist. He remembers orange and red and then black, black, black.

He takes his cane from where it rests against his chair and gets up from the blue Formica table. He goes outside to the garden. The cane's rubber end glides over the prickly summer grass. He finds the avocado tree in the corner of the lawn but there is no trace of the Wendy house which he used to call his studio. He sits on the dry soil and leans against the tree's trunk.

He hasn't sculpted since the accident. They wouldn't let him at the rehab centre in Worcester. They said it was too dangerous; that he'd cut himself. At least they allowed

him to work with clay. And since he's got back to Betty's he simply hasn't had the urge. He wouldn't say he's been depressed, just lazy. He runs his fingers through the crumbling soil. He can feel it getting under his fingernails. He unearths a shallow root and follows it as it tracks away from the tree. He must be dirtying his jeans as his bum scrapes against the ground. The root leaves the surface and Herman digs deeper. His fingers strike something hard and round like a coin.

"What you doing?"

Herman stands up, still holding the metal disc. "Nothing."

"You're filthy."

Herman makes a weak attempt to dust himself off. "I found this."

"What is it?"

"Don't know." He passes it to Chantelle.

"It's Trot's name tag."

Herman swallows. "You sleep well?"

"Ja," she says, "You made yourself breakfast."

"Lunch."

"Is it that late?"

"Don't have a watch."

Chantelle takes her cell phone from her pocket. "It's almost three."

Herman nods.

"I've got to work tonight. Want to come?"

"I'll just stay here."

"All your school friends will be there... Jason, Noel."

Herman finishes chewing his mouthful before replying, “I’ve moved on.”

“Suit yourself. The TV’s broken, hey.”

“I’m blind.”

“I’m going to gym now.” Chantelle picks up a black Nike tog-bag, which lies in the hallway and walks outside, closing the door behind her. “See you tomorrow.”



The mountain watches over Cape Town and from its vantage point cricket fields and parklands become apple-flavoured lozenges. The mountain reassures Capetonians because it remains silent. It is seen from sports-fields and bathroom windows; swimming pools and classrooms. A slice of the mountain seen through squalid buildings on Main Road in Obs can cure a hangover. The mountain causes traffic jams and early sunsets. People who come from this side of the mountain are different to people who come from that side.

None of these thoughts are passing through Chantelle’s head, because people who have never left Cape Town take the mountain for granted. She’s scanning the block, looking for parking, and as she glances towards the mountain she knows that it’s not going to rain, in spite of the black clouds. She is wearing loose black nylon pants and a baby-blue top. Her hair is still wet from gym and it is transparent, pasted to her scalp. She’s happy because a spot becomes available right outside the door to Elfo’s. The sun

has almost dropped behind the mountain, and Chantelle opens first the steel security gate and then the flimsy glass-panelled door.

A few hours later it is night-time in the city. The mountain is a chunk of the sky where there are no stars. Chantelle works frantically: SAB beers are on special, so most people are drinking Black Labels or Amstels. Or they should be. Chantelle finds herself pouring Jack-and-limes, Southern-Comfort-and-lemonades, even the occasional cocktail. She doesn't care that they know nothing about the special; it just means more tips for her. She works quickly and doesn't even break into a sweat. Chantelle is good at what she does.

A tall man wearing a long sleeved white T-shirt and a sleeveless windbreaker leans over the bar. He greets Chantelle.

"Jason." She hands another customer a translucent blue cocktail. "How you? How's work?"

"Ag, you know, it keeps me alive."

"You always say that, you lamer."

"If you repaired life-support-machines you would too."

"Simple pleasures..."

"Hook us a hotdog, please." Jason always gets hungry and orders a hotdog after a few ciders. Chantelle takes a pre-made Glad-wrapped hotdog from the pile behind the bar and pops it in the microwave. When it is warm she removes it from its packaging and smears it with a mixture of mayonnaise and tomato sauce and cuts it up into slices. Jason always eats hotdogs this way. It isn't as messy.

Chantelle has been working at Elfo's for almost three and a half years. It's a pool bar frequented by insomniacs, waiters, barmen and the almost married. It's a nine-ball joint with only one challenge table and a rectangular bar which can seat twenty people. There is ice in the urinals, but it is not replaced as it melts.

"Chantelle." A young man wearing an England rugby jersey leans over the bar and waves. "Chantelle." His hair is jet black but thinning.

Eventually Chantelle notices him. "Oh my God! Noel! Where the hell have you been?"

He ducks under the bottles of hard-tack which hang in the opening above the bar and kisses Chantelle on the cheek. "Around and about. You know how it is."

"What's her name?"

"Who? What do you mean?"

"Who've you been dating?"

"How'd you know?"

"Why else would you have stayed away from here for so long."

"It's not that, it's just--"

"I know, I know. You just wanted to get her to really like you before you were forced to introduce her to all of us."

"Not if you put it like that."

"So... what's her name?"

Noel watches, mesmerised, as Chantelle pours a double gin-and-tonic. The plastic tot-dispenser above him squirts out exactly thirty millilitres of gin. Chantelle depresses it a second time. "Michaela."

“Where is she?”

This time Chantelle is preparing a vodka-lime-and-lemonade. The automatic tot-measure on the vodka bottle is also precise, he presumes. Someone once told him there’s a glass ball-bearing inside the tot-measure, but he’s trying to work out where. “We broke up.”

“So your plan didn’t work.”

“I broke up with *her*. I missed you guys.”

“Let’s have a tequila.”

“Make that three,” says Jason, who is back at the bar.

Chantelle pours three tequilas, without spilling between the tot-glasses, and the trio drinks them with salt and lemon. Chantelle is the first to finish, and she speaks:

“Jason, where’ve you been?”

“Cigarette machine.” He clears his throat and shakes his head from left to right.

At about two o’clock, Elfo’s is suddenly buzzing. This always happens, because the other clubs close at two. After two, the locals become part of the furniture, and Elfo’s is home to the drunkest people the night has to offer. Three o’clock comes and goes, and still Chantelle is busy.

Just before four o’clock, Noel, who is obviously a bit out of practice, goes home. Jason sits at the bar drinking gin-and-tonics. He is normally one of the last to leave. Chantelle sits opposite him and they chat. She has very little to do, as those customers who are left are too drunk to carry on drinking. Chantelle turns, suddenly, and presses EJECT on the CD player. She replaces the disc with whatever is on top of the pile next to the hi-fi. “Hasn’t been changed since my last shift.”

Jason gets up from his stool and heads for the bathroom. Chantelle thinks nothing of leaving the bar unattended and she follows him. As soon as they are out of sight of the customers, and before they have reached the refuge of the toilets, Chantelle grabs Jason's blue and black diagonally striped shirt and kisses him on the lips. She strokes what stubble he has while he runs his hand over her acrylic arse, searching for something to hold onto. They crabwalk their way towards the gents, only to collide with a distant-eyed customer whose thick veins bulge from his forearms. Chantelle is not embarrassed, but she returns to the bar nonetheless.

Within an hour the last customers have left Elfo's.

Jason drinks a whisky, while Chantelle cashes up.

"Shall we go back to your place?" She asks, hooking her fingers into the V of Jason's open necked shirt and scratching at his smooth chest.

"We can't. My mom's visiting."

"I guess it's back to Fish Hoek, then."

"What about Herman?"

"He'll sleep through it."

It is past five o'clock when they eventually leave. The mountain glows blue in the morning light. They have to endure the long drive to Fish Hoek in silence, because Chantelle's radio was stolen a week ago. They pass cyclists, joggers, and people who want to avoid rush hour. They too will avoid rush hour, for the night is their time. When they get home the sun is heavy on the horizon next to Hangklip.



Chantelle and Herman drive in silence to a shopping mall which is simultaneously a convenience and a supreme irritation; a shining otherworld which is behind the times because the lighting allows shoppers to tell day from night. Chantelle takes great joy in parking in a disabled bay right next to the elevator. There are four sunglasses shops which all stock expensive brands. The medical aid will pay.

The first shop they visit is next to the fudge factory and Herman is mesmerised by the regularity with which the syrupy lumps smack against the mixing table. Chantelle is not as easily distracted and, trying on a pair of mamba-green D&G 2073s, she shrieks, “These are awesome. I feel like I’m at the bottom of the ocean.”

The shop assistant, a bottle-blond in a beret, unlocks another cabinet and removes a pair of tortoiseshell Persols with gold mirror photochromatic lenses. “You should try these on, too. The lenses are incredible.”

Chantelle obliges, but after the necessary cooing remembers her reason for being in the shop and puts her hand on Herman’s shoulder. “We’re actually looking for something for my brother.”

“Oh, okay.” She looks Herman up and down, taking in his faded corduroys and double stitched boots. “You probably want something a bit more practical. Let me see what I’ve got.” She opens a cabinet which is dedicated to Ray-Ban Aviators, the sunglasses which were immortalised by General McArthur, and picks out a pair of Gunmetal Caravans. “These would look good on you,” she says, “They’re very versatile.”

Herman tries them on, but they sit too high on his nose and obscure what is left of his eyebrows.

“No,” Chantelle says, “Those won’t do.”

The assistant’s response is instant. “Well...” But her initial enthusiasm is followed by a long pause. “Maybe something a bit more sporty would suit him. How about something from Bollé?”

“You might be right,” Chantelle mumbles, “He always liked fishing.”

The assistant singles out a pair of Crystal Smoke Canebreak wrap-rounds with polarised lenses. Herman doesn’t take them from her, and she puts them on for him.

“Those are perfect.” Chantelle is emphatic in her approval. “Just right.”

“What do you think, sir?”

“They’re fine.” Herman hiccups. “They’re comfortable.”

“Sweet,” says Chantelle, “Buy them.”

“Okay.” Herman reaches for his wallet. “Let’s get out of here.”

Chantelle is quick to reply. “Just give me a second.” She turns and speaks to the assistant, “I just wanted to see if there was anything that would suit *me*.”

“What did you have in mind?”

“Something extravagant.” Chantelle thwarts the assistant’s next question. “The price isn’t important.”

“Then it’s got to be Dior,” she says pointing at a small display next to the till, “They don’t have a very large range, though.”

“Oh my God!” Chantelle picks up a pair of gold-rimmed Diortroikas with black lenses. “How much?”

“Three nine.”

“That’s fine.” Chantelle looks in Herman’s direction. “His medical aid’ll cover it.”

“No they won’t.”

“Oh yes they will.” Chantelle admires her impending acquisition once again.

“They don’t need to know they’re for me.”

“What about my glasses?” says Herman.

“I’ll pay for them.” Chantelle takes nine one hundred rand notes from her purse and gives them to the assistant. “Here you go.”

The assistant rings the purchase up, and hands Chantelle the till slip and a five rand coin. “What about your pair, ma’am?”

“Herman, just use the cheque mom gave you. I don’t have enough on me.”

“I’m not sure about this.” Herman leans forward and stands on his toes, putting his fingers into the front pockets of his trousers. “I mean, I don’t think it’s right.”

“Trust me,” Chantelle insists, “It’s the way of the world.”

Later in March

The sun has not yet appeared from behind the Kogelberg. Jock's Beach is heaped with seaweed: piles of rotting kelp left over from springtide. It comes up to Ali's knees as he scavenges for red-bait. He finds sponges and mermaid's purses; a broken crayfish net and half a pair of cork sandals. He does not find any red-bait because the wrong wind has been blowing. He knew this when he decided to go fishing and he also knew that the water would be too cold for the *galjoen* to bite. The hairs on his legs are stuck to his skin in grimy spirals. He forgot to cut his fingernails before he left the house, and they are already dark at the edges.

Jock's Beach is a natural catchment point. The coastline channels the currents and their cargo onto its steep sand-slopes. In summer families with young children relish in its protection, but now the sand is covered and Ali is alone.

Ali once saw an otter here. It wasn't shy, and it played with a tennis ball that one of those summer-children had tossed to it. Many years ago three brothers would hit old golf balls into the sea from the top of the grassy dunes. Ali knows this because he has dived for sinkers here and found golf balls instead. He knows that although there is normally bait here, there are seldom fish.

At last he finds a pod of redbait, but as soon as he splits it open with his homemade *panga* he knows that it has been lying there for weeks; that it contains nothing but goo, which will never stay on a hook. Red-bait is best when it is a few days old – when it is too fresh it doesn't smell and it doesn't ooze. When it is too old it is liquid.

Galjoen love red-bait when it's a few days old and it smells and you have to hang the bucket on your wing-mirror as you drive.

He has been here for a quarter of an hour and he starts to worry about his car. He had to leave the window open because his fishing rod is fourteen foot long and he hasn't bothered to install roof-racks. He always transports it this way and he's never had anything taken, but he feels obliged to worry. There's not even anything worth stealing. In South Africa everyone is obliged to worry about crime.

There's no redbait here, and that means there probably won't be any nearby. Maybe he'll have to buy some, but frozen redbait loses its texture and its smell. He cannot feel confident with shop-bought bait on his hook. Herman is still in Cape Town but he always has lots of bait in his freezer. Ali will have to go with his tail between his legs and ask Mrs. Mathy if he can have some wonder-worms, which, unlike red-bait, don't go *vrot* when frozen.

The house is painted a non-committal custard colour and apart from an obvious renovation above the garage it is low slung. Whoever designed it must have tried to incorporate every window in the catalogue. The front door is flanked by orange obscure-glass lieutenants, and it is helmeted by an elaborate fanlight. The front elevation sports an array of casement windows – various configurations of small and large squares; squat and elongated rectangles. The bathrooms can be distinguished by their frosted louvers, while one of the bedrooms features top-hung windows. The second-storey extension is serviced by two dormer windows and a row of wind-blocks which look out towards the ocean. There is also a large sliding door which is guarded by an unpainted wooden fence because it does not lead to a balcony.

Before Ali has a chance to knock on the front door it is opened by Mrs. Mathy. She wears a beret and an ankle length dressing gown of ethnic African design – herds of elongated elephants and angular rhinoceroses adorn it.

“When’s Herman coming back?”

“This weekend,” Mrs. Mathy says, “Friday, I think.”

“Who’s bringing him?”

“Chantelle! Incredible isn’t it?”

“That’s great news. It’s the first time...”

“First time since the divorce. Seems like Herman’s finally knocked some sense into her.”

“He does get a bit of a sympathy vote.”

“You take what you can get.”

Ali laughs. “Three years is a long time.”

“Her father *never* came back.”

“I think it’s one of those things that skips a generation. My dad was bald.”

Mrs. Mathy lets out a laugh which startles the elephants and rhinoceroses into a gallop. “You look like you’re after something.”

“I was actually wondering if I could get some bait.”

“He won’t have any redbait.”

“I know that.” Ali looks down at his sandy feet. “I couldn’t find any at Jock’s.”

“I’m sure you can have a look in the freezer.”

“I’ll just take a few worms.”

“I’ll pass on the message.”

Ali knows all too well that Herman will find out about this episode. They've never agreed on which bait is better.

A few minutes later, with the worms in his bucket, he walks across the dunes to the lagoon. He fishes in the sea, where fresh water mixes with briny. The water is a rich brown milk stout and it looks good. But when he washes his hands in it he realises what he knew already. It's too cold to catch fish. Ali casts his line beyond the reef, and gives off slack as he walks up the beach and settles on a dune with a comfortable tuft of grass and a good view. He locks the spool on his reel, and waits for a bite. He can see the whole bay from his position.



Jason finishes work at lunchtime on Friday. His bags are in the boot of his Fiat Uno and he goes straight to Chantelle's house. She and Herman are almost ready when he arrives and they leave before two o'clock. They take Baden-Powell Drive, and then continue through the Strand and Gordon's Bay. The wind blows from the direction of Somerset West and gives the turquoise bay white tips. Jason notices the giant white letters above Gordon's Bay. A capital G and a capital B formed out of what must be thousands of white painted stones. The letters bulge in relief against the red, cleared slope.

“Why do they spend so much time telling us something we already know?”

“Fuck knows,” says Chantelle.

“What?” Herman leans forward, with his head in the gap between the two front seats.

“Those stupid letters on the mountain.”

“GB?”

“Ja.” Chantelle laughs.

“They make the first-years do it as punishment.”

“Who?”

“The teachers at the naval college,” Herman says, “GB stands for General Botha, not Gordon’s Bay.”

“It’s still a waste of time.”

From Gordon’s Bay they take the coastal road, Clarence Drive. Clarence Drive is a tourist attraction in spite of the signs at either end which warn of rock-falls. It follows the contours of the Kogelberg like a polite guest. Government redid the road a few years ago but they did not change its path. Clarence Drive is a favourite for tour buses and foreign car advertisements. For the locals, however, it is the quickest way to Cape Town. Clarence Drive is a dangerous road. One of the corners is nicknamed ‘The Garage’ because the slopes are scattered with wrecks of cars. The sea is also dangerous, and there are crosses on almost every cliff. Crosses which remember fishermen who turned their backs on the sea.

At Rooi Els, Clarence Drive turns inland. It forces its way up the steep slopes on the side of Hangklip, and rolls free onto the plateau at Pringle Bay. At the cutting it

passes the rubbish dump and its resident troop of baboons. Clarence Drive becomes the main road of Betty's Bay, and here it is wide enough to serve as a landing strip for a fighter jet. It was a matter of national security in the eighties. President Botha waggled his finger and said that the coastline of South Africa must also be a runway. Now the residents are petitioning to get the road narrowed. It's too noisy and people drive too quickly. There are children on bicycles and dogs without leashes. A few years ago the municipality painted yellow lines on the road to make it *appear* narrower and even that made a difference.

Herman knows Betty's Bay so well that he is able to direct Jason to his house without a hitch. The curtains are closed and the lawn has not been mowed. The wind has blown the bird-bath onto its side.

"Where can I park?"

"In front of the garage."

They get out of the car and are greeted by Mrs. Mathy.

"This is a lovely house," says Jason, "The view must be amazing."

"You don't mind sharing with Herman?"

"Not at all."

"You're upstairs then." Mrs. Mathy points at the room above the garage.

"What about me?" Chantelle asks.

"You've got your own room?"

"What?"

"We hoped you'd come back."

"So you kept a room empty for me?"

“I have started using it as a sewing room,” Mrs. Mathy says, “But it’s definitely your room.”



That evening Ali goes to the Mathys’ house. Mrs. Mathy has not yet got back from the gallery and there is no sign of Chantelle and Jason. He finds Herman dozing on the couch.

“How long you been home?” Ali hands Herman a beer.

“Few hours.” Herman wipes the sweat from his forehead and sits upright. “What’s up?”

“The usual. Been busy at the pub.”

“How’s the fishing?”

“Quiet. It’s blown south-east for the last fortnight.”

“Maybe you should have changed bait,” Herman teases.

“I actually took some worms from your freezer. Nothing doing.”

“I could do with something to eat bru...just a snack.”

Ali goes outside, to his car, and collects a long thin object which is wrapped in brown paper. On his way back from the car he finds some biltong in the pantry and puts it into a blue and white porcelain bowl. He returns with both of his hands full and he puts the bowl down with a clunk. Herman helps himself to a handful. He chews loudly.

"I brought you a pressie," says Ali.

"What?"

"Don't sound so bloody happy."

"Sorry. I'm half asleep."

Ali passes him the package.

"What is it?"

"Open it."

Herman tears at the paper only to reveal a layer of bubble-wrap. Ali cuts this open with his penknife and hands the object back to Herman.

"It's a walking stick." He runs his hands along its length. He can feel the grain of the wood through the polish.

"A cane."

Herman holds the cane to his nose. "Yellowwood."

"That's right."

"It's great," he says, "When did you do this?"

"I started it ages ago. It took a while to do the finishing touches."

"Always does." Herman thinks of his own work. "You've done well."

"Thanks." Ali slaps Herman on the shoulder. "Want a beer?"

"Just one, hey. I'm buggered."

"One's perfect. I've got to get to work."

Ali fetches the beers and they drink them quickly. They don't say much. Herman leaves through the back door and goes to his bedroom. Ali closes the front door quietly behind him.

Just as Ali is getting into his car Mrs. Mathy appears from the garden.

“Ali, don’t go.”

“I’m late for work.” He starts the car, and Mrs. Mathy is anaemic in his headlights.

“I’ve just *finished* work.”

Ali looks at his watch. Seven-thirty. “That’s late.”

“I went for a walk.”

“On the beach?”

She nods. “Please come inside.”

“I can’t stay long.”

They go into the kitchen and she switches the kettle on. “Tea or coffee?”

“I’ll have a beer.” Ali takes one from the fridge.

“Good idea.” Mrs. Mathy unplugs the kettle, and pours herself a whisky. She plops a single ice-cube into the glass and swirls it. The ice cracks. “I need this.”

“Long day?”

“I feel guilty.”

“But—”

“My son never leaves his room, my daughter resents the fact that I built her a room and I live in a house which was born out of my husband’s spite.”

“None of that is your—”

“I’m sorry,” she mumbles, “I overdid it.”

“Wouldn’t you want some time alone if you’d lost your sight?”

“But two years...”

“Two years isn’t that long. He’s blind for the rest of his life. You’d also get a bit quieter if it...”

“I already said I exaggerated.”

“I know.” Ali has a large *sluk* of his beer. “It can’t be easy trying to hold everything together.”

“Then there’s Chantelle.”

“At least she’s here.”

“Hardly.” Mrs. Mathy finishes her whisky. “She’s out all day.”

“She’s twenty one. She’ll grow up.”

“I hope so.”

“I’ll stay,” Ali says, “Another drink?”

“No. Let’s play ping-pong.”

“I haven’t played in years.” Ali leans back and runs his hands over his stomach.

“That’s not important. It relaxes me.” Mrs. Mathy hands Ali a red bat with a taped handle, and leads him through to the garage. “Herman and I used to play often. I think we both miss it.”

“It just numbs your mind. The noise of the ball hitting the table.”

“It sharpens the mind.” Mrs. Mathy tosses a ball to Ali and gestures to him to serve. He does so, and she returns hard and low down the line. Ali just manages to reach it, the ball landing softly in the middle of Mrs. Mathy’s side of the table. She dispatches it to the far corner, leaving Ali sprawling and one-nil down.

After four more points like this, Ali has the energy to speak: “You’re good.”

It is Mrs. Mathy's turn to serve, and she sends the ball over the net in a curling swirling trajectory which results in it landing on the baseline, and making a right-angled turn past Ali's bat. "Thank you."

"Where'd you learn to play like this?" Ali refastens his bandana and smooths his hair.

"South Peninsula Ping-Pong Club. I would have been the 1974 ladies champion, were it not for my Border-Collie puppy, Yeti."

"Sounds a bit farfetched." Ali serves wide, and Mrs. Mathy is unable to reach it as her dressing gown gets caught on the corner of the table.

"He wasn't quite yet housetrained, and I slipped on his pee on the way to the finals. I tore the ligaments in my ankle." She responds with an emphatic backhand winner off Ali's next serve.

"So you didn't even get to play the final?"

"No. My opponent – who happened to be my younger sister – won by default."

"Makes it even worse."

"Actually, the guy who won the men's championship felt sorry for me and took me out for a drink. We hit it off and ended up getting married."

Ali misses an easy forehand. "So, at least it all ended happily." He claws one back with a clever drop-shot.

"No... it all began happily." Mrs. Mathy pounces on a short return from Ali, and smashes the ball into the back of the table. She watches as it bounces over Ali's right shoulder and into the wall behind him. "I win. 21-4. Another game?"

Ali looks at his watch and shifts his weight back and forth. "I really must go. Cathy's managing the bar on her own." He doffs the bat in her direction, and places it on the table. "Thanks for the game."



Chantelle and Jason waste no time in locating Ali's Cackle and they sit at the bar. Cathy ensures that no one lacks a drink.

"Jeez, I almost took out my car on the way here."

"What happened?" says Cathy.

"I was just coming up this road..."

"Which one?"

"The windy one." He takes a sip of his strawberry flavoured Brutal Fruit. "That goes to the beach."

"Oh...you mean Access Road?"

"Fucking original name for a road," says Chantelle.

"Anyway. I was driving along Access Road and there was this bloody ridge which almost split my axle in two."

"Mr. Esterhuizen." Cathy laughs. "He hates people speeding past his house."

"So?"

"He built a speed bump."

“That thing’s not a speed bump,” Jason shouts, “It’s a Goddamn death trap!”

Cathy laughs again. “Where’re you guys staying, anyway?”

“With my mom and my brother.”

“Who’re they?”

“The Mathys.”

“You’re not serious?”

Chantelle lights a cigarette.

“I can’t believe you’re Herman’s sister! You two are so different.”

“That’s what everyone says.” Chantelle ashes her cigarette in the perlemoen shell closest to her. “Two more tequilas. Please.”

“Make that three,” Jason adds, “Have one yourself.”

“I’ve got a hockey match tomorrow.”

“I’m paying.”

Cathy pours the shots and the trio drinks them, without salt or lemon. She winces as she taps the plastic shot-glass on the bar, and wipes the surface clean of spillage. She has other customers to serve.

Jason turns to Chantelle. “I’m glad we found this place.”

“Thank God. What’d we do here otherwise?”

“Maybe she could show me.” Jason sticks his chin in Cathy’s direction.

“Jason, you can’t. She’s still at school.”

“See the worry in my eyes.”

“Cathy.” Jason waves a fifty rand note. “Cathy. Join us for another drink.”

“Same again?”

Jason nods, and they repeat the procedure.

“Don’t you get bored here?” Jason says.

“What do you mean?”

“What you doing tomorrow?”

“I told you – playing hockey.”

“And after that?”

Ali lets himself in through the back door and joins Cathy behind the bar. “These two giving you trouble?”

“Always.” Cathy laughs. “They’re ripping me off.”

“About what?”

“Betty’s. They say it’s boring.”

“Boring?” Ali’s eyes widen. “Betty’s Bay may be many things, but boring...”

“Prove it.”

“What?”

“Looks pretty boring to me.”

“You asked for it.” Ali clasps his fingers together and cracks his knuckles. “Come over here.” He allows them behind the bar, and points at some old faded photographs on the wall. One of them shows forty men standing on the body of a whale. A ladder leans against its side. Another picture is of three young boys perched on the dorsal fin of a whale. In another photograph, two men smile next to a pair of 100 pound musselcrackers. “You been to the harbour?”

“The one with the penguins?”

Ali nods. "These were taken there almost a hundred years ago. The whalers left about ten years later, when they lost their ship."

"Is that the shipwreck you can see?"

"Yes, it's a ship called the *Una*." The locals who sit around the bar begin to chatter amongst themselves but the other customers, the holidaymakers, gather round and listen. "The crew were caught at sea in a *moerse* storm which blackened the water and left the rain-gauges *propvol*. As they limped towards the shore through triple-storey swells, they spotted a bloody great whale, only metres from their boat." Ali speaks with excitement and Cathy is the first of the local contingent to devote her attention to his story. "Unable to resist, they chucked a harpoon at it and got it one time, just behind the head. The whale went completely *bos* and it thrashed and writhed for hours. When the fishermen finally managed to load it onto their ship it was way after dark. Their wives and children were *kakking* themselves, sitting at home in the candlelight." By now the locals' conversation has petered out and the group is rapt. Cathy has heard the story a hundred times and it always ends up like this. No one is able to ignore Ali for long. "The families had almost given up hope when a slow grinding crunch forced its way through the screeching and shuddering of the wind. They rushed outside and could barely make out the shape of *The Una* plunging beneath the surface. The whale was a tough old bugger and in its final desperate attempt to break free it'd taken the ship with it. Some of the men were able to jump into the sea and swim to safety, but others weren't so lucky. The accident crippled the company, and it was forced to close down."

"Sounds like a movie," Jason says.

"A boring movie?" Ali laughs and turns to serve other customers.

“How was that?” asks Cathy.

“Not bad.” Jason sips his cider. “But it doesn’t prove anything.”

“What d’you mean?”

“About your life. And whether or not it’s boring.”

“I suppose not.” Cathy wipes the bar clean and puts a coaster underneath Jason’s drink.

“Let’s get back to the point.” Jason rocks on his stool. “What’re you doing after hockey?”

“It’ll take all day. We’re playing in Swellendam.”

“And on Sunday.”

“I don’t know. Might go for a surf.”

“I used to skateboard,” Jason says, “But I sprained my ankle. It’d just be too risky to get back into it.”

“Crap,” Chantelle interjects, “You just drink too much.”

“No, seriously.” Jason turns to Chantelle and puts his hands on his knees. “I was in standard nine. You can ask Noel.”

“I don’t remember it, so it can’t have been that bad.”

“It was hectic. I was trying to skate that rail outside the science block. Even Herman’ll remember.”

“Well, I’ll ask him tomo—”

Cathy places another round of tequilas on the bar. “That’s enough of that.”

There is a hollow clunk as the now empty shot glasses hit the bar. “You drink quite a lot for a schoolgirl,” says Jason.

“It must be because I’m bored by living in a small town.” She is unable to hide the smile which wrinkles her slate eyes.

“It’s just that I’ve only been here three days and I’ve already had enough.”

“Why don’t you come surfing with me on Sunday?”

“My ankle...”

“It’ll be fine.” Cathy shrugs. “Water’s much more forgiving than concrete.”

“Okay,” Jason says, “But I don’t have a board.”

“That’s fine. I’ve got a longboard you can use. They’re easier to learn on.”

“I’m so bleak I won’t be able to watch this.” Smoke trails from Chantelle’s mouth as she speaks.

“You can come,” Cathy says.

“I’d rather sleep.”

“Jason will soon be a surfing prodigy so you can watch him some other time.”

Again, her eyes wrinkle.

“Oh my God! We’re the only people left in this bar.”

“But it’s eleven o’clock.”

“People get up early here.”

“I suppose we should let you get your beauty sleep.” Jason runs his hand through his smooth hair.

“Let’s have one more for the road.” Chantelle reaches into her handbag and removes her purse.

“I’ve had enough,” says Cathy.

“No, you haven’t,” says Jason.

“Just pour the drinks. Three tequilas.”

Cathy complies, and the group chinks glasses before dispatching of their contents. Jason and Chantelle do not notice that Cathy empties hers into the ice bucket which stands next to the till.

“Can we give you a lift home?” says Jason.

“No.” Cathy gestures towards her boss who has been quiet all evening. “I’ve got to stay and help Ali cash up and clean this place.”

“I’ll do it,” Ali shouts across the room, “You’ve been working really hard.”

“You sure?”

“No problem. Get some sleep before your game.”

“Goodnight everyone,” says Ali, “I’m sure I’ll see you all tomorrow.” He stands in the mouth of the *alikeukel* and watches as their car drives away. When the beam of its headlights can no longer be seen he goes inside and closes the door behind him. The portholes are a row of gleaming yellow owl-eyes in the moonless night.



As Selena approaches Betty’s Bay the sun fills the gap between the two visors at the top of her windscreen. She grips the steering wheel with both hands and hunches forwards, squinting at the road. She sits upright as a truck overtakes her: she didn’t even see it come up behind her, because the sun has forced her to stop checking her rear-view mirror. As she passes the BP petrol station, Betty’s Bay is wrapped in shade. The sun has

disappeared behind Elephant Rock Mountain. Selena will get to experience two sunrises today.

Selena arrives five minutes early for her eight o'clock appointment with Yvette, who is simultaneously the secretary; managing director; and owner of Sandcastle Letting Agents. Yvette wears a mauve ruffled V-neck cami and matching synthetic skirt. Her blonde hair is short and parted to the side. "You said when I spoke to you on the phone the other day that you wanted a sea vista."

Selena nods.

"I think I've got just the thing for you."

"Let's take my car."

"That would probably be easiest, because actually I think you've parked me in."

Selena takes her keys from her bags and awaits Yvette's next move.

"It's back the way you came. You turn left just before the rubbish dump."

The house is a triple-storey acute angled A-frame with grey tiles. The stubby walls, which support the ambitious roof, are panelled with stained pine planks. There is a balcony on the top floor, which faces the sea. Selena follows Yvette around the house, starting with the sitting room and kitchen on the ground floor and ultimately ending up on the balcony which can only be accessed through the master bedroom.

"What's that?" Selena points to a lone white tower to the right of the scene.

"As a matter of fact that is the Hanglip lighthouse."

"Do you have anything else?"

"I beg your pardon?"

"Any other houses?"

“Don’t you like this one?”

“I’d like to suss out my options.” Selena has never liked the Swiss, and this Afrikaner interpretation of their culture leaves her cold. “As long as I can see the sea.”

“There is the new one near the Blomhuis.” Yvette speaks with an inflection which hints at an unattainable crescendo at the end of each sentence.

“Where’s that?”

“It’s right at the other end of town, on the way towards Kleinmond.”

“Is it nice?”

“It’s amazing, but it’s also very expensive.”

“Money’s not an issue.” Selena doesn’t like the way this comes out. “I mean, not that I’m—”

“I’ll have to check with the owner, but I think he wants about six thousand a month in the off-season, then in the holiday periods you might hav—”

“Sounds perfect. Can we have a look at it?”

They drive through Betty’s Bay and as they summit the small hill which signals the beginning of Sunny Seas, the sun rises for a second time.

“You turn right here,” says Yvette.

“This little gravel road?”

“Yes. It’s very isolated...will you be all on your own?”

Selena shrugs.

“I really wouldn’t recommend it...I mean, the owner would kill me if he heard me saying this, but it’s a big house and there aren’t any neighbours.”

“Have there been problems?” The road is deeply corrugated and the dashboard rattles.

“The house has only just been built, but Betty’s is a safe place. It would just be very scary at night.”

The house has suddenly come into view. It is surrounded by low bushes and restios. The building is a simple spacious rectangle with a pitched corrugated iron roof and white stucco walls.

“Why don’t we have a look around?”

Yvette lets them inside and opens the curtains. The bedroom is separated from the double-volume living area by Japanese folding screens decorated with herons and wisterias. Huge French doors look towards the ocean. A thin strip of land separates the lawn from the small shelly beach which leads to the kelp-beds.

“I’ll take it.”

“So quickly, I mean don’t you want to think ab—”

“It’s exactly what I was hoping for.” Selena laughs. “The owner will have a tough job getting me out of here!”

“We’ll have to go back to the office and sort out the paperwork.”

“Will you need a deposit?”

“Yes, but there really isn’t a rush, if you want to go home and give it a bit more—”

“Do you take credit cards?”

“We just got a Speedpoint last week.” Yvette giggles. “I’m still learning to use it.”

“I’m sure we’ll be able to work it out.”



The next morning, the sky is cloudless but the air is moist and pure. Herman has slept well. He takes the cane Ali gave him from where it rests against his bedside table, and walks towards the bathroom. He prods his way around, making vigorous and erratic clunks. He was right: the cane is completely impractical. He settles for his plastic, regulation cane, and navigates himself effortlessly. “Today is a day of work,” he sings to himself. “A day of work. Of work. Today is a day of work.” He holds the last note for as long as he can, and it sounds good in the muffled auditorium that is his shower.

Clean and refreshed, wearing an orange shirt with green pants and socks that don’t match, he makes his way to the kitchen. His mother speaks: “Look what the cat’s brought in!”

Herman pats his hair flat and straightens his trousers. “Thanks mom.”

“Just look at you.” She laughs. “You wouldn’t be out of place in the circus.”

“What am I meant to do about it?”

“I’ll colour code your clothes. I don’t know how we’ll ever get any order into your T-shirts though.”

“Don’t worry about that. I’ve always taken whatever’s on top of the pile.”

“That explains a lot.” The kettle clicks off as the water boils, and Mrs. Mathy makes two cups of tea. “What can I get you for breakfast?”

“Don’t worry mom. I’ll get it myself.”

“What? Don’t be ridiculous.” Mrs. Mathy nearly drops her cup of tea, but manages to retain partial control, spilling on the melamine counter.

“I’m sick and tired of relying on you.”

“You’ll hurt yourself.”

“I feel like cereal,” he says, “I don’t think there’s much that can go wrong.”

“Let me at least get you some tea.”

“I’ll have orange juice,” he says, pouring himself a cup of milk. He puts it to his lips. “Or...milk.” He laughs.

“Don’t make a mess of my kitchen. I’ll see you this evening.” Mrs. Mathy strides outside.

After breakfast Herman embarks upon the work which he has promised himself he’ll do. He makes his way outside and climbs the stairs without too much hassle. The door is locked – Jason must have woken up already – but he has to look no further than the doormat to find the key. Once inside he switches on the lights, and heads straight for his workbench. After three steps he turns on his heels as he realises that there is no need for light. He flicks the switch with regret. Everything has been packed away. It must have been Jason: any member of the Mathy family would know not to touch his tools. After grappling with the clasp, he opens his toolbox and finds his favourite chisel. It’s easy to find because it is the only one with a bone handle.

He sculpts the first thing he can lay his hands on: a *papier mâché* vase that someone got for him in India. It’s been relegated to the work bench because it does not hold water. Its shape is classic, that of a Greek amphora. Herman runs his stubby fingers along its contours. The sharp transition from base to shaft, the more gentle undulations

which lead up to the splayed opening. He holds the vase to his nose and smells it. Dust. He rubs it against his chin, but only the rough edges grate against his stubble. He tosses it from hand to hand, faster, faster until it smacks and thuds when he catches it. So light and yet so strong. He paws it again, this time running only the ball of his thumb over its surface. He doesn't leave out an inch, and the process takes what are probably only minutes. He presses hard against the vase, but it does not squeeze under his pressure. When he has finished the examination he clasps the vase in his hands and shakes it twice. Satisfied, he puts it back where it came from.

His wood has not been moved, and he takes the smallest piece from the pile. It is heavy and he smells it – the unmistakable dense, bitter scent of mahogany. He feels its smooth grain and lets it balance in his outstretched hand. Wasting no time, he begins to chip away at it, tentatively, covering his apron with thin serpentine shavings and dark nuggety crumbs of wood. The chisel moves slowly at first, as Herman is worried that he may cut himself, but he soon realises that he has never needed sight when he carves. He moves more quickly, the tapping of his hammer sends the sharp edge of the blade slicing through the hard African wood. Herman pauses occasionally to remind himself of the shape of the vase, and soon his replica begins to resemble the original. It is a distended hourglass, a big-breasted woman. Once the shape is more or less conclusive, he begins to smooth the edges with a fine file. His stomach tells him that it's way past lunch-time and he has not stopped, not even for a glass of water. He sands the wood until it is smooth and dust-coated like a moth's wings. He blows it clean, and rubs his hands on the tops of his thighs. His creation is solid, and it leans a bit to one side. It does not stand well, but it is obviously a vase.

Sunday

There is a gentle mist which muffles the sound of the sea and creeps under doors. The gravel roads are damp and no dust is kicked up by passing cars. Mrs. Mathy gets up early, only to find that Herman is already up. He has managed to find his way to the living room where he is sprawled on the couch. He is listening to live coverage of a cricket match being played in Pakistan.

“You’re up early.” Mrs. Mathy rubs the sleep from her eyes.

“Couldn’t sleep.”

“Why not, darling?”

“Mozzie got into my room. Was buzzing around my head.”

Just as Mrs. Mathy is about to speak Herman silences her with a wave of his hand and turns up the volume on the radio. South Africa has just taken an important wicket. Youhana, caught behind for 43. “How’d you sleep?”

“Badly,” Mrs. Mathy snaps, “Didn’t you hear those kids in the road?”

“Who? I didn’t hear a thing.”

“Around midnight a car drove slowly down the road and stopped outside our house.”

“Probably just Jason and Chantelle.”

“That’s what I thought, but this car had really loud music, and I remembered that Chantelle’s radio has been stolen.”

“They’re in Jason’s car.”

"I know. I was half asleep."

"Who was it?"

"I don't know. When they hadn't left after twenty minutes I went outside and asked them if they wouldn't mind moving their party someplace else."

"You didn't."

"Of course I did. They must have felt like naughty schoolboys, 'cause they sped off immediately."

"Who were they?"

"There were about six of them, coloured guys. Some men and some boys. They were a bit shifty...all tattoos and earrings."

"Armed?" Herman is sitting on the edge of the sofa with his elbows on his knees.

"Not that I could see."

"What were you thinking?"

"They were bothering me. I wanted to sleep."

"But you, a sixty year old—"

"Fifty-eight."

"You shouldn't be *kakking* on a group of six young men on an empty road at midnight."

"I asked them to move, and they obliged."

"You were lucky. What if they'd been drunk?"

"Please Herman," she almost shouts, "I can look after myself."

"Mom, it would have been much safer to call the police."

"They've got more important things to worry about."

“Like what?”

“Perlemoen poaching.”

“These guys probably were perlemoen poachers.” Another wicket has fallen, but neither mother nor son notices.

“Nonsense.” She laughs. “They were just a group of youngsters joyriding on a Friday night.”

“What were they talking about?”

“Women mostly.”

“And what else?”

“Oh, nothing interesting. They were just saying that they were late for work.”

“At midnight?”

“Herman, I can’t believe I brought you up to have so little faith in humanity.”

“And I can’t believe that a grown woman can be so bloody naïve. I’m reporting this to the police immediately. What car were they driving?”

“You know what I’m like with cars, Herman. I think it was yellow, and it was quite rusty.”

“And you say it happened at midnight.”

“About ten past.”

Herman reaches forward and feels around the coffee-table, almost knocking over a vase which contains two large *cynaroides* blooms. “Where the hell has the phone got to?”

Mrs. Mathy glances around the sitting room, before walking through to the kitchen, where she finds the cordless phone. “Must have been your sister. She spends half

her life on the damned thing.” Mrs. Mathy consults the sticker next to the front door and dials the number of Operation Neptune, the police’s anti-poaching unit. When her call is connected she passes the phone to Herman. He leaves a message on their answering machine. He knows that there is little chance his call will ever be listened to; let alone attended to.



The wave at Betty’s Bay breaks off the sandbank at the curve on Main Beach. The sandbank is always moving and changing, and this means that the wave does the same. On a good day the wave is a clean sloping right but on a bad day it is just a senseless slush. From the parking lot Cathy and Jason carry their boards under their arms, their wetsuits slung over their shoulders. The path passes through the high dunes before breaking through onto the beach. When it does this they can see the ocean. Its silence is only occasionally broken by the slap of a wave.

Cathy is the first to speak: “The surf’s tiny today.”

“Doesn’t look like there’s any point in going out.”

“Not for me, there isn’t.” Cathy shades her eyes with her hand and scans the beach. “But these are perfect for you to learn on.”

“They’re pathetic.”

“Just put your wetsuit on.”

Jason takes his shirt off to reveal a pale, shaved chest which is marked with the odd ingrown hair. He gets into the wetsuit, hopping and tugging at the bunched up neoprene around his left calf. Once he gets it past his knees it fits easily, and it is baggy around his thighs and under his armpits. "This thing's huge, how's it going to keep me warm?"

"It's my dad's, he's a big man. You'll just have to piss in it."

"That's disgusting." He flaps his hands helplessly. "Anyway, it's not mine."

"He won't care." Cathy kicks at the wet sand with her left foot, splattering Jason's ankles with grey globs. "He pisses in it every time he uses it."

"How d'you know?"

"He told me once when I was bitching about the cold." Cathy, by now in her wetsuit, hands Jason the yellowed long-board. "Let's go." Jason takes the board and the pair walks towards the sea.

"Good thing we've got full-length suits."

"Cold, hey?"

"That too." Cathy gestures to the diaphanous blisters which scatter the intertidal sand. Long blue bowlines trail from these glistening mother ships. "But look at the bluebottles."

"I've never been stung."

"You don't want to be." Cathy clenches her teeth and sucks air into her mouth. "Believe me."

The water is shallow at first and Jason winces as he wets his ankles. After a minute the flats drop away and Jason struggles to keep his balance, because the water is

suddenly chest-deep. Cathy steadies him, and helps him duck under an approaching wave. “Okay, now what you’ve got to do...” Another wave swamps them. Cathy flicks the hair out of her face and continues. “Is wait for a wave, paddle into it on your stomach and stand up in one movement, like so.” Cathy catches a small wave with ease, rides it for a few seconds, and returns to Jason with a sharp cutback over the lip. She motions to Jason to lie on his board, and gives him a nudge as a wave gathers. “This is it.” Jason paddles frantically with his blue-veined hands, and is caught up in the wave. As the wave is about to break Jason remembers what Cathy said about standing up, but he sees the sharp point of the board in front of him and all he can do is tighten his hands around its sides and prepare himself for the impact. The wave curls, gathering momentum, and breaks in one lazy snap. Jason is dropped from the crest, but hits the water gently and glides towards the shore atop the messy white froth.

He rides the wave all the way in to the shallow water, and walks back with the board under his arm. “That was hectic.” He is breathing heavily. “I almost went head-first into the sand.”

“You didn’t stand up.”

“It was so quick.”

“You’ve just got to try get up, no matter what.” A new set of waves is upon them. “The one behind this one looks good.”

Again Cathy pushes Jason into the wave. This time he lifts himself up almost immediately but his arms lack power and he is unable to plant his feet in the centre of the board. His footing is awkward, and he stretches his arms out in an attempt to maintain control. This can only last for milliseconds, and he is thrown from the board as soon as

the wave breaks. He falls in the same direction as the wave, which tumbles him around in an involuntary somersault, and he lands with all of his weight on one foot. A few seconds later he rises from the turbid water with an exaggerated limp. "It's my ankle again." He wipes sand from his eyes.

"That sucks. Is it broken?"

"I should be alright...but we'd better go in."

Cathy carries Jason's board, and supports him with her free hand. The walk back is slow and silent and when they get to the car, it is flanked by a pair of matching white Nissan Champ *bakkies*: the car of choice for rock and surf anglers. They pack the board and wetsuits into Jason's car taking care not to scratch or wet the seats.

"Shouldn't I drive?" Cathy says, "It'd be better for your ankle."

"You're not even eighteen."

"I've got my learner's." She shrugs. "I've been driving round here since I was fourteen."

Cathy adjusts the driver's seat, and starts the car first time. She drives through the myriad gravel roads amongst the dunes until they come upon the tar road.

"Where you going?" asks Jason.

"I need to get some mussels for supper tonight. Want to come with me?"

"What about my ankle?"

"I'll take you home," she pauses, "If that's what you want."

"I'm not letting you drive my car on your own."

"You can just stay in the car while I get them, then."

"I don't have my wallet on me."

“You won’t be needing that...as long as you’ve got some plastic bags in the boot.”

“We can just buy them there.”

“We can’t... and besides bags are a waste of money.”

“They’re twenty-one cents, for God’s sake.”

“Twenty-one cents and a hole in the ozone layer.”

“Don’t tell me you’re one of those!”

“One of what?”

“A greeny-weeny.”

“We can’t buy plastic bags on the side of a cliff, okay?”

“I thought we were going to Kleinmond.”

“We’re going to the cliff path,” Cathy says, “It’s near Kleinmond.”

“We can just buy them from a shop.”

“They taste better fresh. Why don’t you have supper with us? You’ll see.”

“They’re dirty.”

“I’ll clean them.” Cathy turns off the main road and into Chrysalis Way. When the small corrugated dirt road bends parallel to the sea, she parks the car on a flattish grassy patch on the mountain-side of the road. “We’re here now.”

“This is the middle of nowhere.”

Cathy opens the boot of the car and finds two bags: one of sturdy ivory paper with matching raffia handles and emblazoned with the legend *Abercrombie Vintage*, the other of glossy silver plastic, blemished only by three serif black capitals: *YDE*. “These’ll do

the trick.” She puts her hands on her hips. “Are you coming with me or you staying here?”

“Coming.”

“What happened to your ankle?”

“It’s a lot better now.” Jason shifts his weight onto the offending foot and flinches. “I’ll manage.”

“Okay.” Cathy follows a narrow overgrown path towards the sea. “Follow me.”

“Look at the waves.”

“I know a protected spot.”

“A friend of mine drowned when he washed off a rock into the sea.”

“We’ll work as a team,” Cathy says, “You can keep an eye out for big waves. I’ll collect.”

“I don’t want to just sit on a rock and watch you drown.”

“Trust me. I’ll be fine.” Cathy removes her beaded thong sandals, and hangs them from her ring finger. “Look how calm it is here.”

Jason shrugs his shoulders and settles on a large flat rock, just above the high-water mark.

“Can you look after my shoes,” she pauses, “Please?”

“Anything else?”

“Ja, here’re your car keys.”

“Don’t be long.”

“I won’t. This place is *propvol*.” Cathy picks her way over the sharp rocks and wades into a shallow pool. The tide has covered the mussels and she has to crouch, waist-deep, as she pries the black shells from the sides of the pool.

The water level drops, in anticipation of a surge and Jason cries out, “Wave!”

“You call that a wave?”

“I care about you. Is that a problem?”

“These are gonna taste great. They’re huge.”

“Need another bag yet?”

“Please. Bring it here. Quick!”

Jason hands Cathy the silver bag, in exchange for her bulging one. Before he has time to get back to his rock a large wave washes over it, carrying Cathy’s sandals away, but fortunately leaving the car keys behind.

“What’re you doing?” Cathy raises her hands and shakes them in Jason’s direction. “My dad bought me those sandals in Argentina.”

“I’m sorry. I didn’t know it would happen.”

“You were supposed to be watching out for waves.”

“I said I’m sorry.”

“Okay, okay. It’s fine. Let’s get back home, my father’ll be getting hungry.”

“I won’t be eating with you. I’ve got to get back to Cape Town.”

“But I thought you were staying a bit longer.”

“Chantelle’s got to work.”

This time – after a miraculous recovery – Jason drives, while Cathy sits in the passenger seat with the bag of mussels on her lap. When they arrive at Cathy’s house it is

almost dark. Jason rolls down his window and says, “Goodbye.” Cathy lets herself into the house under the glare of his headlights.

Minutes later he arrives at the Mathys’ house and he finds Chantelle sitting in the garden, smoking. “We’re leaving,” he says.

“Now?”

“Ja. It’s the beer special tonight and I told Cathy you’re working.”

“I’m on leave. You know that.”

“I know. I’ve just got to get out of here.”

“Me too. I’m sick and tired of this small town shit.”

“Tell me about it. I couldn’t do it, I just couldn’t.”

Less than an hour later, after an abrupt departure, the pair reaches Kogelbaai, where the coast road flattens out. A torch beam signals them to stop, and a lone policeman examines Jason’s driver’s licence. “Very good sir. Could you open your boot please?” Jason obliges, and the moustached man gives it a once over with his torch beam. “Thank you sir, you can go now.”

After Kogelbaai, the road climbs steeply before flattening out. As Jason rounds the hairpin bend at the top of the hill, his headlights catch the dull posterior of the Honeysucker. He is just able to avoid running into the back of the truck, but he is forced to crawl all the way to Gordon’s Bay in its putrid wake. There must be a lot of shit in Betty’s Bay for someone to have had to call them in from afar.



A small upright house is tangled in the shadows of the radio mast at Stony Point. The fynbos is green but it is not lush. The sun is redder than usual and Alf sits in a white and yellow striped deck chair on the *stoep* and cuts his toenails. He rocks the clippers back and forth in an attempt to snap a stubborn nail.

He goes inside and gathers all he will need for tonight's mission. His night-vision goggles rest on his forehead, and cameras with huge telephoto lenses hang over both shoulders. As he is filling his hip-flask with whisky there is a knock on the door. His mind is flooded with the prospect of embarrassment. He doesn't want anyone to discover his latest obsession.

"Professor." The woman's voice is shrill. "Professor! Are you in?"

He doesn't recognise the voice. She must be from out of town. "I'm coming." Alf screws the cap on the steel half-jack, puts on a tan zip-up cardigan and opens the door.

"Professor Pauling?"

"It's Doctor Pauling, but you can call me Alf."

The woman offers him a limp right hand. "Selena Bottega. Pleased to meet you."

He shakes her hand. She is far younger than he expected. "That's an interesting name."

"My husband's. He was Italian."

"And the first name?"

"Coincidence. My mother always liked it."

"Interesting... what can I do for you?"

"I've recently moved to Betty's Bay..."

“Really?” Alf struggles to categorise her. “Where are you staying?”

“I’ve rented a house.”

“Where?”

“Other side of town. Near the Blomhuis.”

“The one all on it’s own? Right next to the sea?”

“That’s it.”

“Must be amazing.”

“It suits my needs.”

“You don’t seem like the Betty’s type.”

“What does that mean?”

“Most of us are old. Or a bit nuts. Or both...like me.” He points at his night vision goggles.

Evidently Selena is capable of some sort of laughter. “Everything’s been a bit upside down. I came here to work it all out.”

“Didn’t we all...”

“I’ll just be here a few months.”

“What’ll you do?” Alf readjusts the strap of one of his cameras.

“I’ll keep myself busy.” She removes the tortoiseshell hairclip which secures her ponytail. Her hair glows in the dusk. “That’s actually why I came to see you.”

“Oh.” Alf puts his equipment down and walks out onto the *stoep*. “What help could *I* possibly be?”

“I’m going to be doing some research...just for myself, to take my mind off everything.” She flicks her hair out of her eyes. “I studied environmental science but I’ve been neglecting it of late.”

“I’m a ballistics expert, not an environmentalist.”

“That’s not what I’ve been told.”

Alf laughs. “Who put you onto me?”

“Yvette...the letting agent.”

“What d’you want to know?”

“Well, there’s the penguin colony.”

“Everything there is to know about the penguins is in a pamphlet. You can get it at the office.”

“Are you sure this pamphlet will be adequate?”

“Come to think of it, I wrote it over twenty years ago and it doesn’t mention anything about the aerial boardwalk or the leopard attack.”

“Leopard?”

“I’m actually going to find one right now. Why don’t you come along?”

“I’m not dressed for it.”

“No one’s watching.” Alf grins. “Look at me.”

“You serious?”

“Of course.”

“But won’t it be dangerous?”

“The mountains around here are home to the Cape Mountain Leopard, which is about the size of a male Golden Retriever, and very shy. In the early nineties there was

one which become known as the Betty's Bay Leopard. They made a really good documentary about it for 50-50."

"I remember it vaguely. We used to watch 50-50 every Sunday."

"I can lend it to you."

"I'd love that." Selena pauses, waiting for Alf to continue, but he remains silent.

"But you'll have to tell me the story now."

Alf starts walking and Selena, in her eagerness to hear what he has to say, follows close behind him. "Well, the leopard was seen in Betty's Bay a number of times. I once bumped into it on my way down to the café to buy the paper."

They have now crossed the gravel parking lot, and Selena follows Alf along the path which passes the slipway and runs towards the shell of the old lighthouse. "What did you do?"

"Nothing...I didn't have time to react. By the time I had realised what it was, and stopped my bicycle it had disappeared into the fynbos."

"And this leopard attacked someone?"

Alf has turned off the path, and they now stand on the wave-wet concrete pier. "God no! They're far too small to attack a human. It got into the Penguin Colony, and ran amuck. It decimated half of the population."

"That's awful."

"It's the way of the world." Alf closes his teeth around the neck of his hip-flask and takes a healthy gulp of whisky. He offers it to Selena but she refuses. "There's a reason the Jackass Penguin was forced to flee the mainland."

"What did it do with all the penguins?"

“It ate a couple, but it left most of them for genets and maggots.”

“Then what happened?”

“It tried to come back the next night, but the conservation authorities laid a trap. They caught it and radio-collared it, and took it far away into the mountains. It was eventually shot by a farmer in Pringle Bay who thought it might eat his sheep.”

“I presume he was an Afrikaner.”

“He was, but –”

“If the leopard was shot, then why are you looking for it?”

“You know what they say about Elvis...” Alf continues before Selena has a chance to make a fool of herself, “No, they’ve been seeing one around Hermanus and I’m sure it’s been to Betty’s Bay as well. I’ve seen its spoor.”

“I interrupted you, sorry...you were saying, um, something about the farmer.”

“Ah, yes, I was saying that although I don’t agree with what he did, he was only protecting his stock. The reason people feel sorry for penguins and leopards is that they’re cute and elegant, respectively. I mean, look what happened to the whales.”

“There seem to be plenty.”

“There are. Now.”

“Is there something I don’t know?”

“At the turn of the century a Norwegian whaling company established a branch at Betty’s Bay. The whales came here to calve in the spring. Southern Right Whales. In ten years they’d killed almost all of the whales, and the station was closed down.”

“What about this shipwreck?” Selena points at the rusted prong which protrudes from the sea, just to the right of the slipway. It appears to be black in the failing light.

“Please tell me there’s a great adventurous story behind it.”

“Not actually. It’s a ship called the *Una*. When there were no more whales to kill, the whalers ran out of money and they couldn’t afford coal, so they left it to rot. I don’t think they knew it would become a home to fish and crayfish.”

“That’s a bit of an anti-climax.”

“Those Norwegians were an anti-climactic bunch.”

“Why do you say that?”

“They were adventurous enough to travel to the Cape of Storms, but they weren’t even brave enough to eat anything other than fish and potatoes.”

“Getting fish couldn’t have been a problem.”

“It wasn’t. They pulled out leviathans in ankle deep water. The potatoes were another story. They brought potato seeds with them all the way from Norway, but upon arrival they discovered that the soil here is very thin and rocky.” After taking a large swig from his hip-flask Alf offers it to Selena saying, “Staying on the subject of seafood, why don’t you have some whisky – it’ll warm the cockles of your heart.” Selena cannot refuse such an offer and she winces as the liquid bores its way down her throat. “Getting back to the Norwegians and their potatoes...eventually they settled upon the area which has now become The Harold Porter Botanical Gardens.”

“But...they’re magnificent.”

“Well, when the Norwegians were here, the gardens were home to only one thing: measly, wizened, black potatoes.” Alf rejoins the path and stops next to a waist-high row

of concrete tubs which are now overgrown with pelargoniums. "These are the vats where they boiled the blubber." He reaches inside one of the less foliated troughs and digs in the soil. He rises, triumphant, holding a small black nugget of stone. "You can still find bits of coal from the furnaces and the steamships." Selena takes the stone and studies it closely. Before she has had a chance to express her amazement Alf continues, "These larger structures are the foundations of the buildings. The walls were made of corrugated iron, which they took with them to Cape Town, where they pawned it in exchange for their tickets back to Norway."

"What happened to the whales?"

"They all but died out. As a child, I used to spend my holidays at the Hangklip Beach Estates with my family. I remember once seeing a whale tailing off the rocks at Sunny Seas. It was quite a big thing."

"I can imagine."

"The whales are back in their droves now. International bans on whaling allowed the Southern Right population to re-establish itself," says Alf, "It takes time, but nature prevails." He starts walking again, followed by Selena who clutches the piece of coal as if it were treasure. The path soon becomes a boardwalk, which passes the fenced off area of the penguin colony. The penguins are settling down for the night, and only their white chests can be seen as they cluster beneath bushes and rocks. Alf unlocks the gate which allows him – as curator of the colony – access, and beckons to Selena to follow him.

"Shall I lock this behind us?"

"No, leave it open. We may as well make it easy for the leopard to get in."

"You couldn't."

“Couldn’t what?”

“Let the leopard get to the penguins again.”

“Why not?”

“It’s a reserve. They’ve got a fence to protect them.”

“That fence is there to protect them from humans. The leopard is a natural predator.”

“I’d never thought of it like that.” Selena realises that a long time has passed since her university days.

“And you’ve probably never stopped to think that as more and more people come here to escape suburbia and cut themselves a slice of nature, so nature becomes suburbia in itself. People build fences around their houses and they do the same for the penguins.”

Selena does not get a chance to answer, as Alf puts his index finger to his lips and motions to her to be quiet as they set up. They crouch behind a large boulder, with two cameras on tripods at the ready. Alf dons the night vision goggles and sucks at his hip-flask. The goggles are coated with small specks of soot from a nearby *veld*-fire and he struggles to clean them with his shirt sleeve. He cannot see clearly through the smeared lenses.

They leave, about an hour later, when the whisky is finished. There has been no sign of the leopard. As soon as they get back to Alf’s house Selena drives home in her grey Volvo station wagon. Alf, she tells herself, is the kind of person she must get to know. He’s a rare source: not only is he passionate and eccentric, but he is genuinely knowledgeable. If she can get on his good side, it will make her job far easier.

When she gets home she sits at her desk and makes a list:

POSSIBLE THEMES FOR DOCUMENTARY:

PENGUINS: GET PAMHPLET

LEOPARD: WATCH DOCUMENTARY. ULTIMATELY TRY TO
PERSUADE ALF TO LET ME FILM ONE OF HIS CURRENT SEARCH
MISSIONS.

WHALES: WRITE REPORT ASAP, IE TOMORROW! (1910. NORWEGIANS.
POTATOES. FISHED OUT. UNA)

NB: SUBURBIA/NATURE – ALF'S THEORY: INTERESTING
RELATIONSHIP. MAYBE USE AS CENTRAL THEME.

At the bottom of the page she writes three words: *Giuseppe Giuseppe Giuseppe*.

She pauses, draws a perlemoen shell in the margin and then, using a black
permanent marker, crosses out this final line of text.

She puts the list in a file entitled RESEARCH and stows it in the top drawer of
her desk. She goes to the kitchen make herself supper. While she is waiting for the pasta
to boil she plans the rest of her week. If everything goes well she should be able to fax
the first draft of her feasibility report to Rupert by Friday.



Herman lies on the floor in his studio. The sun pours in through the large sliding-doors and he should be basking in reptilian bliss. He is surrounded by the products of his recent determination: still-lives of fruit and wine bottles and shoes and seashells. (It hadn't been as difficult as he'd thought it would be, it wasn't as if he'd had to start from scratch. Sculpting is one of those things, like riding a bicycle, or casting a fly-line, or diving for *kreef*. He just has to do it with his eyes closed now.)

Surely pragmatism like this should be a one-way ticket to mental health, a razor-wire barrier to depression. He has perfected the art of sculpting by feel, the sun is neither too hot nor too cold, the sea is a soporific soundtrack to what should be bliss.

But Herman is no longer satisfied with the safety of objects and he yearns for a model, for human flesh. He has a cannibalistic desire to replicate; regurgitate with interest accrued.

Maybe now that his eyes are covered his subjects will not squirm as he sculpts them. That used to be his problem: he persuaded Chantelle's friends to pose for him but they wilted under his gaze. They said he didn't look *at* them but *through* them.

Maybe his forced abandonment of sight, in favour of the other, keener, senses will allow him to capture some sort of individual life in stone. Allowing his other senses to take over wasn't easy. There was a time in Worcester when he had tried to destroy them all, but the doctors put an end to this. He still understands Trot's form, could sculpt him from memory even now, but he wants to create meaning and emotion that are particular

to the human condition. Will his dependence and his disability elicit empathy or pity, he wonders? Will his subjects display ease or condescension?

The sunlight wanes and Herman shivers, not from cold, but in recognition of the absence of heat. He stands up and, clasping his hands together, stretches his arms out. He forces himself to abandon this self-examination: such egotistic obsession can only be counter-productive. He's a blind guy in a small town: he'll have to make do with coastal paraphernalia or at best an otter or seagull, a princess disguised as a frog. He'll have to accept that his work will forever be displayed in his mother's gallery. Consigned to a back room. Fobbed off.

He has always prided himself on his ability to channel his emotions, or preferably divert them completely. Like a water transfer scheme. But no amount of pumps and turbines can deal with this problem. He thought he could accept and surmount his blindness, allow his work to override it. But instead it has only amplified his predicament. Forced him to reconsider.

All of that time staring into a convex mirror.

Wear and Tear

Herman wakes early and he can smell acres of damp kelp. It must be spring tide and a southeaster is blowing. At spring tide the difference between high tide and low tide is at its greatest, and the beach shifts – at six hourly intervals – between being a thin white strip tucked up against the grassy dunes and a horizon-approaching flatland of kelp and footprints. Spring tide means that the moon is new.

Herman is dressed in comfortable, warmish clothes, for the autumn snap has arrived. He knows that his corduroy trousers are blue and that his shirt is either black or white. His mother has separated his T-shirts into three piles: black and white; primary colours and miscellaneous. His thin cotton jacket is brown.

The walk to the shops is not long and the grass verge beside the gravel road is wide. When he reaches the main road he lurches over the pavement and taps at the tarmac with his cane. He waits for a hand to help him, and eventually it comes. He does not recognise this hand. It is not the hairy calloused hand of Garth the shopkeeper; nor is it the brittle, veined hand of Mrs. Collingwood the estate agent. It definitely isn't the hand of a fisherman or a labourer. This hand is soft and cold and its fingers are slender peninsulas. The hand leads him across the road and its owner does not speak as it loosens its grip. Herman clutches at it desperately. The hand has only four fingers and he does not want to let go of it.

“Excuse me, but I’m not going the same way as you.” The female voice has a sophisticated accent.

"I'll come with you." Herman forces himself to let go of the hand and he stuffs both of his own hands in his pockets, out of mischief. "I'm not in a rush."

"I have an appointment with the curator of the Botanical Gardens." Herman hears the rustle of paper-shuffling. "You'd be bored."

"Your hand." Herman takes his hands out of his pockets and clasps them in front of his chest. "I'm a sculptor."

"I've met you before."

"Really?"

"You were fishing with Ali. It was raining."

Herman nods. "You found the sack of wheat."

"I'm living here now."

"Why?"

"I needed a break...and there are a few things I'm interested in here."

"What?"

"Environmental stuff." The rustle of paper returns. "Betty's Bay is home to an endemic frog. I thought I'd find out more about it," she pauses, "Among other things."

"Sometimes on a rainy night there are lots of tiny frogs jumping in the road. They never seem to get run over."

"If you got out of your car to look, you'd find that you're mistaken," her voice gets louder, "You just don't feel the squelch."

"I don't drive much these days."

"Sorry," she says, "I didn't mean it like that."

“No. No. I didn’t mean it like that.” Herman tries to distil his thoughts, to boil off the impurities. He remembers something about frogs, but this is in the vague distance, effaced by the thought of her damaged hand and the saturation of a voice which should not be real, but can only be. He hates being sentimental. “I have to sculpt you.” He holds out his hand. “I’m Herman, by the way.”

“Selena.” She shakes his hand. “Nice to meet you.”

“When can I sculpt you?”

“What?”

“I’m a sculpt–”

“I couldn’t.”

“You don’t know how much it would mean to me.”

“You don’t even know me.”

“I know, but I also know–”

She cuts him short. “I don’t do this sort of thing. It embarrasses me.”

“Just give it a try... please?”

“You’re a stranger. How do I know I can trust you?”

“Trust me? All I want to do is sculpt you.”

“Look,” she says, “It’s been really nice meeting you, but I don’t have the time.”

“But...you’re on holiday.”

“I didn’t say that.”

“Please. Just give me an hour.”

“I’m terribly sorry, but you’ll have to admit this situation is pretty bizarre.”

“Yes, yes, I know I’m coming across as a bit of a psychopath–”

“I wouldn’t go that far.”

“As slightly odd, then,” Herman says, “But it’s only because I felt something in your hand that I’ve never felt before.”

“I think I prefer the psychopath to this spiritual stuff.”

“Oh God, it always comes out the wrong way. I know what I’m thinking, but as soon as I try to explain myself it goes pear-shaped.”

Selena can’t help but be a little intrigued by this man. She hasn’t allowed anyone to take an interest in her since the accident. “What is it that makes *me* different from everyone else?”

“It’s nothing concrete. It’s just, what’s the right word?” he pauses, “A bond. Don’t you feel it?”

“I don’t believe in that kind of thing.”

“There’s nothing to believe in, it’s just that...some people work well together.”

“Why me?”

“There’s no answer to that.” Herman feels like he is beginning to sway her. “Just give me an hour of your time, and we’ll see if my hunch is right.”

“I’m late for my meeting.”

“After your meeting.”

“Give me your number. I’ll call you.”

He is still saying, “Thank you,” as he listens to the receding clicks of her high-heels on the coarse pavement. Instead of forgetting why he has come to the shops and walking home empty-handed, he is overzealous in his purchases. He buys white and brown bread; a dozen eggs; a newspaper which won’t be read; and a tin of extra-salted

anchovies. Herman has never eaten anchovies. He gets home, and the sound of the sea is in the sitting room. He wants to work but he can't. He is reduced to a foot-tapping ornament. He holds his cane in the air and waves it back and forth like a fly-fisherman. The waves are so close now, that he measures time by counting their splashes.



After hockey practice Cathy walks to the stop street where she has organised for Ali to pick her up. She stands outside PJ's Gaming Palace And Internet Café, the technical hub of Kleinmond, swinging her bag against the backs of her legs. A familiar voice brings her out of a *dwaal*: "Cathy, come inside. Everyone's here." The voice belongs to Matt, a lanky red-cheeked teenager with a tightly knotted burgundy tie.

"I can't," she says, "I'm waiting for my boss to pick me up."

"Come on. You'll see his car through the window."

"You're right." Cathy walks inside, and she squints as her eyes adjust to the weak grey light. Two equal rows of syrup-smeared computer screens flank the walls of the long, blue rectangular room. A yellow version of the same thick sloppy enamel paint has been used to disguise the chipboard of the cashier's counter which is situated at the head of the room. Unfortunately the tacky construction of the cashier himself is not as easily glossed over, and he avoids Cathy's gaze by allowing his Vaseline black fringe to flop over his eyes. Matt has rejoined a group of three green-blazered boys who are clustered

around a single ageing machine, which spurts forth canned cries of pain and anguish and torment. “What are you guys playing?” she asks.

The group responds simultaneously, but not in unison. “Hell’s Avenger,” is the only accurate answer, while the other boys offer reassuring qualifiers such as, “It’s brand new,” and, “We’ve like almost clocked it.”

Cathy looks to the cashier in search of an opening, but this time he turns his head and fiddles with the plug of his electric kettle. As if on cue, the deep grumble of Ali’s Series 2 Land Rover fills the room. “That’s my lift, guys. I’ll see you at school tomorrow.”

None of the boys removes his attention from the gory screen, as Cathy bustles outside and climbs into the passenger seat. She hands her bag to Ali, who drops it carefully on the floor behind them, and reverses out of the small parking lot.

“Thanks for helping me out,” he says, “I didn’t mean to spoil your afternoon.”

“God no.” She laughs. “It would’ve been far worse if I’d stayed with them.”

“What you mean?”

“Have you been to PJ’s?” Cathy takes her blazer off and throws it on the back seat. “Have you seen those games they play?”

“Can’t say I have.”

“Keep it that way.”

The mountain has taken on a mulberry sheen from the ericas which flower at Easter time and the sky is clear and washed clean like museum glass. When they arrive at Ali’s Cackle, they get straight to work. Ali has already laid all of the equipment out: the ladder; the hyperlon bandages; two paintbrushes; a Stanley knife; the tin of adhesive; and

two pairs of well-used blue overalls. As soon as they are dressed they climb onto the roof. Ali kneels while he measures the extent of the damaged area. The roof is white and its violent synthetic glare causes him to squint as he works. He cuts a square of hyperlon, and positions it over the offending area. Cathy kneels next to him and she stirs the tin of viscous white chemicals. She winces as she inhales the sharp fumes and speaks: "It'll be great to get rid of those buckets next to the jukebox." She begins to apply the fluid, trying to ensure that it covers the patch evenly.

"I'm stoked they've brought out these repair kits." Ali brushes with added pressure to smooth out a recess where the adhesive has collected. "They stopped making hyperlon in the seventies."

"Why?" Cathy rolls the ball of her hand on the spongy surface. "It's cool stuff."

"It goes *pap* in the sun. I wouldn't have chosen it if I'd built the place myself."

"Hopefully this treatment will give it an extra twenty years." Cathy has been reading the label on the bucket.

"Tell me about it. I'm fed up with this place. I put so much time into it and it gives buggerall back. The only time I make a profit is when there's a big rugby game on."

"Shut up," Cathy says, "It's great and we all love it."

"I know. It's just that sometimes—" Ali jumps to his feet and turns to face Cathy. "Thanks so much for giving me a hand today. You didn't have to volunteer."

"I've already told you it's better than what I would have ended up doing."

Ali takes his car keys from his pocket and jangles them pointedly. "Want a lift home? I'm on my way to Herman's place now."

“That’d be great.”

As they drive Ali notices a low grey-edged cloudbank in his rear-view mirror.

“How is Herman?”

“He’s alright. We’re going fishing.”

“I still can’t believe that.”

“What?”

“That he fishes.”

“He’s a good man.”

After dropping Cathy off, he continues to the Mathys’ house. Mrs. Mathy’s car is not parked in its usual spot beneath the yellowwood tree, which means she must be at work. Ali walks inside without knocking and finds Herman dozing in an armchair, dressed in a pair of green plastic waders and diving booties.

“All dressed up with nowhere to go.” Ali laughs.

Herman wakes slowly and speaks after a few seconds. “Ja, I got my mom to help me. Thank God you’ve arrived.” He wipes his forehead with the back of his hand. “I’ve been in this shit for ages.”

“Sorry bru. I was just fixing the roof at the pub.” Ali takes Herman by the hand and pulls him to his feet. Herman resists this help and picks his cane up from the floor. “Let’s get cracking. The tide’s on its way in.”

“You’ll have to help me get my tackle ready.”

“Don’t worry,” says Ali, “I’ve rigged up one of my spare rods.”

“And bait? I may be blind, but I still won’t be caught dead using red-bait.”

“It’s all I’ve got.”

“I’m sure I’ve got some mussel in the freezer.”

Ali pats his friend on the shoulder and walks to the freezer, where he scavenges until he uncovers a used yoghurt container filled with frozen mussels. “Okay, we’re all set.” He leads Herman outside and helps him into the passenger seat of his rod-laden car. Before getting into the driver’s seat, Ali deposits the yoghurt *bakkie* in his own bait-bucket.

When the car is already moving Herman speaks: “Where we fishing?”

“I thought we’d fish the rocks off the lagoon at Main Beach.”

“Old Faithful.”

“That’s right,” Ali looks towards Pringle Bay. “There’s a nice cold front moving in.”

Ali drives past the Main Beach parking lot and parks at the entrance to a little-known path which will make their walk shorter. When they get to the beach the wind is blowing from the right. It is not strong enough to prevent the sand-flies from flying, and the bloated black insects pester the men about their faces.

Ali baits their hooks and casts his line far into the bay. Once he has helped Herman execute his cast, Ali focuses his attention on his own rod. The men stand with their shoulders hunched forward to create the necessary line-tension. The sea is rough enough to keep the crayfish away from their baits, and they wait for one of their rods to dip. While they are waiting the rain arrives. It is speckled drizzle at first, but in no time it is black and heavy. Ali is forced to put his sunglasses on his head, nestling the ends of the temples in his damp hair, but Herman fishes on, unperturbed by the drops of water on his lenses.

Both men are into their first fish simultaneously. Ali is caught unawares as the fish takes the bait in one swift movement, almost causing him to drop his rod, but his instant response is testimony to his experience. Herman's fish is far more predictable in its eating habits; it follows the textbook to a tee, giving the bait two rapid nibbles followed by a solid bite – *God Save the Queen*, as Ali always says. Herman feels the line twitch as it passes over his thumb, and he strikes well. He knows that he is into a *galjoen* and he reels it in slowly, taking care not to tear the hook loose of its soft mouth.

Ali, on the other hand, knows that his fish can only be a musselcracker as it takes the bait and runs with unmistakable bullish ferocity. It heads straight for the rocks in an attempt to break the line. Ali applies pressure, but his tackle is light and the drag-setting on his reel allows the line to be stripped from the spool. Just as the fish reaches the first rocks, he jams the palm of his hand down on the spool. He is resigned to the fact that the line will snap. It does and Ali stands, leaning the butt of the rod against his left hipbone. The entire episode has taken a matter of seconds and when he shifts his attention from his own dejection he realises that his friend has something on. "What you got there?"

"*Gallie*." Herman holds the rod in one hand and turns to face Ali. "I think it's quite nice."

A wave gathers around the fish and Ali can see the melanoma of its shape. "Shit bru, don't give it any slack. It's a *lekker* fish."

Herman takes his friend's advice. He reels in slowly and, holding his rod high above his head, walks carefully up the beach, dragging the fish with him. When it is flapping on its side in the shallow water, Ali speaks: "I'll take care of it. We don't want you to lose a finger as well." Herman nods in agreement and Ali wades into the sea, and

kneels next to the *galjoen*. It is well hooked in the roof of its mouth. He is only able to remove the barb after a struggle. “This’ll make a bloody nice meal.” He holds the fish up to gauge its size. “Two kilos at least.”

“I’m putting it back.”

“What?” Ali strengthens his grip on the fish. “Are you *mal*?”

“You never keep your first fish.”

“But this isn’t your—” Ali cuts his remonstrations short and holds the fish in the water rocking it back and forth to resuscitate it. As it swims away, he speaks: “I just got broken off by a musselcracker.”

“What?” Herman secures his hook on the crossbar of his Penn 500, and reels it tight. “When?”

“Same time you caught yours.”

“Hectic.”

“It was. I didn’t even have the thing on for a minute.”

“Break you off?”

“One time, bru.”

“Shit,” he pauses, “We haven’t hooked into one of those for ages.”

“I know.” Ali wanders back to their tackle boxes. “And even when you hook one, they always get away.”

“Let’s call it a day.” Herman wrings the water out of his cuffs and his lips tremble. “The sea can keep its fish today. I’m flipping freezing.”

“Me too.” Ali gathers their things, and hands Herman his bait bucket. The pair walks side by side along the beach, until they cut into the dunes and Herman follows the squelch of Ali’s footsteps on the sodden sand.

When Ali gets back to the pub he kicks the door open and in the same movement flicks the light switch. The white liquid that greets him glares, in spite of its chalkiness. It covers the bar; a good part of the floor; and most of the stools. Some of the bottles of spirits, and the clean glasses have also been bleached. “Damn it!” he says to himself, “Must have been the rain.” He goes behind the bar, and fetches a bucket and mop. He attacks the floor first, but the water spreads the mess. “It’s a bloody conspiracy.” Ali wipes his hands on the front of his thighs. The white mixes with the red of the bait, to form a salmon smear.

He phones Herman. “You won’t believe what happened.”

“You been robbed?”

“No, no,” he mutters into his chest, “It’s my fault.”

“What’s wrong?”

“The stuff I used to mend the roof obviously hadn’t dried when the rain came.”

“And?”

“And the whole place is covered in this white shit.”

“And the leak isn’t fixed.”

“Damn right.”

“Ag, it’ll be okay,” Herman says, “Just wait for a sunny day and you can try again.”

“I suppose I’ve got plenty of the stuff left,” he pauses, “But I can’t get rid of the mess.”

“Just look on the tin. I’m sure there’s a solvent.”

“You’re a fountain of knowledge today.”

“Every day.”

“Piss off.”



The water pressure in the shower of Selena’s rented house is not enough for her body to be covered by the jet of water. She has to swivel the rose, washing her body parts in turn, moving from her feet upwards, over her smooth thighs, finally washing her face and her hair. She shivers as the water evaporates on her skin. At least she is clean.

She wears a white dressing gown and sits, propped up by a continental pillow, in bed. In spite of the thick eiderdown, she is still cold. She phones Herman. She arranges to meet him the following day at seven o’clock in the morning. She tells him she will only be able to stay an hour.

She doesn’t know why she phoned him.

She knows why she agreed to research the documentary. It’s a far more sensitive topic than the kind of stuff she normally does. Environmental exploitation in the area of Cape Hangklip. You could almost call it altruistic. The money’s not as good as what she

could be earning in Cape Town; nowhere near what she was earning in Italy, but she needs to focus on something other than her own problems.

Is that why she phoned him? To help him. Or does she want him to help her?



Ali sits behind the bar, hunched over a ledger with a brown cardboard cover and grey intaglio title. Late afternoon sunlight forces its way in through the row of portholes and dapples the dusty air. The room is empty, in spite of Ali's Cackle being open for business, and Ali works slowly: pen in hand, calculator beside him. Unfortunately everything adds up. He has not made a mistake. The fiscal year has been a disappointment. The bar has an archipelago of white blotches on its surface and the floor tiles are tainted in patches. Ali has had to get rid of the maid, and apparently there is no solvent for the adhesive.

At first Ali does not notice the intruder, and the baboon is already upon the bar with a lemon in its mouth when he looks up. "*Voetsek*, you bastard!" he screams, picking up the nearest weapon, a chopping board. "Bugger off you stinking scavenger." Ali knows that the best thing to do is to hurl abuse at him in a gruff commanding tone, and threaten him with a raised hand. "Get the hell out of here, I'll bloody murder you!" His ploy works and the baboon flees the room. The animal does not find the front door but instead heads straight for the bathroom. Forget what they say about wounded buffalos, Ali knows that a trapped baboon is a real danger. The baboon shrieks with terror, and Ali

follows close behind as it climbs the curtains in the ladies' toilet. It has lost all bowel-control and the room is showered with grainy pumice-stone shit and caustic fountains of piss. The curtain rail breaks and the baboon hits the ground scurrying for the corner. The huge male with four inch yellow teeth cowers behind the loo. Ali knows that it will not leave unless it is forced to, so he fetches a broom from the storeroom. When he returns the baboon has not moved, and Ali crabwalks against the wall until only the porcelain bowl is between them. He holds the broom by its base, and jabs at the animal. The loo gets in his way, but on his fifth attempt he makes solid contact. The baboon yelps and runs out of the room, dragging its back-left leg. Ali follows close behind, broom in hand, literally sweeping the animal towards the door. As it runs outside, Ali offers it a final goodbye: "Piss off you filthy savage!"

Ali runs into Judah, almost knocking him over. The bearded handyman is only able to stammer: "What? What's going on?"

"God! Sorry. I wasn't shouting at you, it was a damn baboon. Come inside." Ali puts his hand on the other man's shoulder and allows him to walk through the door first.

Before they have reached the bar Judah speaks: "The place looks alright. What did he take?"

"Nothing." Ali uses a cracked green cake of soap to wash his hands at the sink behind the bar. "He had a lemon but he dropped it...all covered in *spoeg*."

Judah pulls up a stool and sits down. "That's not exactly going to break the bank." He laughs.

"You haven't seen the bathroom." Ali shakes his hands dry and twists his mouth so that his top lip nestles in the stubble on his chin. "He got stuck in it."

“Messy?”

“You’d better believe it.” Ali takes two Black Labels from the fridge beneath the bar, and opens their screw-tops.

“Thanks.” He takes a long, satisfying swig and holds the cold bottle in between his knees. “The last time I was here you were also covered in shit.”

“Oh, you mean the septic tank?”

“Seems like I’m an omen.”

“Not another one.”

“What you mean?”

“It’s just that nobody ever comes here anymore.”

Judah eases the label from the bottle but the glue has not been entirely dissolved and a torn corner remains. “Ja, it is kind of empty.”

“I never make any money during the off-season.”

Judah sits upright and his dark eyes widen. “You know what you need?”

“No.”

“Just one word.”

“What? Plastics?”

“No. Advertising. When I started advertising, my business doubled.”

“I don’t know, Judah.” Ali takes a bottle top from the bar, and flicks it in the direction of the bin. It hits the rim and misses. “Even if I do have customers, they never spend any money. People here struggle.”

“I may not know much, but I do know one thing.” Judah waves a black-edged index finder in Ali’s direction.

“What’s that?”

Judah finishes his beer with a flamboyant gulp, and bangs the bottle down on the bar. “A man always has enough money to drink.”

Ali gets Judah another beer from the fridge. “They just come in here and have a beer and then they leave.”

“Give a man a few drinks, and he’ll empty his wallet.”

“What’re you saying?”

“Have a happy hour, sell drinks at cost price, maybe even give away some free shooters. Put an advert in the paper. You could try to get one of the breweries to sponsor it.”

“Where’d you come up with all this?”

“My brother. He’s big stuff in Joburg and he was down here at Christmas. He couldn’t believe this town. You know what he said to me?” Judah looks up, and realises that Ali is not going to answer the question. “He said: ‘Judah, you guys can opt out of the rat-race and I’m sure you have a great time fishing every day and not having to wear a suit, but you’ve still got to make a living don’t you?’ And I said: ‘Damn right I do.’ And he said to me: ‘Then all I can say is that the rules of business are universal.’”

“I can’t believe you take that shit from him.”

“I know. I would never have listened to him ten years ago. I thought he was evil and he thought I was a useless hippy slackass, but we’re just different, and he sure as hell knows a thing or two about making money.”

“I don’t want to get involved in all that *kak*.”

“Neither do I,” Judah says, “But we have to make ends meet.”

"I'll give it some thought." Ali finishes and replaces his own beer. As he takes the first sip, a thickly accented Afrikaans voice fills the room.

"You can get four more where that came from."

"Jesus! Johan." Ali rests his hands in his thick hair. "You scared me. How you doing?"

"Can't complain *ou boet*." He motions to his companions (his brother Kobie and the town's policemen, Wilhelm and Koos) "We just came for a few *dops* after work." Wilhelm and Koos are both gargantuan men with moustaches, but Koos is almost a foot taller than his partner, and about twenty kilograms lighter.

"Make yourselves at home." Ali catches Judah's eye and winks. "This round's on me." Ali distributes the beers amongst the men and they receive them gratefully. "From now on I'll be having a happy hour every weekday. Five till six. Spread the word."



The moonless dark is blacker than blindness. Herman goes to bed but he does not sleep. He gets up before the birds, and showers and dresses and waits for her. Time stumbles on, exhausted. The mantel clock strikes seven. Seconds later she knocks. They greet one another.

Herman controls the avalanche of confusion and focuses his attention on the act of creation. "Let's go to my studio, we don't have much time." He allows Selena to lead him up the stairs, but once they are inside he assumes control. He is at work and he will

not let anything get in his way. He shows her to a chair which he knows is green. He takes her hand and holds it. Rubs it. At first it is rigid but gradually it relaxes. He squeezes and caresses it. He searches for the stump, but finds it missing. This hand has five fingers. He reaches for her left hand, but she draws it away.

“Please,” she says, “My right hand is more beautiful.”

“I don’t think so.”

“I can’t do this.”

Herman hears the chair’s legs scrape against the floor as she stands up. “Don’t go.”

“You’re turning this into a freak show.”

“I’m not,” he pauses, “It’s just that I met your left hand first.”

“I don’t understand.”

“What is there to understand?”

“Why are you doing this?”

“I know that I will never see you. I only know your hand and the sound of your voice. These two things are all the explanation I need.”

“I have a posh accent, and I’m missing a finger.” She takes a step towards the door. “And you think that this makes me more beautiful?”

“There’s more to it.”

“You’re just a psycho.”

“It’s not your accent – it’s your voice.”

Selena laughs. She is too old for this kind of clumsy adoration. It’s not her fault that she speaks differently. “And what about my finger?”

“I can hear that you think you lost more than your finger.”

“I don’t think.” Is a husband enough of a loss? Selena wonders. “I know.”

“That’s what I want to sculpt.”

“What?”

“The loss,” he pauses, “Damage.”

“You don’t know anything about what happened.”

“I don’t need to know the details.”

“Aren’t you curious?”

“You promised me an hour. Time is running out.” Herman pushes her down, back into the chair. “Let me try and show you what I mean.” He takes her left hand and tightens his grasp. He runs his fingers along its smooth surface, scraping over her knuckles. It is cold like soapstone. He opens her fist and holds each finger individually, memorising the taper and the segmentation; the texture of the skin; the shape of the fingernail. Each of the four fingers is unique: the steep knuckle of the thumb; the index finger which is slightly wonky at the end; the absolute straightness of the middle finger and the lateral scar on the ring finger – a watershed which separates fertile and arid. Herman devotes the most time to the absentee. He does not stroke or rub or knead the wound. He sits on the arm of the chair, hunched over Selena’s lap, and holds the hyphenated digit in silence. In time Herman breaks this pose and brings the hand to his nose. He smells apples. Selena has just eaten breakfast.

They hold this awkward position for longer than it seems and it is only when the door bursts open and Mrs. Mathy walks in with a tea-tray that Selena jumps to her feet. “Good morning.” Selena straightens her thin cotton dress, even though it is not rumpled.

Selena can't believe her own pliability: he hasn't even started sculpting her yet. Maybe there is some sort of bond.

"I'm Herman's mother." She holds out a saucer stacked with buttermilk rusks.

"I've just been baking."

"Aren't you supposed to be at work, mom?"

"You know I take Wednesday mornings off."

"I forgot." Herman takes the cup of tea which his mother places in his hand. "This is Selena. I was just sculpting her."

"Pleased to meet you Mrs.?" Selena realises she does not know their surname.

"Mathy." Mrs. Mathy raises her voice. "Herman, you haven't even introduced yourself properly."

"Mom, I'm busy." Herman has long since learnt how to deal with his mother when she's like this. "I'll see you for lunch." Mrs. Mathy leaves the room, and she whistles as she descends the wooden staircase.

Selena sits down again, and Herman finds his way to his workbench. His head trembles as he sniffs the air and takes a piece of soapstone from the crate beneath the bench. He is not in a rush but his chisels are sharp and he wastes no time. The stone seems softer than ever, as if the natural fault lines and hairline cracks are not there by accident. The dark silver blade glistening in the sunlight distracts Selena. When she reaches for her tea it is cold. Herman reaches for a smaller, more delicate, chisel. Slowly, quickly the stone becomes her hand. It is still rough, but warmer than its human counterpart, as it accepts the sun's heat. Selena looks at the abrupt gnarl which is her

wrist and she knows that she wants to see it become her arm. She cannot understand what she enjoys about it. Herman doesn't even want to know what happened to her hand.

Herman stops working. He takes the stone and holds it just as he held Selena's hand hours before. The beeping of his watch breaks the dusty silence. "Lunchtime," he says.

"Already?" Selena is angry with herself.

"One o'clock. My mother'll be waiting."

Selena plucks at words, tries to return to reality. "I'd better be off then." She stands and gathers her handbag. "I'm meeting someone at half-past."

Herman is too flustered to show her to the door, and he is the first to descend the stairs. He walks as quickly as his cane will allow and when he reaches the kitchen door his mother ushers him to his place at the table. He feels the steam from the food condensing on his three day old stubble as he lifts a forkful to his mouth. He chews deliberately and squeezes his eyes closed as he swallows the mouthful. "What's this, ma?"

"Goat's cheese curry." Mrs. Mathy pours him a glass of water. "Amber just got back from Kashmir. She got the recipe from a pony-man's wife."

"I was wondering what those hard chunks were." Herman chews another mouthful, this time without the accompanying facial gestures. "It's really good once you know what it is."

Both Herman and his mom eat in a rush. They have to get to work after lunch. The whole process does not take more than ten minutes, and Herman returns to his studio while his mother clears the table. He goes straight to his workbench and feels for the

hand. He runs his hands over the bench, finding various tools and pieces of stone, but no hand. He feels something larger, more solid, but it topples – it must have been his water jug. At this cracking splash a woman shrieks. All Herman can say is, “Who’s there?”

“It’s me, Selena.” She rubs the hand over her stomach, the rough rock grating at the fragile cotton of her dress.

“I thought you’d left.” Herman crosses the room and kneels next to the chair.

“I was lying about my appointment.” Her voice trembles as she grinds the sculpture against her ribs. “I realised that I want you to sculpt more of me.” She passes the hand to Herman.

“I haven’t even finished this yet.”

“You can finish it later.”

Herman rubs his hands over Selena’s taut stomach, through the fabric of her dress. It is a spiral from her navel and down to her thighs, a round tub of ice cream with a pert peak in the middle from the last squirt of the machine. He smells it. Wants to taste it. But his nose does not moisten and grow cold. He remembers that it is Selena, and he holds her again. She is as hard as stone and he reaches for his chisel. The stone is the dark grey of a dead *galjoen*, and its bulbous contours must be flattened. Herman works hard at first, sweat dripping from beneath his sunglasses. The sound of metal on stone becomes tuneful as Selena presses the delicate weave of the Indian cotton against her skin. Her trunk is not rigid like that of a *keurboom* or an *essenhout*, instead it sways and shudders like a kelp forest in the current. The rock, too, becomes sinuous and when Herman has removed the bulges and protrusions he discovers a nugget of quartz where her navel should be. As he is bringing the point of the chisel down to remove it, he reconsiders and

decides to leave it – a glistening white hernia. This indecision causes the chisel to slip and slice open the side of his index finger.

“Fuck!” He brings his hand to his mouth and sucks the blood from the wound.

Selena is hurled from her otherworld, and made to deal with the situation. She rushes to his side and forces him to remain seated. “Are you okay?”

“I’m fine, just get me a plaster.”

“I’ll go and ask your mother.”

“She’s at work. You’ll have to find one yourself.”

“Where?”

“In her bathroom. Upstairs. In the cupboard under the basin.”

Selena rushes outside, across the lawn, and into the house. On the way upstairs she thinks about the pain Herman is going through on her behalf. She thinks she enjoys it. The cupboard beneath the basin is well organised: the varying types of toiletries and medication, bandages and hair-dyes are stored in separate, named, ice cream containers. She takes a wad of cotton wool and a few Band Aids and returns to the studio. When she gets back, Herman is rinsing his hand under the cold tap of the sink in the corner of the room. “Is it deep?” she asks.

“It’s not that bad.” He allows her to examine the cut.

The incision is clean, but severe, and it exposes red flecked tissue. “Looks pretty bad to me.”

“No, it happens all the time.” Herman has not cut himself since he first learnt to sculpt.

“Will you still be able to sculpt me?” she pauses, “I mean, only if that’s okay, of course.”

“We’ll just fix it up now and then we can carry on.”

Selena is relieved, and she dabs his finger dry with cotton wool and forces the flap of skin closed with a plaster.

Autumn

When winter approaches in Betty's Bay, the weather is indecisive. Days of torrential rain can be followed by days of exquisite sunshine and thirty degree heat. On such days the wind does not blow and it feels too good to be true, in the late afternoon, before the rain returns. This climatological volatility divides the locals: pensioners, handymen and artists swell with pride when there is midweek sun and weekend rain, but barmen and restaurateurs; civil servants and philanthropists pray for sunny weekends. Pride and prayer have little influence, though, and the weather is fickle. Thursday the fourth of May – for that is the date today – is perfect, and seven fishing boats lie beyond the reef off Dawidskraal.

The penguin-flag outside Emily's is limp and it clings to the tanalith pole which rises from amongst the *vygies*. Ali switches his car off as soon as he has made the turn from the main road and he freewheels down the steep pebbled driveway. Seconds after the crunch of his tyres abates, his rubber-soled boots fill the silence and he walks into the gallery, knocking the chimes which hang in the doorway with his head. Mrs. Mathy gets up from her small stinkwood desk and they exchange greetings.

"What weather we're having." She tucks her hair into her vermillion beret, and rests her hand on a giraffe's head. "Have you seen the boats are out?"

"Ja, it's weird." Ali walks out of the back door, followed by Mrs. Mathy, and jumps up and down in an attempt to see over the trees which obscure the sea. "It's far too late for it to be *geelbek*, and the *snoek* shouldn't have started running yet." He stands still

again, and tweaks the tuft of beard which he has allowed to punctuate his chin. "I don't know what they could be catching."

"There's only one way to find out."

"True." Ali nods his head three times. "Maybe I'll pop down to the slipway on my way to work."

"I'll come with you," she pauses, "If that's okay?"

"Sure, but I'm in a bit of a rush."

"No problem, I'll walk home. I could do with some fresh air." Mrs. Mathy bustles through the gallery, taking time to dust the wings of a steel flamingo and to straighten a gilt-framed charcoal of a seal colony, which hangs in the living room. When she gets outside and locks the front door Ali has already started his Land Rover and she forgets to strike the flag.

There are no trailers or *bakkies* in the slipway parking lot and the boom is locked. "Must have launched at Kleinmond." Ali leaps back into the car as he realises he has left the handbrake off. Nothing is damaged and he speaks: "Shall we take a stroll?" They pick their way through the scree next to the parking lot but once they reach the contour path concentration is not necessary. "How's Herman doing?"

"How did you know?"

"He's been scarce since that bird got here." Ali picks a leaf from a clump of restios and nibbles at it. "And I can see you're agitated."

"He's become so listless. Last night when I said goodnight to him he told me he was going to spend the night in the lounge because the dishwasher may be able to lull him to sleep."

“Maybe I should take him fishing.”

“That’d be great.” She stares at her feet as they negotiate the path. “At the moment he just mopes around listening to his minidisk.”

“Sounds like he’s lovesick.”

“Maybe, but in his case there’s more to it.”

“I’ll pop round tomorrow morning and try to rouse him.”

“I’d like that.” Mrs Mathy exhales a plume of steam, for, no matter how hot the weather, the autumn air is cold once the sun has set. “It’s been eating at me.”

“We’d better go our separate ways,” Ali says, “You don’t want to end up walking back in the dark.”

Mrs. Mathy walks home along the coastal path. When she reaches Main Beach she takes off her sandals and walks, up to her ankles, in the shallows. Just before she turns onto the path which comes out next to Bass Lake the beach brightens in the dusk: the fishermen out at sea must be into a heavy shoal. They have turned on their spotlights and are showing no sign of letting the darkness deter them.



A cold front arrives that night, and Betty’s Bay is subjected to days of rain over the weekend. The Overstrand’s economy loses out. When the sun returns the sea is again smattered with unseasonable dinghies and Ali arrives at the Mathy residence early on Monday morning and lets himself into the kitchen through the back door. “Herman,” Ali

shouts before looking for his friend. He finds Herman sitting on the couch. Herman sits on the edge of his seat and leans forward over the low coffee table. Ali watches, mesmerised, as Herman takes a fifty cent coin from a stack next to his right hand and bounces it off the table and into a tumbler. He lets Herman do this three more times, before saying, "What the hell are you doing?"

Herman removes his headphones and rubs at his scarred eyes. "Practicing."

"For what?"

"Coinage."

"I thought you might want to leave the house now that the sun is back."

"No," he mumbles, "Not yet."

"You missed out last time...fishing was great."

"I haven't finished though."

"Finished what?"

"Listening to this album."

"All you ever do these days is listen to music."

"I play coinage."

"Alone."

"I'm working on something. I've been listening to Massive Attack's *Blue Lines* album seventeen times a day—"

"What the hell is wrong with you?"

"The album's just over forty five minutes long, and there are nine tracks on it."

"And this proves?"

“First of all it proves that I really like the album, and secondly it’s my new method of telling the time.”

“That’s bloody wonderful.”

“You see, each track is more or less five minutes long, so I can divide the day into five minute segments.”

“I understand.” Ali has not yet sat down and he rests his hands on the back of the couch. “But it’s not much use if you just sit at home cutting your time into bite-size portions and doing bugger all else.”

“My system is still in the research stage. It’ll soon be ready for launch.”

“Shut up and come to Kleinmond with me.” Ali knocks the crocheted beanie off Herman’s head. “I’ll tell you what the time is.”

“Fine...you win. What we doing in Kleinmond?”

“I need to get some stuff from the hardware store,” he pauses, “And I’m keen to find out what the boats have been pulling in .”

“Ja, my mom was saying there’ve been lank guys out. It’s odd.”

“We’ll drop in at the harbour and find out. It’s been bugging me too.”

Harbour Road in Kleinmond is a small town attempt at gentrification. As its name suggests it leads to the harbour, but before it reaches that culmination it is flanked by curio shops and a fishmonger with hand painted wooden boards; a wine shop; and a gallery which sells anything from second hand books and leopard skin placemats to art. The road which runs parallel to Harbour Road is home to two hardware stores; a motor-mechanic and wheel alignment centre; and a newspaper fish and chip shop. Ali parks in one of the diagonal bays outside the bakery.

"I'm just going to get a few *ciabattas*," he says, "Think your mom would like one?"

"Ja, why not. She doesn't often come through here."

Ali walks inside, almost knocking a *baguette* from Alf's grasp in the process.

"God! Sorry," he says, "What brings you here?"

"I always come here after dropping Cathy off at school." Alf amputates his recently fractured loaf, and holds the loose end at his side. "More to the point, what are you doing here?"

"Ag, I just need some hardware and I'm going down to the harbour to find out what the guys have been catching."

"No need for that." Alf clears his throat. "I can tell you."

"Shoot."

"You won't find anything at the harbour. Those guys were taking out *perlemoen*."

"Bullshit!" Ali waits for Alf to speak, but the older man only nods his head. "In broad daylight? What about the reserve?"

"Come round to my place later and I'll show you. If you look through my telescope you can see them, clear as day, with oxygen tanks, pulling out sacks of *perlies* and shucking them on the boats."

"What's wrong with them?" Ali struggles to find his words, "I mean, they'll get caught. Surely the cops aren't that useless."

"They're no match for these guys."

Herman has been listening to the conversation from the car, and he can keep quiet no longer. "If they don't hurry up and do something, soon there'll be no *perlemoen* left."

“They need to bring in the navy.” Alf waves the broken *baguette* in the direction of the harbour. “See how much the bastards like being chased by a battleship.”

“They wouldn’t?”

“Come on Alf,” Herman says, “Get real.”

“Mark my words.” Alf moves to the side, to let another customer through the door. “It’s about time the government found a use for their forty-seven million rand submarine.”

“I’m not disagreeing with you, Alf.” Herman smacks the outside of the car door in resignation. “I just don’t see it happening.”



The lawn in Selena’s garden is a spoon-shaped interruption of the landscape. It is carved out of the *palmiet* and bracken which thrive in the area because of its high water table. The coarse grass is unable to fully cover the peaty soil, but Selena imagines it as lush. She ignores what is distinctly African about the lawn and thinks of it as a mulched glade. She likes spending time on the lawn, unbothered by civilisation.

The sun sets abruptly behind an approaching cloudbank and Selena goes into the garden with the sculpture of her hand. The ground is wet and even her delicate footsteps draw small puddles to the surface. She lies on her back with her knees bent and the tops of the bushes form a halo of protection around her. She holds the hand tightly against her chest but soon it moves independently of her. She does not resist. She digs her toes into

the earth, and they are edged with black. The quiet damp of the clearing has always calmed her, but she finds herself becoming frenzied.

When she stands up her clothes are filthy. She goes inside and phones Herman. She invites him to supper the following evening.

He accepts.



Mrs. Mathy gives her son a lift to Selena's house. She drives towards Kleinmond and turns off onto a small gravel road which passes the Blomhuis, where the previous owner used to pack dried flowers.

Selena comes to the door. "Would you like to stay for a drink?" she asks Mrs. Mathy.

"I'd love that." Mrs. Mathy puts her hand on Herman's shoulder. He is fidgeting with a six pack and his hands are moist from the condensation. "If you don't mind."

"No problem."

Mrs. Mathy smiles at Selena. "I've always wondered what this place was like."

"Come inside." Selena holds the door open for her guests and takes the beer from Herman. She opens a bottle of wine and pours them each a glass.

"Thanks," says Mrs. Mathy, "You don't mind if I have a look around."

"Not at all." Selena spreads her arms. "Make yourself at home."

Selena speaks to Herman: "Did you bring your tools?"

"You didn't ask me too."

"I know... I was just hoping."

"Next time."

"Tonight we'll have to make do with some real Italian pasta."

"I never eat pasta."

"You should have tol—"

"My mother can't eat gluten." Herman slurps at his wine. "I eat anything"

"Non hai mai provato la pasta italiana."

Mrs. Mathy returns from her self-guided tour of the house. "It's fabulous."

"I like it."

"Did you rent it fully furnished?"

"Some of the art is mine, but otherwise it was all here."

"I'd better be off," Mrs. Mathy says, "My rice'll be boiling dry."

When Mrs. Mathy has gone and the sun has set behind the dunes of the Blesberg, Herman and Selena are alone. They sit on the lawn in canvas deck chairs and Selena gazes at the first stars, those which are bright enough to be seen against the pale background evening blue. Herman speaks to Selena: "What was that?"

"What?"

"That language."

"Italian," she says, "I used to live there."

"I thought you lived in England."

"How did you know?"

"Ali told me."

“I lived in Italy too.”

“Doing what?”

“My husband was Italian.” She wants him to ask more.

“And Franschhoek?”

“Yes.” She refills their glasses. “And Joburg.”

“You’ve been around.”

“I grew up in Joburg. My family moved to Franschhoek a few years ago.”

“To do what?”

“They bought a farm.”

“Wine farm?”

“Yes. My dad was bored when he retired.”

“And England?”

“I studied there.”

“Where?”

“Durham.” She pre-empts his next question: “Environmental science. Are you hungry?”

“I could eat a horse.”

“Well, I don’t have any *mortadella*.” Selena has not made a joke for over a year.

“But I do have *pancetta*, a *salsiccia calabrese* and a nice big chunk of *parmigiano reggiano*.”

“Don’t tell me you brought all that stuff with you.”

“Of course I did.”

“But why?”

“We all do it.”

“Who’s we?”

“Italians.” Selena has forgotten about the stars and she faces Herman.

“But you’re not–”

“My grandfather was from Bergamo.”

“The plot thickens.”

“He came here as a POW in the first war.”

“And he stayed?”

“Why do you sound so surprised?” Selena pauses, “He married a South African, started importing tiles.”

“How did you get it all here?”

“What?”

“That food.”

“I just put it in my bags.”

“You can’t bring meat into another country.”

“D’you want me to show it to you?”

“Okay, okay. Let’s not argue.” Herman scratches at his stubble. “I’d love it if you made me some real Italian pasta.”

Selena watches the stars disappear. The next cold front is on its way and the wind has brought thin cold clouds which shroud the sky. She rubs her naked arms. “Let’s move inside, it’s getting cold.”

“And I’m getting hungry.”

“Not as thirsty as me.”

Selena leads Herman directly to the fridge. He almost shrieks when she presses the cold bottle against his face, but instead he says, "What's that?"

"It's a bottle of..." Selena squints to read the label. "Grand Mousseux. I don't think it's French."

"Have you never heard of it?" Herman laughs.

"No...should I have?"

"Grandma's Socks. But you're a wine farmer!"

"Not really. My dad was an accountant."

"It doesn't matter. I just thought everyone knew about it."

"Shall we have some?"

"If you want. It's bloody sweet."

"It's a present from Yvette," Selena says, "We'd better." She opens the bottle and pours them each a glass.

"Cheers!" Herman winces as the liquid passes his lips. "I'll move on to beer soon."

"And I'd better get going with supper."

Herman downs what remains in his glass and fumbles around in search of beer. The six pack which he brought is on the top shelf of the fridge and he finds it easily.

"What are you making?"

"*La carbonara*. It's a traditional dish from Milan." Selena drops strips of pancetta into the frying pan.

"How long'll it take?"

“Fifteen minutes.” Selena turns the kettle on. “It’s very easy.” She breaks two eggs into a bowl and adds a handful of grated *parmigiano* and some cream. She whisks the contents of the bowl. She grinds black pepper into it.

Herman drinks his beer and leans against the counter, out of the way of the chef. As soon as the spaghetti is cooked Selena assembles the various parts of the meal, and mixes them together in a large stoneware bowl with a ring of blue whales around its rim. They eat at the Oregon pine table next to the doors which face the sea.

“This is amazing,” says Herman, “It’s a pity we don’t have any decent wine.”

“I’ve got some red.”

“D’you want to get it?”

“I feel bad. We should finish this.”

“I’ll stick to beer.”

She pours herself another glass of Grandma’s Socks. “What are those lights?”

“What lights?”

“There are these yellow lights appearing and disappearing in amongst the bushes.”

“The bushes next to the beach?”

“Yes.” Selena gets up and walks to the window. She presses her face against the glass and shields her eyes with her hands. A crack of light finds its way in through the gap left by her missing finger, and she can only just make out what is happening in the darkness outside. “I think there are two people, with torches.”

“What are they doing?”

“It’s hard to tell, they keep on going in and out of the bushes.”

“And there are just two of them?”

“Yes, but there are five or six black shapes moving around them.” The wind seeps through the bushes, whining as it does so.

“What do these shapes look like?”

“Like crabs. Really big crabs.”

“Probably their dogs.” Herman has joined Selena at the door. “Poachers use them for protection.”

“You’re right.” Selena stands behind Herman and rests her chin on his shoulder.

“They’re so close. What can we do?”

“Nothing.” Herman leans his forehead against the windowpane.

“There are only two of them.”

“So?”

“Can’t we call the cops?”

“The cops are no match for this. They’ll have to organise a full-scale raid sometime.”

“For two people and a couple of dogs.”

“We don’t have a clue how many are hiding in the bushes. The poachers love this area because there’re so few houses.”

“So all we can do is stay inside and lock the doors and windows?”

“Basically.”

Selena takes Herman’s hand and draws him away from the window. “I’m scared.”

“Well I’m here.” He laughs. “You’ve got a blind bodyguard.”

“Would you mind staying?”

"I'll be no help at all."

"I'd like you to stay."

"My mom's expecting me back."

"Give her a call." Selena takes her mobile phone from her handbag. "What's her number?"

"What's the time?"

"Early. Not even nine."

Herman tells her the number. She dials it and passes him the phone.

"Mom," he says, "There're poachers in the bushes here. With dogs. Selena wants me to stay the night."

"But you're useless."

"That's love, mom." Herman laughs. "She really wants me to stay."

"Go for it. You're a grown man."

Herman gives the phone back to Selena. "It's fine."

"Thank you. This house is big."

"So...you're married?"

"Was."

"What happened?"

"He died."

"I'm sorry. I didn't mean to..."

"It's fine. He was a lawyer. It was a car bomb."

"Nice guy?"

"The best. He got on the wrong side of some bad people."

“Mafia?”

“Pretty much.”

“And your finger?”

“I was in the car. The bomb was under the driver’s seat.”

“I don’t know what to say.”

“You’ll think of something.”

“Do you have bedding for me?”

“There’s a spare room.”

“You tired?”

“Exhausted.”

“Me too.”

Selena shows Herman to the spare room and turns the duvet down. She opens a new toothbrush and puts toothpaste on it for him. They brush their teeth together. Herman tries to brush properly, in neat circles, starting at the molars and working forwards. He rinses his mouth but still he can hear Selena brushing. He does not rinse the bristles and he resumes brushing. She seems to keep on going forever, but even forever ends eventually.

“You have to sculpt more of me.” She kisses him on the forehead.

“Soon.”

“Goodnight.”

“Goodnight.”

“Sleep with the angels.”

“What?”

“It’s Portuguese.”

“It’s nice. You too.”

Herman hears Selena’s footsteps on the stairs. Clearly the angels aren’t as tired as he is because he lies awake for hours.

Upstairs, Selena is also awake. After brushing her teeth she sits at her desk and opens her RESEARCH file. She starts reading through her report on the perlemoen poaching, but her mind roams. She likes Herman for allowing her to talk about herself. He never pushes her, but he’s willing to listen. It’s nice having to tell someone what she’s been through. All of her family, and her other friends know the whole story, and they have showered her with nothing but pity ever since Giuseppe’s death. They’ve made her cakes, and sent her flowers, and said that they’re only a phone call away. But it all seems so forced. They don’t understand. How could they? She doesn’t mean this in a bad way, but all they’ve done is swaddle her in cotton wool, like a bean shoot, which needs to be protected from the dangers of the world. This is all very well in the beginning, but in time the absence of danger becomes a danger in itself. The young plant will die if it isn’t moved and exposed to more risks. First it must be put in the sunlight on the windowsill and, ultimately, it must be removed from the house altogether and planted in the garden where it will be exposed to wind and rain and caterpillars and aphids.

That’s why she left Franschhoek.

She cancelled her cell phone contract and asked everyone not to try and contact her. Her mother wasn’t happy, but Selena gave her no choice. “Mom,” she said, “If you really love me, you’ll respect my wishes, and give me the space to find myself.” Selena didn’t like having to stoop to these levels, but she knew that it was the only kind of

treatment that would work with her mother, who (having a husband who is always at work) has been laid waste to the ravages of daytime TV. It was far easier with everyone else: her father probably still hasn't noticed she's gone and her friends and her brother are so busy with their own lives that they're probably relieved not to have to look after her anymore.

She phones her mom once a week, just to keep her happy.

Selena can't believe how different she and Herman are. It's almost impossible to believe that he only lost his sight a year or two ago. She knows that she'll never be able to deal with her problems in the same way as him – with her personality that would be a foolproof blueprint for tragedy – but she can definitely learn something from him.

The most ridiculous part of it all is the sculpting. She can't believe what it does to her. She's never thought of herself as vain, but now she's obsessed with watching him create her. It's almost as if he's building her up, piece by piece, and she won't let him stop until the puzzle is complete.

Her bedroom window is open and a gust of wind blows the file open, scattering the various documents on the floor. Selena collects them all and puts the file back in the drawer where it belongs.

She goes to bed thinking of Rupert. He's not going to like any of this, but she doesn't care. She just won't tell him. This is more important than her job.

Displacement

Herman hears Selena walk downstairs and into the kitchen. She fills the kettle and starts to wash up. Herman has spent the last few evenings sculpting Selena's elbow. They finally finished the sculpture in the small hours of the morning and Selena was too tired to give him a lift home. He's been sleeping at her place more and more. He waits till he hears the kettle boil and then goes to join her in the kitchen. She gives him a cup of coffee. The sun does not rise easily in Betty's Bay, it struggles over Elephant Rock Mountain. Their coffee does not stay hot for long. "Herman." Selena finishes what remains in her mug in a single gulp. "When I first moved to Italy I lived in a road called Via Ritorta in a hill town called Perugia." She pauses.

Herman sits down. "I'm listening."

"I lived next to the *piazzetta* where emotions were dealt with: new lovers kept trysts; old lovers argued; ex-lovers cried; and gambling debts and matters of honour were solved with fists and raised voices."

"Everyone went to this place to sort shit out?"

"Not everyone. But it was a space dedicated to that sort of thing."

"Weird."

"When I lived there I thought it was pathetic."

"And now?"

"I want to go back there."

"I could sculpt you every day."

“I’d like that.”

Selena gives Herman a lift and they do not talk on the way. The sun has finally made an appearance and they drive with the air conditioning on. She drops Herman off and drives straight home. She goes to the bathroom to wash her face. She rinses the sleep from around her dark brown eyes, and brushes the knots from her hair.

Herman’s mother is about to leave for work when he gets home. “How was your night?” she asks.

“Good. Yours?”

“Dull. What did you eat?”

“Pasta. She’s a really good cook.”

“Really?”

“She lived in Italy you know.”

“Why do you bother?”

“What do you mean?”

“To come home every morning.”

“I’m sorry, mom, I won’t do it again—”

“I’m not cross with you,” she pauses, “I just don’t see any point in Selena driving back and forth all the time.”

“What do you mean?”

“Why don’t you move your sculpting stuff to her place? Take a few days’ worth of clothes?”

“I don’t want to leave you alone.”

“That’s just old-fashioned,” she pauses, “It’s honourable, and I love you for the sentiment. But it’s old fashioned, and I can fend for myself. I don’t need a man to look after me.”

“I know you can look after yourself, but–”

“Herman, you’re twenty five, you don’t need to live with your mother.”

“Twenty six.”

“Whatever.”

Herman takes a few seconds to respond to this: “She has mentioned it before. She gets scared on her own.”

“Why didn’t you ask me?”

“I’ve already told you, I didn’t want to leave you–”

“Stop being stupid.”

“It’s not what it seems.”

“What?”

“Me and Selena. We’re not...you know.”

“Either way.”

“What does that mean?”

“It’ll be good for you...for us.”

“That’s what Selena said.”

Mrs. Mathy gathers what she will need for work – a straw handbag; rice-cakes wrapped in tinfoil; and a pair of binoculars – and leaves in a hurry. As soon as Herman hears her car start he phones Selena.

“My mom thinks I should move my sculpting stuff to your place.”

“I thought you weren’t going to ask her.”

“I didn’t. She suggested it.”

“When can you move in?”

“Whenever.”

“Today?”

“I guess.”

“I’ll come and fetch you now.”

“We’ll have to move my studio.”

“I’m sure we can handle it.”

“We can’t. I’ll give Judah a call.”

Selena returns to the Mathys’ house for the second time that day. The sun is huge and the poachers’ boats are out on the bay again. She has to wait for a tortoise – which should already be hibernating – to cross the driveway before parking her car. Winter is long overdue, she thinks to herself, but who knows what the climate is up to these days?

Selena helps Herman pack his things. They fill a small suitcase. As Herman had predicted, the real problem is the relocation of his studio. Fortunately his things are ordered: his tools hang on racks above his workbench; his stone and his wood are stored in crates beneath his workbench; and his works in progress sit on the shelves which used to house books before the accident. Selena fetches his empty toolboxes from the garage and they pack them, together. They gather those uncompleted sculptures which have relevance to Herman’s current endeavour: sculptures of her torso; her right elbow; her left foot; and the beginnings of an abstract interpretation of her hair. Herman was right:

there is no way they could move it all alone. Not only are the crates of stone far too heavy for them to manage, but they wouldn't even fit in Selena's car.

Herman phones Judah who is only too happy to help. He and his *handlanger*, Adam, transport it in their *bakkie* that evening, after work.

Selena takes her chequebook from her handbag and speaks to Judah: "How much do I owe you?"

"What?"

"For the job."

"Don't even think about it."

"Don't be ridiculous...it's taken at least an hour."

"Think of it as a housewarming present."

"How about a case of Labels each?" Herman emerges from the bathroom where he has been listening to their conversation. "Call it a compromise."

"Sweet," says Judah, "But you really don't have to."

"We'll drop them off tomorrow."



A helicopter flies just above the ocean. Its rotors churn the surface of the water and soak the boatmen. It is no quiet Sunday afternoon in Betty's Bay and nobody dares have an afternoon nap for fear of missing the excitement. The poachers shake their fists and some even try to throw perlemoen shells at the pilot through the chopper's open door.

It has been like this for weeks: whenever the weather has been right, the poachers have been out in full force. They have stripped the rocks off Dawidskraal and Main Beach and are currently working on the waters around Die Been. Although they have moved around, they have never left the reserve and locals have been forced to watch as the ocean is raped. They recognise some of the poachers; have seen them around Kleinmond (usually in the parking lot of the bottle store) but the law makes it hard to convict them.

If it weren't for Alf the government would have done nothing about the poachers and the problem would have been solved within weeks: the entire perlemoen population would have been removed. He found an old telephoto lens that an ex-game-ranger friend of his no longer needed and he fixed it up and attached it to his SLR. Every day that the poachers were out, Alf took photographs of them. Pictures of the divers and the sacks of perlemoen; close-ups of the poachers themselves; and more wide-angled shots which emphasised the extent of the operation. The pictures were published in the *Cape Times*, on the front page, every day for weeks, until public opinion forced the government to react. For the first time since its disastrous sorties into Lesotho, the South African Defence Force had something to do.

Today, Alf can take pictures of the army helicopter harassing the indignant poachers; he can take pictures of the armoured Caspers which patrol the bushy coastline; and he can take pictures of soldiers performing indiscriminate searches on passing cars. Tomorrow the *Cape Times* will be able to publish some of these photographs next to an article about the man who was arrested with 356 shucked perlemoen in a secret compartment beneath the engine of his car.

Alf is not alone in his loft: Herman and Selena, Mrs. Mathy, Ali, Judah and, of course, Cathy stand behind him as he waits for the right moment to click the shutter. They are all rendered blind by distance, and Alf offers a stilted commentary of proceedings as he fiddles with the camera's settings. "That's it! Just a little to the left and..." Alf extends the last syllable as he swivels the camera on the tripod, "Bingo!" The shutter opens and closes again almost immediately. He hopes he can get away with a speed of 60 and an f-stop of 4.8 in the failing light. "I just got a portrait of the guy who seems to be in charge," he says, "He's a little Chinese runt, wearing a sky-blue zip-up top. He's on his own in a small, fast rubber duck."

Judah expresses the sentiments of all who are assembled, "Why don't they just nab him?"

"I'd like to get a piece of him," says Herman.

"Pointless," Mrs. Mathy reprimands her son, "We've got to let the law do its thing."

"That's easier said than done."

"Exactly," says Ali, "It's damned hard to catch them red-handed," he pauses, "They can just drop the *perlies* when they see the chopper on its way."

"The bastards don't deserve our bloody liberal constitution."

"Especially not that bloody Chinaman. They've been trawling our fish illegally for years, and now look at what they're doing."

Alf looks up from the viewfinder and turns to address the group: "Sometimes I agree with you." He runs his hands through what remains of his hair. "At least the photos will make people take notice of the problem."

“Ja, maybe they’ll help the poachers realise that they *are* actually criminals,” says Mrs. Mathy.

“And what good will that do?” Cathy has been quiet until now.

“Good point.”

“It won’t achieve anything on its own,” Mrs. Mathy continues, “But if the community also realises that they’re nothing more than a bunch of thugs, maybe the cops will be forced to act.”

“Maybe,” Herman says, “But I doubt it.”

“What do think of it all, Selena?” says Alf, “As an outsider.”

“I don’t think I’ve been here long enough to have an opinion.” This is a lie: Selena has opinions but she does not voice them. She has her documentary to worry about. Her job is to observe and record the community. To saturate herself in their opinions without so much as rippling the surface. Gatherings like this are tailor-made for her, but she does find it difficult to keep her mouth shut. She wants to tell them that they mustn’t allow the poachers to divide them. That their only strength is in their unity, and already cracks are forming.

She has witnessed the unsatisfactory relationship between intention and activity before, and she feels pity for these people. A community is being held ransom by fear and it is up to the people themselves to crush this fear. It is the same in Italy: the government is apathetic, or worse, involved. If the community doesn’t react it will soon be too late.

The last traces of sunlight have disappeared and the landscape is constructed of blues and blacks, like a bruise.



As soon as Herman and Selena get home from Alf's house Selena prepares supper. They eat ostrich steaks with roasted vegetables and couscous. As Herman scrapes the last of his food onto his fork, the phone rings.

Selena rushes to answer it. She doesn't speak for more than five minutes. When she returns to the table she sits next to Herman and puts her hands on his knees. "You'll never guess who that was."

"I suppose I won't."

"A guy I studied with at Durham."

"Overseas call?"

"I can't believe he rang, I mean how'd he even get my number?"

"But you're happy he phoned?"

"Over the moon."

"You guys close?"

"Very," she pauses, "He's great."

"What did he have to say for himself?"

"He's coming out here in a week."

"Awesome. You gonna see him?"

"Definitely," she says, "If the weather plays ball we'll go collecting."

"What?"

"Frogs... The Cape Micro—"

"I remember...you were talking about them the first time we met."

"Second."

"You're right. The second time we met."

"We did a first year course in herpetology together."

"What's that?"

"The study of frogs and reptiles."

"I should have guessed."

"He's a professor now."

"Herpetology?"

Selena nods. "I'm so excited."

"We'll just have to hope for some rain."

"You can say that again." She gets up from the table and walks to the window.

She can see lights moving in the bushes. She drums her fingers against the glass. "I can't believe it."

"What?"

"They're back."

"Who?"

"The poachers."

"Not again." Herman stands up to join her at the window, but she intercepts him and leads him towards the sitting room.

"Let's talk about something happy," she says.

They sit down on the sofa in front of the empty fireplace. Herman is still worrying about the poachers, and he knows that the only thing that will calm him down is to sculpt.

He runs his fingers through her hair, taking care not to pull too strongly at the small knots. "Can we carry on with that one of your hair?"

"I haven't washed it."

"It's better that way. I need the texture."

Selena laughs. "Can we do it here?"

Herman nods. "Let's go and get what we need from my workbench."

Selena finds the uncompleted piece easily. "I've got it," she says, "What tools do you need?"

"Just my small toolbox." Selena hands it to him and they return to the sofa.

Herman kneels on the ground, and reacquaints himself with his creation. He follows each individual strand of hair, losing himself in the maze. Selena breaks the silence. "I was thinking we should have a dinner party to thank everyone who's helped us."

"Like who?"

"Oh, you know...everyone."

"Who's everyone?"

"Your mom and Ali, of course. And Alf and Cathy and..." Selena pauses for a moment, making sure she has forgotten no one. "Oh yes...and Judah and Adam."

"We can't invite Adam."

"Why not?"

"We just can't."

"What do you think this is? Apartheid?"

"Come off it...you're a South African."

“A new South African.”

“It’s not about his race. I suppose it’s his class.”

“That’s even more old fashioned than apartheid.”

“He wouldn’t know what to do, which fork to use. All that stuff. Come to think of it, neither would Judah or Ali or me. It’d just be you and my mom and Alf. Maybe Cathy if it’s rubbed off on her.”

“I don’t care about that nonsense.”

“You may think you don’t, but...anyway...it would be awkward for everyone.”

“What am I meant to do?”

“What do you mean?”

“About this dinner party.”

“We don’t have dinner parties in Betty’s Bay. It’s just not that sort of place.”

“*We* have dinner parties for *our* staff.”

“I’m sure you do.” Herman can imagine the scene. He doesn’t want to be mean to Selena, but he is convinced that the farm labourers find these dinner parties onerous. Rich liberals have embraced the ideals of the new South Africa wholeheartedly, but in most cases its practicalities have passed them by. Herman knows that none of this is worth saying.

“How am I meant to say thank you?”

“We can...have everyone round for a braai.”

“Why can Adam come to a braai, but not a dinner party?”

“I’m not trying to argue with you. I just know how things work. It’s not only for Adam.”

“Then who is it for?”

“Would you invite a bunch of Jews round for a pork roast?”

“Piss off.”

Neither person speaks.

Selena realises that she should have stopped probing a while ago. She still can't understand what Herman is going on about but she can see that he is not going to change his mind. Old habits die hard, particularly in small towns. She is fortunate to have grown up in a big city, surrounded by forward thinking liberals.

Herman sits in the armchair and thinks. He does not rationalise the argument they have just had. But he is glad that Selena has shut up. He doesn't like picking at scabs.

Selena diffuses the situation in the best way possible: she allows herself to be sculpted. This makes both her and Herman happy. While Herman works, the stone is given movement and the light plays on its intricate surfaces. Herman and Selena relax and, Herman tells himself, this must be some sort of love. Outside the rain has begun to fall, and it softens the rasping of the wind.

Minor Hindrance

Later that night, when the rain has intensified, a small group of stragglers left over from happy-hour is clustered around the log fire in Ali's Cackle. Ali has joined in the conversation and Cathy mans the bar alone.

"What were all those coloured *ous* doing here?" says Koos, the policeman.

"I thought they were mates of Adam's."

"No, bru," says Judah, "He doesn't like those guys at all. That's why he left so soon."

"Why doesn't he dig them?"

"Says they're all *skollies*." Judah swirls his glass and looks into the liquid as if it will provide answers. "I think he means they're poachers."

"Wouldn't be surprised."

"Ja. They looked pretty *skelm*."

"Your Adam seems like a good one, though," says Wilhelm.

"The best. It's been ten years and I've never had a problem."

"There aren't many like him these days. I'm glad that lot left when happy-hour finished."

"Bloody typical. Come here for the cheap drink and then leave."

"My brother would call them educated consumers," says Judah.

"Well we all know your brother's full of shit."

“No, no, seriously bru. It’s bloody difficult to walk away after a few drinks. Why d’you think we’re all still here?”

No one says anything for a few moments, as they process the possibility of the poachers being above them in the hierarchy of consumer intelligence. Eventually Ali, the top of this food chain, breaks the silence in an effort to keep his custom. “So...have you guys seen Selena?”

“Jeez, bru, she’s a belter.” Judah looks up from his drink.

“I’ll take your word for it.” Koos sighs as he finishes his brandy and coke.

“She’s this English chick,” says Judah.

“South African,” says Ali.

“Sounds like a pom.”

“She lived there a while.”

“I hear she’s been spending lank time with Herman.”

“He’s living with her now.”

“What?”

“Ja. I helped him move into her place the other day.”

“So he’s *pomping* her?”

“Apparently not,” says Ali, “I spoke to him this morning.”

“But he’s living with her. How the hell did he manage that?”

“They say that love is blind.” Ali chuckles at his own joke. “Sorry, I just had to say that.”

Koos ignores Ali’s attempt at humour and offers a suggestion of his own: “It must be that whole sculpting thing.”

“Chicks dig all that arty shit.”

“Ja,” says Judah, “And she lived in Italy for a while.”

“That explains a lot...those Europeans are different.”

“I wish our women were like that,” says Koos, “I had to have Luanne home by midnight every day until I married her.”

“Tell me about it.” Ali finishes his beer. “I got out of all that shit long ago.”

Looking around the group, he realises that everyone has an empty glass, and asks Cathy to bring them another round. Nobody complains.

Cathy opens two Black Labels, and goes to the storeroom to fetch another bottle of brandy. As she returns a young black man, covering his shaved head with a scuffed masonite clipboard, runs inside. He is dressed in an unimpressive uniform, which is the same brown as the clipboard. Plastic epaulettes hang forlorn from his slight shoulders. He walks to the bar, where Cathy is pouring two double brandies. “Excuse me ma’am.” He clears his throat and opens the folder with ceremony. “May I see the liquor licence for this establishment?”

Ali is ensconced in conversation, and Cathy has to go over to the fireplace to alert him of the inspector’s presence. Ali greets the uniformed man and asks him to wait while he fetches the paperwork from the safe. He returns triumphant, carrying a red file. “It’s all in here, inspector.”

The inspector wipes a raindrop from his cheek, and takes the file. He scrutinises the documentation with finicky precision. He thumbs the revenue stamp and checks that Ali’s identity number is correctly duplicated on every page. Disappointed, he hands the file back to Ali. “Everything seems to be in order, sir.” The inspector walks towards the

door, but just before he reaches it he turns on his heels and speaks to Cathy, “Sorry, ma’am, how old are you?”

“Eighteen.”

“May I see your ID book then?”

“I left it at home.”

“Do you not know that as a South African citizen you should never be without it?”

Ali has been hovering behind Cathy, growing more impatient with the conversation. Now he can hold his tongue no longer: “Come off it, man, this is Betty’s Bay.”

“And Betty’s Bay is a part of South Africa.” He reorders his papers. “What is your date of birth?”

“Tenth of September 1985.”

“Well in that case you are only...” He counts the years out on his fingers and announces in triumph, “Seventeen years of age. It is illegal for a minor to serve alcohol.”

Once again, Ali joins the conversation, “She’s almost eighteen and there’s nobody else to employ.”

“The law does not see such excuses, sir.”

“But—”

Koos and Wilhelm, who have been listening to everything, get up from their seats and join the group at the bar.

“Sir, you are in contravention of your liquor licence, and I am obliged to close this pub down.”

“Can’t you just turn a blind eye... I mean, I won’t let her work here until she turns eighteen.”

“Mr. Pellegrini.” He segments the name into four abrupt syllables. “The damage has been done. This pub will be closed until your court appearance.”

“What?”

“You have broken the law, sir, and you will appear in court.”

“When?”

“There’s a huge backlog at the moment. It’ll be a few months at least.”

Koos speaks: “But inspector...” He looks at the shorter man’s name tag. “Kekana, surely there’s something Mr. Pellegrini can do to make you a little bit...forgetful.”

“We don’t do business that way.”

Koos takes his SAPS badge from his pocket. “Thirty years I’ve been a policeman, and I’ve learnt that there is always room for interpretation in the law.”

“The law is explicit.”

“What harm is young Cathy doing to anyone?”

“Sir, I am just doing my job.”

“How much do they pay you? Are you getting overtime?”

“That’s none of—”

“What’s your first name, Inspector?”

“David.”

“Well Dave, before you get any ideas about giant slaying, I think Mr. Pellegrini over here would like to pay you overtime.”

Ali rings up an imaginary amount, opening the drawer of the till, and takes seven one hundred rand notes from the extreme right compartment. “This should be enough.” He passes the cash to the inspector, who tries to put it in his back pocket before he has undone the button. The money falls to the floor and he picks it up and scuttles out of the room, still fumbling with the button.

“Bloody youngsters don’t know how it all works,” says Koos.

“Ag, he’s only learning.”

“Seven hundred bucks...and I’m still going to have to find a new barmaid.”



On Saturday, Herman and Selena get up early. “What do you want for breakfast?”

“I’ll just have cereal,” Herman says, “We’ve got work to do.”

“Muesli okay?”

Herman nods.

“And coffee?”

“Perfect.”

They sit at the table and wait for the coffee to brew. “Weather’s good.”

“Is it?”

“Not a breath of wind.”

“Awesome.” Herman chews steadfastly, grinding the muesli down with his molars. “The braai should be *lekker*.”

“I hope so.” Selena plunges the *cafetière*, and pours them each a mug. She adds milk and two sugars to Herman’s. “I don’t really feel up to it.”

“It’ll be fine.” Herman sips his coffee and laughs. “They’re not exactly the toughest crowd.”

“It’s not that,” Selena pauses, “It’s...”

“What?”

“Never mind.”

“You can tell me.”

“Really. It’s fine.”

“Come on, Selena. I can hear it’s not.”

“It’s Giuseppe’s birthday today.”

“You should have told me.”

“That’s the thing.” She puts her mug down heavily. “I only just remembered now.”

“You’ve been busy.”

“I know. I mean that’s why I came here. But I can’t just forget his birthday completely.”

“You didn’t for—”

“Almost.”

“But you didn’t.”

“I know. And now I’ve got to be the perfect hostess.”

“Hardly.” Herman laughs. “They pretty much entertain themselves.”

There is a knock on the door and Selena goes to open it. It is Ali. "Howzit!" He kisses Selena on both cheeks. "Thought I'd come and give you guys a hand."

"That's very kind of you." She shows him inside. "But I'm sure we can manage alone."

"Don't be silly." Ali slaps Herman on the shoulder. "We've got some men's work to do."

"Shot, I was gonna have to rope Sel in."

"Don't even think about it. You *ous* got a braai?"

"Not a clue."

"What? How long have you lived here?"

"I know," Herman says, "It's shocking."

"Let's go and find out." The three of them go to the garage and they eventually find a half-drum welded onto a steel frame, which is hidden beneath a cobwebbed collection of surfboards and paddle-skis. It's a bit rusted but there are no holes in it. "This'll do," says Ali.

"Okay, what else do we need?"

"Well, I'll phone Corné and get him to bring a thousand pieces of *rooikrans*."

"What's that?"

"Firewood. It makes the best coals."

"A thousand pieces?" says Selena, "We'll never use it all."

"I do a lot of entertaining," says Ali in a deliberately thick Afrikaans accent.

Herman laughs at the reference to a lorry driver who gave him and Herman a lift a few years ago, and then answers Selena's question in seriousness: "A thousand pieces will be enough for the rest of the year. It'll give it a chance to dry out nicely."

"I see." Selena takes a diary from her handbag, and waits with the nib of her pen touching the lined paper. "What can I get from Kleinmond?"

"Just some meat and potatoes," says Herman.

"What about booze, bru?"

"We can handle that."

"Then we may as well get the food too." Ali scratches the back of his shoulder. "I mean, the bottle store's right next to the butchery."

"One way."

"Just wait a minute," says Selena, "You can't get only meat and potatoes."

"Why not? We'll get chicken, and chops, some *boerie*. Maybe even a few steaks."

"What about snacks?"

"We'll chuck in some chips."

"Not those disgusting flavoured things?"

"The very same. Trust me, Sel, I've been to a few braais in my time."

"Yes, I know. It's just that..." Selena traces and retraces a five-petalled flower in her diary. "I want to feed everyone properly."

"Oh...you mean a salad?" Selena doesn't have time to disagree with Herman, and he continues, "I'll just get my mom to make one."

"Herman! You were the one who wouldn't let me have a dinner party."

"Just trying to make it easier for you...after everything tha--"

"I *want* to do this."

"Guys," says Ali, "Let's all go to Kleinmond. Selena can handle the snacks, we'll take care of the braai and the *dop*."

"Fair enough."

"Okay," says Selena, "What are we waiting for?"

Ali drives them to Kleinmond. As they enter the town, the car in front of them is pulled over by a traffic cop for speeding. "That'll teach them," says Ali.

"Trapping?"

"Yip." Ali stops the car in front of the Spar. "Here we are, Selena."

She gets out, and Ali and Herman continue to the butchery.

In Kleinmond most of the men are called Kobus, and the butcher is no exception. Everyone calls him Kobus Tjops, to distinguish him from Kobus Spanner and Kobus Spyker, the carpenter, and Kobus Tande, the dentist.

When Ali and Herman walk into the butchery Kobus Tjops is squeezing his secret recipe of mince and coriander and bread and the various undisclosed ingredients into an endless transparent tube. Metres of sausage lie coiled on the steel counter, and the skin is drawn from a bucket on the floor. Kobus Tjops can never make enough of his *boerewors*: people from Cape Town and Barrydale and even as far as Saldanha Bay place thirty kilo orders to last them a year. Or the Christmas season at least.

"Tjops, you look pretty busy."

"It's a bloody joke, Ali." Kobus Tjops looks up from the growing pile of sausage, but does not stop kneading the bloody mixture into its filmy sheath. "This is meant to be my quiet month."

“Herman’s just moved into a new place with this chick, and...”

“Ja. Danie was telling me about that. Well done bru.”

Herman mumbles an acceptance of Kobus Tjops’ congratulations, and Ali continues speaking, “Anyway, he’s having a housewarming braai and we’ve come to get some meat. Can you spare any *boerie*?”

“For you guys, I can get as much as you need.” He lifts a rubber-gloved handful of the glistening sausage and allows it to slap back onto the counter. “This is for a game lodge near Montagu. They can wait.”

“We won’t take it all. Three kilos will be plenty.”

Kobus measures two arm-spans of *wors*, and wraps them in blue and pink floral paper. He doesn’t bother to weigh the package. “What else can I get you?”

“D’you have Karoo lamb at the moment?” says Herman.

“Only the best. Twenty carcasses came in from Oudtshoorn on Monday.”

“Then I’ll have forty chops, please.”

Kobus walks through the thick plastic curtains, into the cold-room, and returns with two lambs. He separates the ribs with a cleaver which slices through the bluish cartilage without tearing it. He packs the chops in the same way as the *wors*, and puts them down with a thud. At this prompt, Herman speaks again: “And two sirloins, too.”

“Whole sirloins?”

“That’s right. For the braai.”

“Jeez this is a nice heifer,” says Kobus as he returns from the cold room and drops half a cow on the steel counter. He cuts at its inner loin. “Will that be all?”

“Ja.” Herman chuckles. “Should be enough, hey?”

“Wait a minute.” Kobus Tjops takes a large brown paper bag from beneath the till and offers it to Ali and Herman. “I’ve got something you have to try.”

Ali puts his hand into the bag and pulls out a clump of deep purple slices of biltong. He gives a few pieces to Herman, and waits until his friend is chewing on the still-succulent flesh before he tries it himself.

“This is unbelievable,” says Herman as he takes more biltong from Ali’s hand. “What is it? Kudu?”

“Nope. What you reckon, Ali?”

“Not sure.” Ali swallows what is in his mouth and continues, “Warthog maybe?”

“Hippo.”

“What?” say Ali and Herman in unison, “Where the hell did you get it from?”

“A friend of mine owns the Bosveld Slagtery in Hoedspruit. In February they found a hippo that died when a dam wall broke during the floods.”

“I can’t believe it’s so tender,” says Ali, “And where’s the fat?”

“They must have an outer layer, like whales.” Kobus Tjops has also helped himself to a piece of the biltong. “‘Cause you’re right – this meat is *blerrie* lean.”

“I can’t believe we forgot biltong,” says Herman, “Can we buy some?”

“This stuff isn’t for sale, but I can sell you some of my own Kudu biltong.”

“Great, we’ll take a kilo.”

When Herman has paid for the meat he and Ali put the variously shaped parcels in the back of the Land Rover and go next door to the bottle store. They buy three cases of beer (two of Black Label and one of Windhoek: opposite ends of the spectrum); three

bottles of Klipdrift Brandy, which they will mix with coke; and two five litre boxes of cheap wine: one red, one semi-sweet. They buy a bottle of Tequila just in case.

With the back of Ali's short-wheel-base well-laden, they return to the Spar to fetch Selena. She's waiting outside the door, with an audience of green and red and white plastic shopping bags circled around her. "She's gonna have to sit on your lap," Ali says to Herman.

"I'm sure I'll manage," Herman says with a smile. He waits in the car, while Ali gives Selena a hand with her shopping. When this is done she opens the passenger door, and Herman helps her into the car. "What did you buy?"

"Lots."

"Ali said so."

"I got bread to make *crostini*; tomatoes and *zucchini*; some *pesto*; olives; eggs for a *frittata*. I could go on."

"Why don't you just make it a surprise? Sounds amazing so far."

When they get home a haphazard heap of wood denies them entrance to the garage. They'll have to stack it themselves: Herman is the designated packer, and he waits in the garage as the others deliver the wood to him in armfuls. He fills the recess beneath the workbench, and there is just enough left over to fill the woodbin inside and for the braai.

There is a lot to do before everyone arrives.

Selena takes over the kitchen. The house is supplied with limited cooking paraphernalia and she has to recycle chopping boards and baking trays; hotplates and dish cloths. The braai would have to be today. Any other day she'd have enjoyed all of this

cooking. The kitchen smells of Italy. A pan of olive oil is heating up. She slices *zucchini* frantically. *Julienne*. She grinds basil and olive oil and pine nuts in the mortar which she brought from home. She lets her emotions loose on the *pesto*: she bashes at it with the pestle, probably destroying its flavour. She doesn't really care. If what Herman says is true, the guests won't know the difference.

The men are relegated to the outside sink which is normally reserved for gutting and cleaning and scaling fish. They half-fill a plastic baby bath with an imprecise mishmash of ketchup; curry powder; oil; wine; and whatever else they can lay their hands on, and mix it well. The recipe requires a lot of finger-licking and new ingredients, but eventually Herman is able to announce: "That's the best bloody marinade I've ever tasted."

All of the meat goes into the tub and once Ali is satisfied that it is sufficiently submerged he covers it with a towel and says, "We won't touch that for a few hours."

The men have other tasks to perform: they split the six-packs and put the individual cans of beer into a galvanised tub and top it up with ice cubes; they take the half-drum out to the front lawn and start a fire; and they set up a ring of deck chairs around the fulcrum of fire and beer. At one o'clock everything is ready and they sit down to enjoy their first lagers. They have not even finished these when Judah and Adam arrive. In spite of the fact that this Saturday comprises the rest day between the domestic and international rugby seasons, the meat will be ready by three o'clock, synchronised with an imaginary three-thirty kick-off. The newcomers are furnished with Black Labels and Judah speaks: "Did you see the team for next week?"

"I know," says Ali, "What's Paulse doing in the side?"

“He’s over the hill,” Herman says, “You see how he got burnt by Vunibaka the other day?”

Adam struggles not to laugh but a babble of hiccupy giggles escapes. “My *ouma* could run faster than that.” His giggling continues.

“The Irish are going to give us a rugby lesson.”

“Bloody hell. Let’s talk about something a bit less depressing.”

As it happens the conversation is forced to change, because Mrs. Mathy and Alf arrive.

“Where’s Cathy?” asks Ali.

“Away on hockey tour. Potch.”

“I should have remembered that was coming up. I’m so out of the loop now that she doesn’t work for me.”

Ali pours Mrs. Mathy a glass of wine, and Alf helps himself to a whisky from his hipflask. When Selena arrives with a tray laden with food, the entire kilogram of biltong has been finished and a pile of empty beer cans has already begun to form on the lawn. The tray boasts *crostini*: some topped with *mozzarella*, *rosa* tomatoes and fresh basil; others smeared with *tapenade*; still others only lightly sprinkled with rosemary and olive oil. There are also wedges of spinach *frittata*; stuffed purses of *melanzane*; and a finger bowl on the tray.

“Selena you shouldn’t have,” says Mrs. Mathy with a mouth full of *melanzane* and parmesan, “This is delicious.”

The others also express their approval with full mouths and hand signals, but before Ali has time to offer the hostess a drink, she has disappeared to the kitchen again.

Adam is overwhelmed by the variety of foods, and he limits himself to the simplicity of cheese and tomato *crostini*. The others are more ambitious and when Selena returns with round two the tray is scattered with nothing but parsley and breadcrumbs.

Alf, who has been silent until now, raises his binoculars to his eyes and speaks with intent: "Damned poachers are it again."

"They're here every day," says Selena, "They scare me."

"The guys on the shore are a bunch of thugs. Protection for the divers."

Adam sucks at his beer with measured purpose. He winces when Alf passes him the binoculars and says, "Surely you'll recognise a few of them, Adam."

He scans the beach. "Ja, I know some of them. That fat guy in the vest lives in my street. He just put a new sound system in his car."

"Tell me about it," says Herman, "I've heard some of the women walk around wearing Armani dresses with fluffy slippers on their feet and curlers in their hair."

"It's bullshit," Ali says, "You'd think they'd be a bit more subtle in spending their money."

"You can't really blame them," says Mrs. Mathy, "They're the kind of people who've always had to worry about where their next meal is coming from and suddenly they're rolling in it."

"Exactly, it's not the poachers who disgust me," says Herman, "As much as the ringleaders who must be sitting pretty watching their Swiss bank accounts swell."

"I'd never really thought of it like that," says Ali.

While the poachers continue to go about their business, lunch is cooked, served and eaten. There is too much meat, but almost all of it is eaten: Kobus Tjops and

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Herman's combined expertise make it too good to resist. The alcohol is equally over-abundant and the group performs a similar demolition of it. Ali lies on his back on the grass and rubs his stomach. He groans when he hears the first gunshot, but he jumps to his feet when the second shatters the afternoon's laziness properly.

Herman is the first to speak: "What the hell was that?"

"Luger P08 Parabellum," says Alf, "German officers' issue in WWI. These bastards must have stolen it, it's a museum—"

"So, you're sure it was a gun?" asks Ali.

"I spent forty years working with weapons. You know that."

"Ja, sorry," he mumbles, "So what do we do?"

"We phone the police," says Selena.

"But we don't know if anything's happened."

"Two gunshots were fired by suspected poachers."

"This is South Africa...taking pot-shots is standard Sunday afternoon practice."

"Ali," Herman says, "Selena is right and you know it. For all we know someone's been killed."

"For all we know they were just having fun." Ali squeezes his beer can and the thin metal buckles. "We should go down there and find out what happened."

"Don't be absurd, they're armed criminals." Mrs. Mathy gets up and goes inside. She reports the incident to the tired voice on the other end of the line, and its owner promises that her complaint will be attended to. When she rejoins the group on the lawn Alf's binoculars are being passed around.

"It's a seal...I think," says Judah, "They're standing round it in a circle. One of them's pissing on it."

"Who is?" asks Ali.

"I don't know. He's a tall thin guy with an orange cap on sideways."

"Maybe Adam will know who it is."

Adam takes the binoculars, and raises them to his eyes. He puts them down almost immediately. "*Ek ken hom nie.*"

"Just wait a second," says Mrs. Mathy, "Did you say something about a seal?"

"Yes, it looks like they shot a seal and—"

"Now someone is urinating on it." Mrs. Mathy finishes her wine with a large gulp and drops the glass on the lawn. "I can't believe I defended those guys who parked outside our house."

"What are you talking about?" Ali is pouring brandies for himself, Judah and Adam.

"A few months ago my mom was woken by a bunch of guys in the road," Herman says, "I insisted that we phone the police."

"Speak of the devil." A white van drives up to the house. "They're here."

"That was so quick. In Italy you wait for hours."

"Believe me, it's normally the same in South Africa." Alf stands up and walks in the direction of the vehicle. "They must have been driving past." When Selena starts to follow him, he waves her away. "It won't be safe, dear," he says, "And besides, you should keep an eye on your guests...they look like they're about to get out of hand."

Selena laughs and returns to the lawn. Ali has found the bottle of tequila and he and Judah are singing a song which is still popular in Ali's Cackle:

Tequila!

It makes me happy!

Oh come tequila, I'm feeling fine

Come tequila when the doors are open

Come tequila when they call it time

Selena watches as Alf squeezes into the front seat of the police van. He sits between the policemen, hemmed in by their massive shoulders. The van follows the rough jeep-track which leads to the beach where the poachers are gathered.

After ten minutes of impassioned persuasion Ali and Judah succeed in their mission, and the tequila bottle is emptying rapidly.

"The poachers don't even seem to have noticed the cops." Selena turns to Herman, the only other member of the group who is both sober and relaxed. "They're still messing around on the beach."

"They're all drunk...or stoned." Herman reaches towards Selena and finds her outstretched hand. "You joining me for a tequila?"

"I don't think that would be a good idea."

"Why not?"

"Not today...the whole thing with Beppe's birthday."

"It'll take your mind off everything."

"I wouldn't want the others to see me."

"See what?"

"I don't know...I'm not used to drinking a lot."

"It doesn't sound like they'll last much longer, anyway."

"Even your mother has joined them for shots."

"It's a good thing Alf's driving her. She can't handle her booze."

"Alf may have to drive them all."

Herman traces the outline of Selena's left hand with his index finger. Alf stands behind Herman, hoping that Selena will notice him. She doesn't and Alf clears his throat. "I'll be perfectly willing to take them home." Selena sits upright, like a meerkat sentinel. "But they may take some convincing."

"Sorry, Alf," Selena says, "We didn't know you were back."

"What happened with the police?"

"They arrested the guy who shot the seal."

"What? Didn't the poachers fight back?"

"They were all out of it... I think they'd been smoking mandrax."

"How did they know who shot it?"

"It was the same guy we saw pissing on the dead body – he still had the gun in his pocket." Alf leans over and speaks softly to Herman: "Apparently he's Adam's brother."

"Adam who?"

"Judah's Adam."

"God! No wonder he didn't want to say who it was."

"Maybe I should try and get them all home. I think it would be best if you guys moved everything inside and locked the house."

“Too true. Those guys aren’t going to be happy when they sober up and realise what’s happened.”

Alf tries to get everyone’s attention. He claps his hands and shouts over the sound of their revelry. “Guys,” he bellows, “Let’s call it a day. The party’s over.”

“Come off it Alf,” says Mrs. Mathy, “Don’t be such a spoilsport.”

“Ja. Join us for a tequila.”

“You don’t understand. They shot a seal.”

“The cops’ll sort it out,” says Judah, “We’ve got more important things to worry about.”

“Like what?”

Mrs. Mathy grabs the rectangular tequila bottle by its neck and waves it at Alf, shaking what remains in it into a froth. The other drunks cheer her on as they roll on the grass.

Selena has been standing apart from the group, but she realises that her influence is required. On her way to Mrs. Mathy she taps Alf on the shoulder and says, “I’ll sort this out.” She crouches next to Herman’s mother and looks into her eyes as she speaks: “I’ve got a proposal to make.” The other drinkers strain to hear what Selena is saying. “I’ll join you guys for the last round of tequila, if you promise to leave straight after that.”

Mrs. Mathy looks around, silently conferring with her compadres, before saying to Selena: “We’ll accept.”

Ali and Judah make a half-hearted objection, but Selena’s sincerity has dulled the mood. They have graduated beyond tot-glasses, and instead they pass the bottle around.

Selena is the first to drink, and she wretches in mock-charge as she takes the bottle from her lips. The others are far less dramatic in their consumption and when the last – Adam – has drunk, there is still some tequila left in the bottle. They insist that Selena drinks it.

Selena and Alf are both eager to dispatch of the guests and they help them to their feet and lead them to his old red and white VW kombi. The drunks sit on the bench seats behind Alf; the passenger seat remains empty. Before he starts the car he turns and speaks to Adam from over the headrest: “I’ll just take you back to Judah’s house.”

Adam lifts his head from its repository against the window and stares at Alf, wide-eyed. “I don’t live with Judah.”

“I know, it’s just that...” Alf pauses to make sure that he finds the right words, “That there’s been a bit of trouble. I wouldn’t feel safe.”

Judah, who sits next to Adam, silences his employee and explains in a whisper that Alf is right; that he is welcome to spend the night at his house.

Now that this is resolved Alf starts the engine and drives (his kombi just narrow enough for the dirt track) to Clarence Drive and to the left, out of sight.

When they are alone Selena and Herman go to the lawn. They lie outstretched, facing one another. Selena looks into Herman’s eyes. Or at her reflection in his sunglasses. “I love it when you sculpt me.”

“I love sculpting you.”

Selena does not reply. Herman waits for something to happen. She does not even move.

“Selena,” he says, “Are you there?”

No reply.

“Selena.” He prods her. “Wake up.”

She groans.

“You should go to bed.”

“I’m sorry.”

“Don’t be sorry.”

“It must be the tequila.” She sits up and runs her fingers through her hair. “I’m sorry.”

“You’ve had a tough day. Get some sleep.”

Selena goes inside, leaving Herman on the lawn. He lies awake, listening to Selena preparing herself for bed. He hears her showering; brushing her teeth; flushing the loo. He even hears her closing the curtains. A nocturnal mist comes in off the sea. Herman and the lawn are coated in dew. He manages to find his way to his bedroom, where he retrieves his cane. He locks the house and switches off the light. He brushes his teeth but he does not bother to shower. He lies awake for hours before falling asleep.

Tissue Samples

Selena's varsity friend phones on Monday evening.

"I've just watched the weather report," he says.

"What does it say?"

"There's a cold front on its way."

"And?"

"It should hit on Wednesday evening, rain for most of Thursday and clear on Friday."

"Can you make Wednesday?"

"Wednesday's out. But Thursday's perfect."

"Want to come for lunch?"

"Have I ever turned down your cooking?"

"And then we can collect in the evening."

"Wonderful." There is a pause before Prof. Henderson speaks again. "How are you?"

"I'm okay. Betty's has been good for me."

"Your mom said—"

"When did you speak to her?"

"She gave me your number here."

"Of course. What did she say?"

"She said you've had a rough time of it."

“You know how she is...I mean, she’s right, but there comes a time when you’ve just got to get on with it.”

“You’re a strong girl.”

“Wouldn’t have guessed it if you’d seen me a few months ago.”

“You’ve had a lot to deal with.”

“*Now* at least that’s what I’m doing.’

“Is that why you came to Betty’s?”

“More or less.”

“What does that mean?”

“I’ll tell you when you get here.”



Prof. Henderson arrives for lunch in a red vintage MG B sports car, which is spattered with orange mud, and Selena runs out to meet him with an umbrella.

“This is a fancy car.”

“Isn’t it just.” Prof. Henderson takes his bags from the back seat and follows Selena to the front door. “It’s a friend of mine’s.”

“And he just let you use it?”

“He’s away on a conference.” Prof. Henderson is a few years older than Selena and he tweaks the longer strands of his mandatory facial hair when he speaks.

Selena holds the door open for him.

He speaks before he has removed his rain jacket: "Great weather for collection."

"I know, they'll be out in force." Selena takes his jacket and hangs it on a fish-shaped coat hook next to the door. "Come inside, you must meet Herman."

"Who's he?"

"My housemate." She lowers her voice: "He's blind, by the way."

Herman is crouched over the sculpture of Selena's hair, concentrating as he scrapes the rough creases smooth. He stands up at the sound of footsteps, and walks towards the source of noise with the aid of his cane. While they shake hands Herman says, "Professor, did you find us alright?"

"I know the area well."

"It seems winter is upon us."

"Which means that I can get away from my computer screen and actually do some fieldwork."

Selena leaves the men to chat while she prepares lunch. She is making *gnocchi* in a simple sauce of basil and olive oil, followed by *cotolette alla milanese*. She puts the *gnocchi* into a pot of boiling water and waits for them to rise to the surface. It only takes a minute or two, and lunch is served. By the time they have finished the *gnocchi*, the veal is ready to be eaten. The food leaves everyone replete and Herman announces: "I'm going to have a nap."

"Why don't you do the same, Prof?" Selena says.

"Oh, I couldn't. I'll just do some reading."

"I insist. We've got a spare room."

“I don’t like to impose.”

“You’re not imposing,” Herman says, “Let Selena show you to the spare room.”

The Prof. agrees grudgingly, but within minutes his baritone snores are harmonising with Herman’s trebles.

Selena takes the opportunity to read up on *Microbatrachella capensis*, otherwise known as the Cape Micro Frog.

The men wake within minutes of one another, when the clouds are almost black in the low light and the rain is colder than it was when the sun still shone. Prof. Henderson finds Selena at her desk. “We’d better get going.”

She nods. “It’s always good to scope the landscape before it gets dark.”

“If you’re going to the *vleie*,” Herman says to Selena, “You might want to borrow my waders.”

Prof. Henderson answers for her: “We’re actually going to the marshlands around the lakes, but waders will come in handy.”

Once the herpetologists are suitably dressed they leave in Prof. Henderson’s friend’s car. The rain is loud against the soft canvas roof. “How’ve you been?”

“Alright,” Selena says, “Getting better.”

“What a coincidence that you should end up here.”

“It wasn’t entirely by chance,” she pauses, “I remembered what you said about it, so I came and had a look.”

“Sorts out the karma, hey?”

“Slowly.”

“Better than the catwalks of Milan.”

"You can say that again."

Prof. Henderson takes his eyes off the road and stares at Selena. "What brings you here? You were a bit vague on the phone."

"Sorry. Herman was in the room."

"Tell me about him."

"He's just a friend. We've got a lot in common."

"So what couldn't you tell me on the phone."

"That's different."

"Go on..."

"I'm making a film."

"Here?"

"I'm just doing the research."

"What's it about?"

"Environmental exploitation."

"So, you've finally come to your senses." Prof. Henderson laughs. "Doesn't he know?"

"Who?"

"Herman."

"I haven't told a soul."

"Isn't that going to be tricky?"

"Maybe. We'll see."

"What's it about?"

"The whole poaching thing got me started, but I want to do more."

“Like what?”

“You must know about the penguins, the whales, the leopard...”

The professor nods.

“I may even want to do a bit about the frogs.”

“I could help you.”

“I’d like that. Maybe we could even do an interview.”

“On camera?”

“Why not?”

“I think I’ve got more of a radio face.”

“Come off it.” Selena slaps his knee. “You’re perfect.”

“You’re just saying that...”

“Seriously,” she says, “Take a look in the mirror.”

“I try not too.”

Thankfully it is dry when they reach the lakes, and they are able to take their time in selecting the necessary implements of collection from the custom-made compartmentalised boot (the car’s owner is also a herpetologist). They each don a headlamp and the professor wears a many pocketed waistcoat designed for photographers and fishermen, which is laden with bottles and scalpels; preservation solution; a notepad; and a large supply of his favourite Bourneville chocolate. Selena carries the collection net and the pair picks its way through the restios, in search of large puddles. After only a few minutes of walking they hear the low pitched scratching call of the micro-frog. They walk more slowly, and creep towards the courting males.

Their stealth is rewarded by the males' continued calling and Prof. Henderson and Selena try to single out an individual for capture. This is easier said than done, as the Micro Frog attains a maximum length of 1.8cm and its mottled markings vary from green to grey to brown. Males call from floating vegetation, and they are quick to swim away when disturbed. After a few close shaves and muffled expletives from the frustrated collectors Prof. Henderson identifies an unperturbed specimen. He lunges at it with the net, and is successful in catching it. He seals it in a bottle of water, to ensure that it does not dry out, but once he has stashed it in one of his zip up pockets he celebrates by sharing a bar of chocolate with Selena. Their euphoria is short-lived, as they know that they will need at least three tissue samples to perform a reliable DNA analysis.

This time the hunt is resumed by Selena, who has her sights set on a very vocal individual that is perched on a man-sized clump of weeds. It calls from the apex of the floating island and Selena decides that the best mode of attack will be to coax the frog into a wide mouthed jar with her free hand. As she makes the double handed swoop, she loses her footing and tumbles as the frog flees to the safety of water. She connects the large body of flotsam with her right elbow and feels the first trickle of cold water working its way beneath her waders. The weeds do not allow her to sink to the bottom as she had expected they would. Instead they bounce back towards her and her face smacks into the Atlantean mass. She closes her eyes instinctively and turns her head to the side. She rolls over, pushing the dense heap away from her, and lies on her back in the muddy water. When she opens her eyes, she is blinded by the light of the professor's headlamp. Her own light has been rendered useless by the water. She gasps for clean air but coughs immediately: her fall has released a foul, rotting stench.

Prof. Henderson, prompted by the commotion, comes to investigate. "Selena, what's happened?" He scans the water with his headlamp. "Are you—" His light illuminates a clammy moustached face. "What the hell is that?"

"What?" Selena has managed to lift herself to her knees. "Aren't you going to give me a hand up?" Prof. Henderson helps her to her feet, and she shrieks as the water inside her waders works its way down to her feet. "What's wrong?"

Prof. Henderson shines his torch beam on the corpse, which is now suspended just below the surface, and prods it with his foot. It rocks from side to side and its yellowed teeth, framed by purple, puckered lips, glint. Selena yelps uncontrollably and rips at her clothes. "Get him off me," she sobs, "Get him off me."

Prof. Henderson puts his arm around her and speaks: "Calm down, Selena, calm down."

"He's dead," she sobs.

"There's nothing we can do about it, just calm down."

"I was lying on top of him."

"It's horrible it had to happen like that Selena." He pulls her closer to him. "But you couldn't avoid it."

Selena's crying has got the better of her tongue. The professor smooths her hair, and waits until she is ready to speak again. Minutes pass.

"What are we meant to do?"

"We've got to get hold of the police," he pauses, "D'you recognise him?"

"No. I mean...I've only just moved here."

"Where's a phone?"

“We could go back to my house.” Selena bites at her bottom lip.

“Isn’t there anything closer?”

“The pub. I’m sure Ali wouldn’t mind.”

“Perfect. Let’s go.”

“We can’t just leave the body here.”

“He’s not going anywhere... and besides, the police will want everything to be untouched.”

“But...are you sure he’s dead?”

Prof. Henderson presses his heel against a fist sized boil on the corpse’s arm. It bursts, and leaks a viscous stream. “He’s been dead at least a day.”

The rain has begun to fall again, and it is a pleasant cleanser during the walk back to the car. As they rise up to road level from the *sloot*, Selena says, “Why do you know so much about dead people?”

“I grew up next to a mortuary.” Prof. Henderson opens the passenger door for Selena. “And both of my parents worked.” The professor gets into his seat and the engine starts with a hoarse-throated cough. “The morticians taught me all I know about preserving specimens.”

Interesting though the conversation may be, neither party wishes to continue it and Selena directs Prof. Henderson to Ali’s Cackle with a series of nudges and grunts. They park in the shadow of the giant *alikeukel*’s shell.

“You should have told me he worked here. Everyone knows this place.”

Ali and Judah are the only people in the pub, but they do not notice the newcomers. Judah is speaking: “Seriously, the climate’s changing...”

He is interrupted by Selena clearing her throat: a noise which is intended to be guttural comes out squeaky. "Ali, your phone..." Selena says, "Can we use it? It's important."

Ali waves his hand in the direction of the phone, while Prof. Henderson clarifies the situation. "We found a body. Near the lake."

"What were you doing there on a night like this?" Ali fidgets, trying to remove the plastic lining from a bottle top.

"Collecting specimens. Frogs are very active in wet weather."

Selena realises that although she is holding the phone, she has not used it yet.

"Where's the number?"

"Whose number?"

"The police!"

"In the small yellow book on the bar."

Selena finds the number and holds the phone to her ear. No one answers. Selena wipes the hair-damp earpiece dry and returns the handset to its mooring. "No reply."

"Did you say you just found a dead body?" asks Judah.

"Yes."

"Human?"

Selena nods.

"Who?"

"How would we know?" Prof. Henderson is one of those people who you want to have around during an emergency. "Maybe you guys should come along with us now, and we can call the police again from the scene, if anyone—"

“Let’s go,” says Judah, “I’ve got a phone.”

“I can’t leave the bar unattended.”

“There’s a corpse in the *vlei*. And it’s not as if your bar is happening, anyway.”

Ali concedes this point and the *bakkie* and the sports car drive in funereal convoy.

Returning to the exact parking spot is made easier by the fact that Selena dropped the white collection net on the side of the road. Judah parks behind Prof. Henderson’s car, and the group assembles in sodden dejection. The professor leads the way as he is the only one in possession of a functional headlamp. By the time they reach the collection site he is also the only dry member of the party, as both Ali and Judah are saturated by the rain which hangs on branches and restios. The group’s approach has not been stealthy and the previously vocal frogs have taken submarine refuge. The silence is appropriate, and Judah clenches his teeth to avoid the embarrassment of them chattering. The body lies where they left it, suspended in the knee-deep brackish water. This time around, the herpetologists are able to process the details: he is in his forties, overweight and very hairy. He wears no shirt and there are three round, bloody wounds in his chest. His blue trousers cut into his bloated waistline. The ends of black canvas boots form twin islands in the pond. Judah forces his way between Selena and Prof. Henderson, and kneels next to the dead man’s head. “It’s Wilhelm.” He turns to Ali, who is standing behind the others.

“It can’t be,” Ali stumbles on his words, “I saw him yesterday.”

“Come have a look.”

As Ali wades through the cold water his jeans cling to his calves. When he joins Judah next to the body his frame obstructs the headlamp’s beam. “Just shift over a bit.”

Prof. Henderson moves until he is standing up against the corpse's feet. He shines the lamp down its length. "You're right." Ali pinches his chin between index finger and thumb. "It is Wilhelm."

"He a friend of yours?" asks Selena.

"Yes," says Judah, "He's one of the town's policemen."

"The poachers...is he one of the guys who came yesterday? I didn't get a good look at them."

"Him and Koos."

"I feel terrible, I mean it's all my fault," Selena says, almost in one breath.

"Selena, I have no idea what you're on about but I'm sure his death is nothing to do with you."

"You don't understand." Selena clenches her hands together, and her knuckles are as white as those of the dead man. "We had problems with the poachers yesterday, and I insisted that we call the police."

"You did the right thing," he pauses, "Isn't that what the police are for?" Selena doesn't answer his question, and her silence allows him to continue. "In fact, we'd better call them right now."

"There's only one policeman left," says Judah.

"Then we'll have to call him, won't we?"

Judah uses the cell-phone, which his brother gave him for Christmas, to phone the police station. There is no reply, so he tries Koos at home. Luanne, Koos' wife, answers the phone and explains that her husband is working.

"Is there any way I can get hold of him? It's very urgent."

“He’s with the search party,” she pauses, “For Wilhelm.”

“Luanne, where’s Hannelie?”

“She’s here. With me.”

“I don’t know how to say this but–”

“Not Wilhelm?”

“We’ve found him, near the *vleie*.”

“I can’t tell her.”

“You’re her best friend,” Judah says, “She’d do the same for you.”

“She’s calling me now. I’ve got to go.”

“I need to get hold of Koos.”

“0623217479, that’s his cell number, 0623217479.”

Judah ends the call and, in adrenaline induced gibberish, repeats the number over and over. After half a minute of these high speed emissions, Prof. Henderson provides a welcome return to sanity: “Judah, is that Koos’ number?” Judah is able to control himself enough to nod in agreement. Prof. Henderson snatches the phone from Judah’s trembling hand, and dials the number which is on everyone’s lips.

A gruff voice answers: “Strijdom.”

“Koos, um, officer, we’ve found Wilhelm.”

“Who are you?”

“I’m here with Ali and Judah. Wilhelm is dead.”

“Where?”

“Near Grootwitvlei. You’ll see our cars – a *bakkie* and an MG – they’re on...”

Prof. Henderson turns to Judah and gesticulates a question. “Clivea Road.” The professor

removes the phone from his ear and hands it back to its owner. "They'll be here in ten minutes. They were searching for him at the Palmiet River Estuary."

"There's no point in hanging around here then," says Ali, "We can wait in our cars."

The police take closer to twenty minutes to arrive, and Judah leads them to the body. Once the site has been scanned for evidence, the dead man is lifted onto a stretcher and borne to the road. Judah cannot help but notice the deep ragged welts on his back, which form a deranged spiderweb of torment. When the body is secured on the stretcher, the bier-carriers depart. The yellow reflector-strips on their jackets do not get a chance to shine because there is no light here. Koos hangs back from the group. Judah follows suit, in silent acceptance of Koos' unsaid request: South African men are not good at emotion and policemen are amongst the worst. It's up to Judah to initiate the conversation: "I'm so sorry, Koos."

"He dropped me off at home after we took that guy back to the cells." Koos swallows a tear. "He never got home."

"But you live in the same road."

"I know. I should have saved him."

"He was as good as home."

"I'm a policeman." He swallows again. "It's my job to be alert."

"It's not your fault." Judah presses his feet into the muddy pond-bed. "We've got to stop this from happening again."

"Bloody poachers came and fucked this town up."

"They haven't managed yet." Judah stands on tip-toes and tries to lay his arm

across Koos' shoulders: his outstretched fingers barely reach the policeman's neck, but he leads the larger man to the car nonetheless.

The group disperses, and the vehicles head their separate ways: the MG abandons the micro-frogs and takes its passengers home; Judah's *bakkie* is drawn to the pub; and the police van takes the body to Hermanus Hospital before returning to Kleinmond.

On Tuesday, when the story breaks, not much else is happening in the world. A petrol price increase of seventeen cents is announced and Malawi prepares to induct a new president. The killing of Wilhelm is the main item on the front page of both the *Cape Times* and the *Cape Argus*. The incident arouses real interest as opposed to the voyeuristic curiosity which Alf's telephoto shots garnered. Wilhelm's murder also makes national news: it can be found on the second page of *The Star* and the fifth of *Die Beeld*. It even manages to slip into the SABC television news, before the first ad-break.

A few hours after the news broadcast, Selena rests her head on Herman's lap and they sit in silence. It is easier to say nothing and they doze. The phone rings – an outdated, piping analogue chime – and Selena rushes to answer it. A female voice announces that it would like to speak to Herman. Selena calls him to the phone.

"What the hell is happening to your little dump?" The voice is agitated, perhaps even offended.

Only Chantelle could start a conversation like this, but Herman never ceases to be startled at her abruptness. "I'm fine, how are you?"

"Same old, same old. You haven't answered my question."

"The poachers killed one of our policemen."

"I know, but what's going on? You're on the front page of the paper."

"You don't read the paper."

"I'm doing the crossword as we speak."

“Where are you?”

“Elfo’s,” Chantelle’s voice shifts from being bored: “Who’s that chick next to you?”

“Where?”

“In the paper, you toss...she’s hot.”

“That’s Selena.”

“She your chick?”

“My housemate.”

“What?”

“I’ve moved in with her.”

“Why?”

“She was scared.”

“So?”

“She’s a friend of mine.”

“You never tell me anything.”

“You never call me.”

“I came and visited you in Worcester.”

“Yes, once...on Christmas day.”

“But *you* could call *me*.”

“You must come visit.”

“I bloody well should. It’s not every day you manage to hook a chick.”

Herman blushes. “Seriously. It’s not like that.”

“I am being serious. This is a bloody special occasion.”

“When can you come?”

“You know how it is. I’m busy. It’ll only be for a day or two.”

“You don’t have to stay with mom. We’ve got a place for you.”

“Thanks for telling me.”

“You never call me.”

“We’ve been through this before. Is there space for two?”

“Bringing Jason?”

“No, Terrence.”

“Who’s he?”

“You know...”

“Ja, sorry, stupid question.”

“So, can we come?”

“This week’s a bit frantic. Why don’t you come next week?”

They agree that Chantelle and Terrence will come for a few days the following Friday. Chantelle doesn’t even bother to say goodbye. As Herman puts the handset down he senses Selena’s presence behind him.

“Who was that?”

“My sister.”

“I thought it was an ex-girlfriend.”

“Nope. Just my sister.”

“You’ve never told me anything about her.”

“She’s coming next week.”

“Will I like her?”

"Dunno. You'll either love her or hate her."

"Why d'you say that?"

"She's very," Herman purses his lips and continues, "Independent."

"Independent's good."

"Sometimes. She can rub people up the wrong way."

"And you?"

"What?"

"Do you like her?"

"It's been complicated...since my folks got divorced."

"It always is."

"I guess...but Chantelle has acted really weird. She never visits us."

"Then it's great that she's coming."

"Are you sure it's alright with you?"

"Are you joking? She's your sister."

"Thanks. I really want you to meet her."

Selena and Herman have never spoken about their families and they relapse into silence. They return to the sofa, and Selena falls asleep before Herman, who finds it hard to sleep when she is nearby.



The following day, something more important than Wilhelm's murder happens in the world – a coup, or a stock-market crash, perhaps even an earthquake. Whatever it is, it is big enough to remove the murder from all but the regional newspapers and even in these it becomes an item of minor interest. What had been prematurely dubbed 'The Perlemoen Murder' will not achieve national notoriety and Wilhelm's death, like so many in South Africa, will soon be forgotten. The general public does not have the time or the inclination to remember them all.

It will not be as easily discarded by the people of Betty's Bay and Kleinmond; Pringle Bay and Rooi Els, and the community is thrust into a tornado of frantic gossip and widespread hatred.

The telephone rings and Selena answers it. It is Rupert, her boss. "What the hell is this?"

"What?"

"The paper. Your photo's on the front page of *The Star*, the *Cape Times*, *Business Day*...you name it."

"I didn't choose to find a dead body."

"I know, but you can't let this compromise your journalistic autonomy."

"What are you saying?"

"You know exactly what I'm saying."

"I think I do...but I don't want to hear it."

"You're a professional, Selena."

"Why do you sound like such a ponce when you're angry?"

"Wha--"

“Journalistic autonomy. You’re pathetic.”

“Okay, Selena, I’m sorry. Just don’t do anything stupid.”

“I won’t.”

“Promise?”

“Yes, I promise,” she shouts in a whisper, “I have to go now.”

Selena goes downstairs. Herman lifts his head from the sculpture of Selena’s torso which he is re-perfecting, obsessing over non-existent irregularities. “Who was that?” he says.

“My dad,” Selena says, “He’s worried about me.”

“He didn’t seem to show it.”

“No. He’s a strange man.”

“I’m going for a walk.”

Herman makes his way down to the water’s edge, taking care to avoid the anthills which dot the path. He takes his shoes off and sits with his feet in the seaweed-thick water. He always goes to the sea for reassurance. Even when he spent a year in Worcester, at the rehabilitation centre for the blind, he was able to cover the distance between himself and the sea. He remembered the flat blue sea; the frothy, fever-green sea; the warm puddles which form in the depressions at low tide; the turbid Guinness sea when the rivers have broken their banks; and he even remembered days such as this when the sea is listless and thicker than *minestrone*.

When he first got to Worcester, he came as close as he’s ever been to letting his blindness get the better of him. The gardeners sold alcohol to the patients, and Herman bought Autumn Harvest from them and hid the bell-shaped 1.5 litre bottles under his bed.

He relished the acrid sweetness as it bored down his throat and fizzed in his stomach. He drank it warm. It felt appropriate that the whole experience was so vile. He didn't think of it as a penance, because even in his state he was able to realise that he wasn't to blame for his blindness. Instead he justified his drinking with something akin to logic. He felt he owed it to his eyes to destroy his other senses. Not only his taste buds, but also his sense of smell and, later, with the hangover, his hearing and – sometimes – even his ability to feel.

He just liked getting pissed on his own. They caught him and made sure he couldn't get hold of booze. "It's a standard response to trauma," they told him. They counselled him and made him realise that he had to find a way to accept his blindness. They urged him to think of something which comforted him. That's when he realised that he'd had it all along. The memory of the sea provided a smidgen of light which made the darkness bearable.

He can't blame the sea for having such an ugly face today.

The tide is coming in and Herman's jeans are wetted by an advancing surge. He retreats, dragging his bum on the moist sand. He crosses his legs and dries his feet on his inner thigh. He puts his socks and shoes on and walks back to the house. Before he has had a chance to unlock the door Selena opens it from the inside.

"You were gone a long time."

"I lost track of..."

"Almost four hours."

"I needed to think."

"Herman," she pauses, "That was the second time I've seen a dead man."

"I've driven past car accidents...but it's not the same."

"No."

"There wasn't much left of Giuseppe. I only knew it was him because I was in the car."

Herman says nothing.

"It all kind of hit home when I saw Wilhelm."

"It must have been hard."

"Still is."

"Shall we sit down?"

Selena takes Herman's hand and they walk to the sitting room. They both manage to fit in a single armchair. Selena does not let go of Herman's hand and she holds it in her lap.

"They were both killed."

"By bastards," says Herman.

"Both killed by thugs."

"Thugs they were trying to fight."

"Last time I ran away."

"You didn't..."

"I ran all the way to South Africa."

"Your husband was killed...you came home."

"I know."

"You did the right thing."

"I'm not going to run this time."

“What can you do?”

“We can fight them.”

“We already are.”

“Not really. Not as hard as we can.”

Herman nods. “I guess.”

“It’s not just because of the murder.” Selena is still infuriated by Rupert’s call.

She can’t believe he could be so insensitive. After all she’s been through he has the nerve to reprimand her, two days after she finds a dead body: the second she’s had to deal with in as many years. But she’s not going to let it get her down. No, she’s going to show him what she’s made of. He can take his journalistic autonomy and shove it. She knows she has to help the community. And if Rupert knows which side his bread is buttered on he’ll let her do what she pleases.

“The murder makes it easier,” Herman says.

“What do you mean?”

“It gives us a cause.”

“In Italy there are hunters who shoot anything that flies.”

“Surely there are laws...”

“There are. But no one obeys them.”

“Like the perlemoen.”

“Now with the murder...”

“It’s not only an environmental issue,” Herman completes her sentence.

“People will care more.”

“If the poachers carry on they’ll destroy us.”

“I won’t let it happen.”

“How?”

“I’ll call a meeting.”

“The community’s ready,” Herman says, “It’ll be like riding on the crest of a wave.”

“Will you help me?”

“I’ll support you. But I’m not cut out for the spotlight.”

“I can’t do it alone.”

“Why not?”

“I need a foot in the door. Some local support.”

“Alf’s your man. Speak to him.”



Wilhelm’s funeral, which takes place on Sunday due to the delays caused by the police investigation, raises the Dutch Reformed Church in Kleinmond from the shadow of its more striking neighbour, the municipal library – which is a grotesque mix of pebble dash walls and large dark-framed rhomboid windows – and establishes it as the location of resistance. After the polished chestnut coffin has been lowered into the ground in the cemetery on the outskirts of town, Selena and Alf return to the church and set up a trestle table in the parking lot. They disguise the table’s rugged construction with an ankle-length black cloth. They decorate it with perlemoen shells and bits and pieces of diving

equipment. Three hand painted placards adorn the table's front. They read: UNITE AGAINST THE POACHERS; SAVE THE PERLEMOEN and STOP SENSELESS MURDER!

In most situations the pair would be looked upon as crackpot greeny-weenies, but the social climate is right and Selena's appearance lends to their marketability. The locals, particularly the men who feel uncomfortable in the acknowledgement of death, see the pair's anger as a viable investment and they are soon surrounded by a throng of interested parties, sporting oversized carnations in their lapels. Selena and Alf pass clipboards amongst the group and ask them to record their names and telephone numbers. Many people linger around the table well after they have given their names, and Selena gives an impromptu speech to these stragglers: "We will be organising a volunteer based anti-poaching group," she says, "That will seek to increase awareness of the problem. It will also actively combat the poachers through the introduction of coastal patrols."

Alf picks up where she leaves off: "Not only is the poaching destroying the fragile balance of our marine ecosystem," he shouts, "But it is also undermining the delicate fabric of our community." He wipes his forehead with a faded red handkerchief. "Do you want your children being exposed to these gangsters? Do you want your grandchildren to have to read about perlemoen in the history books?"

It is almost dark by the time they are able to leave, and although Selena has spent the afternoon repeating herself, she is energised by the community's response.

Herman has been at her side all afternoon, and he is proud of her performance. He can't believe he is so tolerant – no, it's more than that; more than tolerance – of someone who so enjoys being the centre of attention. He doesn't want to have to resort to the old

cliché that opposites attract, but he hasn't yet had enough time to come up with an alternative explanation when Selena says, "Are you sure Ali won't mind if we meet at his pub?"

"Of course he won't." Herman shakes his head in what is literally an attempt to clear his thoughts. "Think of all the money it'll bring in."

"Looks like there're going to be hundreds of people."

"Then you can just move the meeting to the beach."

"I don't know how I'm going to do my research now I've got involved in all of this."

"You've never explained to me what you're researching."

"It wouldn't interest you."

"How do you know?"

"Believe me."

"I don't know...but what I do know is that I'm never going to get any time to sculpt you."

Selena giggles.

"You little go-getter."

"Don't worry." Selena shifts her left hand from the gear knob and rubs Herman on the thigh. "I've already pencilled you in."

"That sounds a bit vague."

"It's not up to me to set things in stone." Selena pauses to make sure her next line comes out right. "That's your job."

Herman has no riposte for this and silence returns to the vehicle. They drive over the bridge which crosses the Palmiet River and Selena shrieks as she sees a shirtless teenaged boy leap from the rail.

“What’s wrong?” Herman asks.

“Someone jumped off the bridge.”

Herman does not respond.

“Will he be okay?”

“If he jumped from the right place he’ll be fine. I used to do it all the time.”

“And if he jumped from the wrong place?”

“Then he’s in trouble. There are rocks to the right of the channel.”

This time the silence which grips the air is more permanent. There is a lot to think about and it is only when the car comes to a halt outside their house that Selena speaks:

“The poachers are at it again.”

“Knew everyone would be at the funeral.”

“At least they’re wearing black.” The poachers’ wetsuits allow them to blend into the kelp beds, as seals do.



The cold front puts paid to the poachers’ activities, and it is only on Wednesday that the weather clears and they are able to return to the water. This is the same day that the meeting in Ali’s Cackle takes place. Although it is only scheduled to begin at six,

people start to arrive an hour earlier: pensioners are impatient for any sort of activity, and others head straight to the pub from work. By five-thirty the large room has warmed and the portholes are steamed up against the cold outside air. Garibaldi could not have assembled a more diverse assortment of people: blue-rinse grannies in ermine coats sit next to brandy-drinking farmers with revolvers bulging from hip-holsters; a dreadlocked ex-longboard champion rolls a cigarette for the president of the Kleinmond Croquet club. Fifteen minutes before the meeting is due to start, the pub is full to bursting and the bar-stock has been heavily depleted: Hansa and Castle are the only beers left and Ali, who sweats rivers as he struggles to serve everyone on his own, has had to fetch an extra case of Klipdrift from the storeroom. In an attempt to gain everyone's attention, Selena rings the bell which is normally used to announce the last round. She is successful with the third toll, and she stands on the strut of a barstool and announces from her slightly raised perch: "Due to the great turnout, the meeting will take place outside, on the beach."

A rough Afrikaans attempt at a statesmanlike British accent interrupts Selena: "We will fight them on the beaches!" This comment is greeted with boisterous revolutionary approval: shouting, whistling, and table-banging indicate the group's eagerness.

"What are we waiting for?" shouts a bearded man in blue overalls, as he heads for the door. About half of the group follows him and makes for the path which leads to the beach, but the remainder of the assembly gathers around the bar as its number orders, "One for the road." Ali struggles to keep up with their demands, but eventually everyone is gathered on the wide low-tide beach in the moonless dusk. Those with drinks clasp them close to their chests in both hands, while those without shove their hands deep into

their pockets. Some of the women, who have neither pockets nor drinks cross their arms and trap their hands in their armpits. Herman and Ali are the last to arrive, and they stand at the back of the crowd.

It is almost too dark to see, and the sound of outboard motors being started brings silence to the congregation. The white wakes of the poachers' boats head out of the bay and towards Kleinmond. Selena takes advantage of this lull and speaks: "As you can see..." She motions to the activities behind her. "The poachers have taken this all too far and although it is possible to say that it's up to government and the police to sort the problem out, by the time that happens there'll be no perlemoen left and more blood will have been shed."

Selena knows how to appeal to emotions, and her last sentence is greeted with loud agreement, which is contradicted by a lone voice: "But government is doing something about it. Haven't you noticed all the roadblocks and helicopter swoops?"

"I know," Selena replies, "I know. I've lived in Italy and they have similar problems there... I'm sure you have all heard about the *mafia*... and the government is never able to solve them. For every good policeman or judge, there are ten who are corruptible. The poachers have money, the soldiers and policemen don't."

"But we don't have any money!" It is the same voice, again.

"Hear! Hear!"

Is the tide changing? Selena, named after the moon, pushes it back. "Of course you don't, but you live here. You have always lived here. You love this place. The land. The sea. You will fight for love not money." The tide is not changing, it surges behind Selena. "Think of the Vietcong, who held out against the Americans for so long."

“Think of the Boers, in our very own country,” adds Alf.

Both Selena and Alf know that this is of little relevance, but they also know that it is working. The throng of people heaves forward, hurling abuse at the distant whine of outboard motors. Now that she has them where she wants them, Selena broaches the technicalities of the matter. “It’s wonderful to see you’re all so enthusiastic, but there’s lots of work to be done. I’m sure you’ll all agree that the most obvious way to stop the poaching is by force. But, before any of you...” She looks towards a group of men (probably retired farmers) in long socks and *veldskoene*. “Get any ideas about being heroes, I want to point out that the poachers are armed and experienced. We are not a vigilante group, so, although we will patrol the coastline – in groups large enough to be safe – we will always rely on the laws of this country to bring the criminals to justice.”

“I thought you said the government is corrupt.”

“That may be so.” Alf has moved next to Selena and he fields this question. “But two wrongs don’t make a right.”

“Exactly,” Selena continues, “And if we all band together as a community, if all of our eyes combine to observe and enquire, we will be able to create a net which is so far-reaching that the corrupt officials themselves will be found out.”

“Bravo!” the Afrikaner masquerading as a member of the peerage has everyone laughing again.

Selena puts her index finger to her lips and speaks: “And that is our most powerful asset: the fact that we are all so different. A farmer with a shotgun can be just as effective as an old lady with a pair of binoculars or a bookworm brandishing nothing

more than a pen.” Selena scans the assembled faces. “Would anyone like to volunteer their services?”

A gaunt blonde-bearded man of about thirty shuffles forward. “I would like to start a prayer group.” He spreads his arms out wide. “The Lord Jesus will surely deliver us from this evil.”

“That’s just what I’m talking about,” says Selena, “We must all focus on what we’re good at. Maybe the members of the prayer group would like to go to the local schools and teach the pupils all about poaching?”

The prayer group has already taken shape, and its leader responds: “We’d love to do that.”

“Come on Alf, why don’t you just nuke them?” The toff-impersonator has had one too many. The raucous response to this comment suggests that quite a few of the other men have also over-indulged.

“We all know that that is not the way to go about it,” Alf shouts over the rabble, “We don’t want to stoop to their levels.”

“Fair point! Fair point! But it would be jolly good fun!”

“I think we need a name for our group,” says Yvette, the letting agent.

“Yes! An identity which bonds us together.”

“How about The Anti Perlemoen Poaching Organisation?”

“TAPPO?”

“Sounds like the name of a clown.”

“Then, um, People Against–”

“Gangsterism and Drugs?” This suggestion is greeted with widespread laughter.

“No, seriously, People Against Perlemoen Poaching.”

“Or...Residents Against Perlemoen Poaching.”

“Yes, that’s it. Those poachers can face the RAPP.” Alf has found another audience which approves of his particular brand of humour, and they settle upon the name.

The meeting continues in such stop-start fashion. The boisterous Afrikaner makes a serious suggestion: “I understand,” he says to Selena and Alf, “That you may think I’m too much of a *grootbek* for the job, but I would like to assemble a group of men who are willing to become volunteer Sea Fisheries Inspectors.”

Selena fidgets with the hair band which is on her wrist.

“Why do you say that, Hendrik?” asks Alf. “We don’t have any rules against a sense of humour.”

Hendrik smiles. “There’s a course we’ll have to do, but we can start patrolling immediately.”

“Just remember,” Selena says, “We’re not giving you official travel vouchers to take an ego trip.” Selena has heard this phrase before. “Our only objective is justice.”

Hendrik nods. “You don’t know me. I’m all bark and no bite.”

Everyone, including Selena, laughs.

The patrol group – just like the prayer group before it – forms naturally, and Hendrik is surrounded by nine men. They move away from the hub of the meeting and organise their first outing.

While this is happening a female voice emanates from the centre of the crowd: “We’ll have to have a fête to raise funds.” The people surrounding the speaker disperse,

to reveal Antjie Visagie, a midget divorcee who makes up for her size with her attitude.

“We can make jams and cakes and...”

“Elmarie makes some really pretty stuff with shells,” says Hendrik from the fringes.

“Perfect,” says Selena, “We could have a raffle too.”

“Irie,” says Alexis, the ex-longboard champion, “I’m not really into confrontation, which is why I’ve been so quiet.” He rearranges his dreadlocks in his beanie. “But I could make some beaded badges for everyone.”

“Isn’t this amazing?” Selena turns to Alf. “Out of diversity comes strength.” Selena has memorised thousands of similar clichés, from years of working with Rupert.

“Alf...” a weak, wavering voice emerges from the back of the crowd.

Alf stands on tiptoes and cranes his neck to see who is speaking. “Rudy! Haven’t seen you in ages. How’s the writing?”

“Painful. I’ve hardly left my house for two years and I’ve still got nothing to show for it.”

“Maybe you need a change of scenery.”

“That’s what I was thinking, um, no actually...”

“Carry on...”

“No. It’s stupid.”

“Come on. We’re all friends.”

“I was wondering whether there might be any use for a newspaper.”

“Of course,” Selena says, “We all know the pen is mightier than the sword.”

“Not my pen,” Rudy mumbles, “But I’ll give it a bash.”

“You could call it *The Perlie’s Moan*,” says Alf.

By nine o’clock, everyone has had their say and the meeting is adjourned. They walk, in single file, back to the parking lot outside Ali’s Cackle, and either drive home or go back to the pub for another beer.

Herman walks arm in arm with Selena, and when he feels the beach sand replaced by gravel underfoot, he speaks: “Shall we stay for a drink?”

“If I’m not mistaken, I’d scheduled to pose for a certain sculptor tonight.”

Herman imagines, correctly, Selena pouting her lips. “Let’s go then.”

“Just one thing...what was that about Alf nuking the poachers?”

“Oh, that.” Herman laughs. “He used to work at Somchem.”

“Which is?”

“Was...a nuclear weapons plant near Pringle Bay.”

“Was?”

“The government closed it down years ago.”

“What did Alf do?”

“He was in charge of it.”

“No wonder he’s so clever.” This answers one question but poses another.

“Why’s he so...such a tree-hugger these days?”

“I don’t think he’s ever forgiven himself.”



When they get home it is Herman's turn to shine. Selena's busyness over the past few weeks has given him the time to polish and perfect all of his half-finished projects. They are laid out on the floor and Selena, the complete article, lies next to them. The earlier fragments – her hand, elbow, torso and hair – are joined by new recruitments: a brittle balsa-veined ear; a diagonal swathe from breast to coccyx; and a mahogany navel. Selena has seen each item individually, but this is her first chance to appreciate the entire menagerie. Herman is more than a mirror; more than a mountain pond's reflection. Herman sees, creates, her as perfect.

He sits in the box armchair behind her. "What shall we sculpt tonight?"

Selena is in no doubt. She stands and places her naked left foot on the arm of the chair. She takes Herman by the hair and eases his face towards her foot. When his nose makes contact with her toes, his hands rush to join in. Selena closes her eyes and allows herself to be sublimated by his attentions. She has always adored her feet, so small and so pink. She loves to bunch her toes and pirouette; to pretend she's five and she needs something from her father. She asks for favours with her left foot, achieves balance with her right. She still buys children's sizes. Her feet will never grow up. Herman explores her foot with his fingers. He memorises its bumps and creases; crevices and slopes. The awkward pose does not tire Selena and she holds it for as long as Herman needs.

Eventually he announces: "Get me my tools, and some stone."

"You must choose the stone."

"No. You must."

"I don't know what to look for."

"You'll know."

Selena goes to his workbench – why does he call it that? He always ends up working on the floor – and gathers the tools that she knows he will need. The apple-crates of stone leer at her. She does not know where to start as she gropes her way through the hunks of grey and black. She shuts her eyes and feels the grain and the sinew of each piece. Her hands settle on one right at the top of the crate. It doesn't shine at her like a thumb-sized nugget in a prospector's pan, but she thinks she has found the piece. She takes it to Herman.

He holds it and inhales its powder. "I told you you'd know."

They say no more and Herman gets to work. Herman has never been in love before but he starts to think that this must be what it's all about: the silence of the night broken only by the sound of steel on stone and wave on shore. Two people who do not need to speak to be happy. They say that is what love is. He tries, as an experiment, to purge the memory of Selena's foot, but still his hands move. He is a conduit for the stone's reformation. He is powerless to resist.

Selena never shifts her gaze. She watches as the stone becomes her foot: a physical and emotional replica. Herman sculpts a foot that could only be hers. Bunched asparagus toes; archless sole; creased heel; voice of a pleading child. He understands the personality of her beauty, could converse with every part of her body. No one can feign this.

The last words they exchanged.

"I don't know what to look for."

"You'll know."

A blindfolded search.

“I told you you’d know.”

They know. Time sinks to the bottom of a swimming pool and they too are submerged. It must be late when Selena says, “Let’s go to bed.”

Herman nods.

“I’m exhausted.”

“Me too.”

“Thank you.”

“For what?”

“Sculpting me.”

“Thank you.”

“I did nothing.”

“You did nothing very well.”

Selena almost laughs. “It’s ridiculous.”

“What is?”

“The way you make me feel.”

Herman is silent.

“All you’re doing is sculpting me...but it feels like so much more.”

“It’s weird for me too. I’ve been sculpting for a long time, but I’ve never...”

“Sshh.” Selena takes Herman’s hand. “Will you sleep in my bed tonight?”

Herman nods.

“Just lie next to me.”

“I’d love that.”

When Herman has finished brushing his teeth and washing his face he goes upstairs and gets into her bed. He lies there listening to the sound of Selena brushing her teeth. She gets into bed and lies with her head on his chest. She falls asleep quickly. She grunts and snores, softly. Her mouth leaves slug-trails on his chest. He doesn't mind.

Herman lies awake with his arms at his sides. His right shoulder is becoming numb but he remains still. Hours pass. Selena draws closer to him. Outside there is no wind, and he can hear waves breaking against the shore. They seem to punctuate Selena's breathing. In the moments before he goes to sleep – those instantaneous moments of lucidity which are forgotten before they have been understood – Herman admits to himself what everyone else has known for a while. He wants more than this.

When Herman wakes the curtains are open and the sun gushes into the room. In a previous life he must have been a puff-adder or a leguan and he stretches his body to its full, increasing his surface area. Selena's side of the bed is empty. He gets out of bed and finds his cane. He shivers in his grey and white boxer shorts, but he does not get dressed. He goes downstairs and calls her name.

No answer.

He goes outside, onto the lawn and calls her again.

Seconds pass and then she speaks: "I'm here."

"Where?"

"On the grass."

"What are you doing?"

"Sitting." Selena's voice seems capricious to Herman. "Admiring your work."

"Aren't you cold?"

“No.”

Herman goes inside to dress, and Selena is left surrounded by her fragmented self. She has taken all of the sculptures onto the lawn. They surround her, just as the bushes do, forming a second ring of protection. They glisten in the sun.

Hidden Depths

Selena organises nightly patrols even before the men have begun their Fisheries Inspector's courses. The first patrol is scheduled for Thursday evening and the full quota of ten is assembled well before eight-thirty. Every man has eaten an early supper and they huddle in the Main Beach parking lot, passing a bottle of Old Brown Sherry between them. When Selena arrives, Hendrik offers her the bottle. "Sorry, but we don't have any glasses."

She waves the bottle away. "You guys need it more than I do. It's going to be chilly."

"You telling me." Hendrik laughs. "So what are our orders, madam?"

"I don't want to give you guys a lecture," she says, "You're all grown men, but I just want to urge you not to take the law into your own hands. RAPP might have a bright future, but if you guys get all gung-ho on me it'll never get off the ground."

"You can trust us."

"I know I can." Selena gets into her car and starts the engine. She rolls down the window and shouts, "Just give me a call if anything big happens." She drives away in a lazy loop which almost spills out onto the grass next to the parking lot and her taillights disappear around the first bend of Access Road.

"She's a good chick."

"Always in control."

"But not too bossy. I can't handle bossy chicks."

The sherry is soon finished, but fortunately Hendrik has been thoughtful enough to bring a bottle of rum as well.

“That’s more like it.” An unusually small but overenthusiastic member of the group wipes the residual liquor from his moustache.

“Ja,” says a man in a yellow windcheater as he puts the bottle to his lips, “It’s bloody freezing.”

“What are we waiting for,” Hendrik says, “Let’s *sluk* while we *soek*.”

The group responds to Hendrik’s bravado and they follow him to the beach. They carry lamps and torches. Foot-long Maglites; feeble plastic pocket torches; and a hissing kerosene lamp cast light on a wavering patch of beach. They walk towards Dawidskraal, passing the bottle of rum between them. The tide is coming in and the group continually changes its trajectory for fear of wet shoes. As they near Dawidskraal the men become aware of activity in the *melkhout* forests. The forests are dank enough in the daytime, but on a moonless night their absolute blackness only makes the smell of urine more noticeable. The poachers perform their toilet in the windsculpted hollows between trees.

The patrol members, big men more at home on a rugby field than a dance-floor, are scared. A whispered conference begins. The now empty rum bottle lies on the beach, enclosed in this human laager, and the men kick it amongst them.

“Let’s go in there and *moer* them!”

“Are you crazy?” Hendrik says, “We don’t know what we’re up against.”

“Why don’t we just stake them out?”

“Ja, it’s not as if we’re unarmed.”

“What?”

“You heard what Selena said: ‘No guns! No cowboys!’”

“Ag, you can’t be serious. I brought my revolver just in case.”

“Me too. You can never be too careful.”

“Exactly. I borrowed Letty’s little pistol. Thought it would be more discreet than my shotgun.”

A few of the men laugh.

“So...you three have guns.” Hendrik stares at the men, who happen to be standing next to one another. “Is everyone else unarmed?” The other six men nod and grunt in the affirmative. “We could wait and make sure that these guys don’t get up to any mischief.” Before anyone has a chance to voice his approval Hendrik continues, “But I don’t want any of you doing anything stupid.” He stares at his men until the three gun-toters walk away sheepishly. At this cue the group disperses but soon reassembles. The men, the strong arm of RAPP, stare pointedly at the pungent darkness.

“You know what they say...” says Hendrik.

“Who?”

“The experts.”

“What do the experts say?”

“War is ninety-nine percent boredom.”

They wait for the poachers to make the first move, but are only rewarded with a change in the wind direction. The acrid smell of piss is thick. Those who are fortunate enough to be bearded twiddle and scratch. Others bite their fingernails. Hendrik takes the rum bottle from the ground and arches his back as he puts it to his lips. Definitely empty.

Marthinus, a man who is only prepared to open his mouth when it is to state the obvious, speaks: "This is pretty boring."

"It doesn't have to be."

"What do you mean?"

"I've got some booze in my car."

"What?"

"A case of gin," says Garth, the man in the yellow windcheater, "I got it for my mother. She can't drive herself to the bottle store anymore."

"We can't drink her *dop*."

"I'll replace it tomorrow." Garth starts to walk back to the parking lot.

"Wait up!" Wayne, the smallest member of the group runs after him, his hand on his holster. "You can't go alone."

The pair walks briskly. Garth stoops and grinds his hands deep into his pockets, but Wayne is furtive and his right hand does not leave his weapon. It is almost high tide, but instead of treading the water mark they walk on the uppermost terrace of the beach. They are eager to reach the car.

They do not wait for the others, and the first slug of gin is bitter and teary. They are warm now, and they walk in the damp sand which is uncovered between waves. Their shoes sink and stick.

The moon is rising above Leopard's Kloof. Its dim yellow light lacquers the white nautiluses which are borne by the waves and deposited at the high water mark. "Jeez there's a lot," says Garth.

"I've never seen anything like it." Wayne picks up one of the ear-shaped shells. Its slimy, tentacled occupant dangles and writhes above the sand. "This shell is perfect."

"Not even a crack."

"And look at this one!"

"Marelise and Hestrie would love these."

"And we could use the squids as bait."

"Really?"

"Didn't you know." Wayne leers towards Garth. "It's the best stuff for *kob*."

"Shit. All the time I just thought they looked pretty."

"No china...my old man swears by it."

Wayne tosses the creature back into the sea, and Garth watches as it is washed up on the shore again and gathers sand like an oiled sunbather does. A small wave washes it clean, and Garth speaks: "Shall we get the others?"

"Ja. They must be bloody cold by now."

The pair walks back towards the rocks at Dawidskraal. They stop for a moment to gaze at the channel of deep water which cuts through the breakers and towards the black horizon. *Kob* feed in this channel at night. They carry on walking, and when they reach the others, the mood is sombre. "Guys, you should check the nautilus." Wayne is more enthusiastic than usual as he offers Hendrik a bottle of gin.

The older man takes the bottle and is decisive in his drinking of a quarter of its contents. Once everyone has sated their thirst, the group mobilises in search of the shellfish. The noises from the *melkhout* have dissipated and the patrolmen have abandoned hope of a glorious debut mission. They follow Garth and Wayne, and when

they reach the stranded nautilus they gather them up in their jackets. The men shiver as they walk towards the car balancing the preciously laden garments on their outstretched forearms.

The moon has disappeared behind a cloud and the channel where the *kob* must be feeding is no longer visible. A few of the men stop off at Ali's Cackle on the way home, but the pub is already closed.



It is past midday when Chantelle and Terrence arrive, but the sunlight is insipid and filtered. Jaundiced clouds turn the day into a watercolour and Terrence's purple Opel Corsa is a jarring intrusion. He wears a nondescript beige T-shirt which is too small, even for someone of his size, and his hair is cut in a subtle Mohawk. David Beckham's influence is far-reaching but it could hardly be described as interesting. He and Chantelle are met at the door by Herman and Selena. Chantelle rushes to hug her brother and the unmistakable aroma of Stuyvie Blue and Hugo Red washes over him. Terrence teeters towards Selena in an indecisive greeting. They settle on a brief shoulder tap and a limp handshake. The siblings break their embrace, and introductions are made: Herman crushes Terrence's hand in a show of power and Selena introduces Mediterranean flavour to the affair by kissing each of Chantelle's cheeks. Herman holds the door open for his guests. They stand in the entrance hall and admire the flat grey sea through the French doors at the front of the house.

"This place is wicked," says Terrence.

"Damn sight better than mom's."

"We like it," says Selena, "Let me show you guys to your room."

Once Terrence has deposited his bags in the spare room, the two women are left alone while Chantelle unpacks. "What made you choose Herman?" she asks.

"What do you mean?"

"You are *living* with the guy."

"We're not together."

"Herman said so," she pauses, "But there must be a reason you wanted him to move in."

"I was scared...being here on my own."

"Why him?"

"He's a wonderful man. We really understand each other."

"But, you're...beautiful."

Selena's face reddens. "Thank you."

"He's done well."

"So have I."

"Has he sculpted you yet?"

"That was how we got to know one another."

"He's good, hey?"

"Unbelievable. How long have you been with Terrence?"

"Not that long. It's pretty arb really."

"Arb?"

“Arbitrary.”

Selena pauses. “So, what do you do?”

“Ag, you know... go out, drink, smoke.”

“The student life.”

“Screw that.” Chantelle gestures somewhat over-elaborately. “I’m a barmaid.”

“Oh, that’s great,” is all Selena can manage.

“And you? Herman’s told me nothing about you. ”

“I’m between jobs.”

“Aren’t we all.”

“I guess.”

Chantelle closes her suitcase and stows it under the bed. “Where you from, anyway?”

“Joburg.”

“You don’t sound like it?”

“I’ve lived overseas.”

“Where?”

“I’ve been in Italy for the last few years.”

“Why the hell did you leave Italy for this hole?”

“I had my reasons.”

“I’d love to go to Milan. The shops...”

“They’re better than the frogs.”

“Oh yes...you studied herpetology.”

“How did you know?”

“I read the papers. I’m not stupid, you know.”

“I’m sorry. I didn’t mean it like...”

“Don’t worry. You’ll have to try really hard to offend me.” Chantelle sits on the bed. “I still can’t believe you left.”

“I think,” Selena says slowly, “We are very different.”

“I guess so. But I like you.”

“Me too,” Selena answers almost too quickly, “I have to go to Kleinmond now. Want to join me?”

“And do what?”

“I’m going to help make jam.”

“Sounds thrilling.”

“We’re raising funds to try and stop the poaching. There’s a fête on Sunday.”

“Hold me back.”

Selena leaves for Kleinmond and Chantelle joins Herman and Terrence in the lounge for a drink. Herman drinks a Black Label but the others sip on ciders with lemon wedges in the bottlenecks. Herman hopes that Chantelle’s arrival will boost the levels of conversation.



The women meet at Antjie Visagie’s house, as she runs a B&B from home and her kitchen is better equipped than most. The B&B is called Indian Dream and it looks

onto a windowless double-storey face brick elevation, which is flanked by two lopsided cypress trees. Antjie's house has only one level, but its high pitched turquoise corrugated roof makes it visible from the road. The guests sleep in the bedrooms which belonged to her five children and her husband before they left Kleinmond for Cape Town and Johannesburg respectively.

Antjie has bought a fifty kilogram sack of sugar, and it lies in the middle of her kitchen surrounded by half a dozen women in aprons. All of them, apart from Antjie and Selena, are wives of the men who are volunteering as Fisheries Inspectors. The sugar will be mixed with equal quantities of fruit, to make jam. One of the women, short and round in a floral apron, has managed to procure a crate of apricots from her brother who farms in Grabouw. Another member of the group, tall and biltong complexioned in a red Weber apron, has brought two boxes of grapefruit from the tree which grows in her garden. There are smatterings of other fruit in the kitchen: figs, gooseberries, grapes and a watermelon. There are also some peaches, tomatoes and mangoes: the makings of chutney.

"This is going to be a lot of jam," says Marthinus' wife.

"There's nowhere near enough fruit."

"We don't have to use all the sugar."

"May as well though...seeing we've got it."

"That's the spirit." Selena has never made jam before, but she is eager to change this.

"Are we going to go and buy more fruit?"

"We can just get *suurvygies*."

“What?” asks Selena.

“Sour figs. They grow on the dunes,” says Antjie, “They make a really pippy jam.”

“I’ll stay here and start cutting the apricots,” says the floral-aproned woman, “Can someone help me with hammering the pips?”

Selena looks enquiringly at Antjie, who answers her stare: “To get the kernels out...they help the jam set.”

Marthinus’ wife agrees to help the farmer’s sister with the apricot jam while the posse of four goes in search of *suurvygies*. Antjie drives her one ton *bakkie* and the other three women squeeze onto the single bench seat in the cab. Antjie is forced to change gears between Selena’s knees.

They arrive at the beach. Or at least at the vegetated dunes which signal that the beach is nearby. The *vygies*’ fat potato wedge leaves make it possible for them to grow in the sand. The fruits are puckered and ochre in colour and they are insignificant blotches which break the monotonous green succulence of the leaves. The women squat as they tear the *vygies* from the plants and stow them in the pockets of their aprons. When their aprons are full they return to the *bakkie* and empty them into the crates on the back of the vehicle.

“It’s not a competition,” says Antjie, as Selena scuttles around on her haunches in search of better pickings.

“No. No. I’m just enjoying it.”

“Come here a minute.” Antjie breaks one of the leaves open, revealing a triangular mucous stump. She passes it to Selena. “If a bluebottle stings you, you wipe the wound with this and the pain will go away.”

“A bluebottle?”

“Those things you see washed up on the beach. The big see-through bubble with long blue tentacles.”

Selena shakes her head.

“They float in the sea. Sometimes the tentacles wrap around you. You must have...”

“And it’s sore?”

“Agony.” Antjie takes a deep breath, and clutches at her upper arm. “*Suurvygie* juice or your own urine. The only things you can use to ease the pain.”

Antjie and Selena return to the job at hand and the women have soon exhausted the fruit-supply in the first depression. They summit the dune which forms the threshold to the next dip and from this lookout they can see that the neighbouring hollow has been partially filled in. A large convex mound of sand, dotted with a few lazy flies, is at its base. “What on earth is that?” Selena echoes the sentiments of everyone present.

“Only one way to find out,” says the woman with biltong skin.

The women tumble down the slope to the heap of sand and dig at it with their hands. The covering of sand is thin and their scraping fingernails soon strike resistance. They dust the sand away to reveal bulging *mielie*-meal sacks and fertiliser bags. The heat makes the briny smell almost viscous and the flies increase in number and activity.

“No prizes for guessing what’s in here,” says Antjie.

“Jeez, I’d love to get my hands on the bastards.”

“Tell me about it.”

The parched woman unties one of the bags and confirms that it contains shucked perlemoen. “We’d better take these to the police.”

“We’ll never get them to the *bakkies*. I’ll call Garth.”

“Ja. The guys will love this.”

“It’s a bit more exciting than collecting nautilus shells.” Antjie chuckles.

Selena has not said a word since the discovery of the perlemoen, but now she speaks with authority: “The only people we’re calling are the police.”

“They’re so understaffed. We can save them the effort of coming out here.”

“We’re not touching these.” Selena gestures towards the perlemoen. “Obviously someone’s going to come and fetch them...”

“And the cops can catch them red-handed,” Garth’s wife completes Selena’s sentence.

“So,” says Antjie, “You’re not just a pretty face.”

“It’s brilliant. Just what the community needs.”

“I can’t wait to tell my husband, he’ll be so excited.”

“No,” Selena’s voice is adamant, “You’re not telling anyone.”

“But—”

“Absolutely not. The less people that know about this the better. We’re going to cover it up with sand and leave it exactly how we found it. Then we’re going straight to the police station.”

“And then?”

“We carry on making jam.” Selena starts walking towards the road and the others follow her. For the first time in almost two years she is able to exert an influence. The only difference is that these people are all so nice. When she worked in advertising she was always one of the best employees. Her bosses recognised this and rewarded her for it. But it caused tension. Being a woman, and pretty too, tongues wagged and rumours spread. She never really let them get to her, but it was impossible to ignore it all completely. Here nobody questions her authority; instead, they look up to her as some sort of saviour. A gift from above. And the best thing about it all is that it creates such an effective team: because everyone here is in it for the common good, there is no infighting or one-upmanship or back-stabbing. She knows she’s always been a leader, but the feeling that she gets from it now, from RAPP, is so much better. Purer. Almost selfless.

The women reach the road and they pile into Antjie’s *bakkie*.



The weather conspires with RAPP and Sunday morning is crisp and clean. The fête is attended by most of the locals, and there is also a contingent of people from further afield. Even Chantelle and Terrence have ventured out. The stores are as varied as the community allows. There is, of course, a cake sale which features banana bread and lemon meringue pies; *melkterte* sprinkled with cinnamon; and cheesecakes both baked

and fridge-set. The Cape Nature Conservation has set up an educational stall explaining the importance of preserving the environment in general and the perlemoen in particular.

The stall which has been awkwardly signposted as SEA ORNAMENTS features a spectrum of shell-based junk or curios or art, depending on personal taste. While some of the wives of the fisheries inspectors were making jam at Antjie's house, the remainder gathered at Hendrik's house. Under the supervision of his wife, Elmarie, they made the hanging tresses of size-sequenced sea urchins; the compartmentalised wooden frames which display small shells and dried starfish and polished pebbles; the lamps fashioned from wine bottles filled with shells; the perlemoen shell pendants; and the various nautilus inspired creations which are all on sale here.

The first edition of *The Perlie's Moan* is on sale at a price which does nothing more than cover costs and Alf bellows its virtues through a loudhailer made from a dried out kelp pod. He arches his neck and shouts at the sky. He is so ensconced in his looped monologue when Mrs. Mathy arrives that she has to tap him on the elbow to get his attention. He mumbles a reply before removing the loudhailer from his mouth and it comes out as a distorted grumble.

"I'd like to buy one, Alf."

Alf holds the loudhailer at his side. "Only one? It's great." He hands her a copy which she pages through.

"Look at the front page," Alf urges.

Mrs. Mathy obliges and reads the headline out loud, "POACHERS MEET STICKY END AS LADIES OF RAPP PUT THEM IN A PICKLE."

"Marvellous, isn't it?"

Mrs. Mathy balances the gazette on the palm of her left hand. "It's quite small."

Alf is quick to provide a retort: "It's filled with useful stuff," he pauses to catch his breath, "There's hardly any advertising in it."

"Only joking." She breaks into a laugh which is normally contagious. "Of course I'll take a few."

"Great." Alf puts his hands in the pockets of his tan corduroys. "The printers added a nought onto our order, so we've got a whole lot of copies which need selling."

"They didn't make you pay for them?"

"No. But if we sell them we can make some profit."

"The raffle's going pretty well too. Maybe we'll be able to buy a boat after all."

Alf screws his eyes up and whispers the workings of his calculations to his chest. After a few seconds he shakes his head and speaks: "I don't know about that."

"It was only a jo—" Mrs. Mathy curbs her mirth, and asks a sensible question instead: "Who made this?" She waves the newspaper like a fan. "Anyway?"

"Rudy."

"God! I haven't seen him in yonks. Where is he?"

"He couldn't come today."

"To the fête? To the launch of his bloody newspaper?"

"He's writing." Alf is obliged to clarify this. "A novel."

Mrs. Mathy interrupts Alf, "That's wonderful."

"About Betty's Bay."

"What? Who?"

"I don't know. I'm not sure he knows. He's only just started it, you know."

“He must have something in mind though.”

“Um.” Alf tugs at his fringe and gazes at his Grasshoppers. He does not raise his head to speak. “Says it’s a community novel.”

“Who’d want to read about us?”

“Ag, I don’t think he’ll put *us* in it,” Alf thinks aloud, “He’ll probably come up with some interesting fictional characters.”

“If he doesn’t it’ll be the death of his book.” Mrs. Mathy laughs again.

“Too true, too true.” Alf continues with his propaganda: “Get *The Perlie’s Moan*. Interesting. Informative. Ecology and marine biology. Crime and intrigue. Only two rand a...” he shouts in staccato.

Mrs. Mathy leaves Alf to it and goes in search of Selena and Herman who are selling raffle tickets. When she finds them they have already run out of tickets, and have resorted to scribbling people’s details on scraps of paper.

“You guys are doing a roaring trade,” says Mrs. Mathy.

“People must really want the first prize.” Herman laughs. He has donated a set of three sculptures, Trot #364, #365 and #366, which feature the dog resting, rising and standing, respectively. He refers to them as the core of his Evolutionary Cycle.

“Or maybe they wanted the other prizes.” A few of Mrs. Mathy’s stalwart exhibitors have also contributed to the raffle.

Selena is writing Garth Schoeman’s name on three separate scraps of paper. “Just remember sir, you can only win a prize if you’re here at one o’clock for the draw.”

Garth neatens the collar of his patchwork leather jacket and mumbles his understanding as he heads towards the jam stall.

“I’ll go along with Garth.”

“I’ll join you,” says Selena, “I don’t want the others taking all the credit.”

The women leave Herman seated at the school desk, dealing with a small queue of would-be raffle entrants. He opens the petty cash box, and explains that he is blind and that he’ll have to trust them with taking their own change.

When Selena and Mrs. Mathy arrive at the trestle table, which is draped with a blue and white tablecloth, Garth is talking to his wife, while the other women serve customers. Their supplies are fast diminishing, and they have already had to empty the makeshift till three times.

“Yes sir, this fig jam would make a wonderful gift,” says the tall, parched woman, “It’s delicious on cheese or with ice cream.”

“Good grief!” The man is dressed for the golf course, complete with sleeveless cardigan. He scratches at his upper lip, which is still clammy from shaving. “I suppose she is quite into that sort of thing. Tell you what... I’ll take a jar of apricot too. To be on the safe side.”

“Certainly sir.” She hands him the two raffia-bowed jars and motions towards Marthinus’ wife. “You can pay my colleague for these.”

Mrs. Mathy is left alone while Selena helps the other jam-makers. As soon as Antjie has a free moment Mrs. Mathy is quick to pounce. She takes a copy of *The Perlie’s Moan* from her handbag. “I see you’re famous now.”

“Want an autograph?” jokes Antjie.

“I haven’t read it yet. Did Rudy do a good job?”

“Haven’t even seen it.” Antjie stretches her arms behind her back to tie her apron. “Been far too busy making pretty labels for these bloody jam bottles.”

Mrs. Mathy must have been influenced by the beautiful spring morning, for she laughs again. “Let’s have a look at it then.” She holds the newspaper so that they can both see the front page.

“God I’m photogenic!” roars Antjie, in response to the black and white photocopied photograph of her and Selena standing in the hollow where they found the perlemoen.

Mrs. Mathy readjusts her stonewashed dungarees and reads to Antjie: “On Friday morning four women, all members of RAPP, went to the dunes near the Main Beach in Betty’s Bay to collect...” She ups the tempo and skims the first column. She picks up again midway through the second: “The army deployed a unit of five troops who embarked on what would prove to be a nine hour stakeout.” Mrs. Mathy is excited and she cuts straight to the chase: “Although the three poachers tried to flee when they realised they were surrounded, two of them were arrested on the scene and the third was found hiding in a large stand of *rooikrans* less than an hour later.”

“Sounds alright.”

“The men will appear in the Caledon Magistrate’s Court on Monday.” Mrs. Mathy’s voice tapers into a whisper as she reads the last words of the article.

“And they’ll pay the bail and end up serving a few months of a suspended sentence,” says Antjie.

“Come on! That’s a bit pessimistic, don’t you think?”

“It’s what’s happened every other time there’s been an arrest.”

“True, but public awareness is much greater now. Won’t the judge be a bit harsher?”

“Okay, so if these three *skelms* serve five years each, what’s it going to change?”

“It’ll send out a message to the other guys.”

“Maybe to a few of them, but they’re earning ten times what they could ever earn as gardeners or fruit and veg *smouse*. You’ve got to be realistic.”

“What’s got into you Antjie? I mean, everything’s been going so well.”

“Ja, in a way. I’ve just been thinking about this a lot.”

“I can tell.”

“And what really pisses me off is that there’s some rich white guy at the top of all this, who’s sitting pretty and making millions while these poor coloured *ous* do the hard work.”

“It’s depressing.”

“That doesn’t mean it’s not true. Jesus, I wish they’d catch the bastards in charge!”

“We’ll get them. In a small community like ours you can’t keep a secret forever.”

“I just hope I’m not there when they catch him, because—”

Mrs. Mathy continues Antjie’s sentence, “You’ll rip his arms off—”

“And beat him to death with the wet ends!” Antjie delivers the *coup de grâce* of their well-rehearsed performance which is a remnant of the days when they spent many an evening together drinking port and bitching about their ex-husbands. The women shake hands theatrically and then begin to giggle when they realise that they have an audience.

Ali is the first to break the lull they have left in their wake: "I've got the badges."
He is carrying a wine carton. "Alexis and Judah have been up all night making them."

"Who's Alexis?" the women ask in unison.

"The surfing champion, remember?"

"Is that his name?" says Mrs. Mathy, "I've always just called him Rasta."

A giggle ripples through the women.

"Well, they've gone to a lot of effort." Ali shakes the box. "What do you want me to do with them?"

"Sorry Ali," says Selena with a smile, "You can give them to me."

He hands the box over to her. "They only started yesterday, though." Ali winks.
"The swell's been too good to miss, apparently."

"As long as they're done," Antjie says as she slices the box open with her car key.
She removes a handful of brooches. "*Mooi, ne?*" She kneads the beadwork of the turquoise interior of a perlemoen shell, with the letters RAPP emanating from the spire.

"These ones are a bit odd." Antjie holds a red, yellow and green version of the same design.

"They ran out of blues and greys...only had Rasta colours left."

"Makes them more interesting," says Selena, "I'll take one of those and Herman can have one too."

"With his wardrobe," says Mrs. Mathy, "You could get him a pink one."

"It's not as if he's got much choice," Selena snaps.

"He was like this before the accident, believe me, only now he's got an excuse!"

Selena looks at her watch and gasps. "It's already ten past one."

“The raffle!”

“I’ll go and get Herman.”

“And I’ll tell Alf to announce the draw.”

“Good idea.”

“Get yourselves over to the jam stall,” Antjie shouts, “We’re having a once in a lifetime Buy One Get One Free Minute Madness On Apricot Jam!”

A few minutes later almost all of the various stalls are unattended and everyone is gathered around Selena and Alf. Most members of the crowd wear RAPP brooches. Alf holds a black nylon bag and addresses his audience. A breeze has begun to blow and he is forced to shout to be heard. “You all know why we’re here, so there’s no point in wasting your time, but before I hand over to Selena I’d like to thank everyone for coming. Every little bit counts and if we keep on going in this manner we can only have many more successes.” As if on cue, the ladies from the jam stall arrive.

“For they are jolly good fellows,” sings Hendrik, “And so say all of us.” Everyone takes this chant up and minutes pass before Alf turns to face Selena and holds the bag out as if it were a full cookie jar.

“Selena, if you’d draw a name from this poacher’s holdall, I’d be much obliged.” Selena screws her eyes closed and digs deep into the bag. Eventually she holds a jagged-edged scrap aloft. Alf takes it from her, and announces that Mr. P. Kirkby is the winner of a charcoal sketch of an elephant bull which captures the lumbering scruffiness of these animals perfectly.

Mr. Kirkby makes his way to the front of the crowd, with his three year old daughter on his hip. He takes the picture, thanks Alf and Selena, and turns to his daughter

and says, "It'll be perfect above the fireplace, don't you think, Hannah?" The child is struck with stage fright and Mr. Kirkby returns to his wife.

The other runner up, Herculene Botha, is thrilled with her acrylic rendition of a primary coloured sunset over the Blesberg, but she struggles to carry the heavily framed picture against the ever strengthening southeaster.

"And now for the moment we've all been waiting for," says Alf, like a talk show host. Selena scrunches her eyes tightly closed and delves deep into the bag. Only the upper extremities of her goose pimpled arm can be seen. Suddenly she finds herself cut off from her surroundings. The darkness. The monotony of the wind. The surge of the soft sea of ticket stubs against her arm. Her fingers settle on a ticket, but she does not lift it out of the bag. She has a bizarre determinist sensation that all of the events leading up to this moment have contributed to her hand settling on this ticket. This realisation is so far-reaching that suddenly everything important that has ever happened to her seems to be taking place right now. The scenes merge into one another, like a heaving audiovisual collage. Giuseppe sits watching Oprah Winfrey. Her father stands over a bubbling pot of apricot jam. Herman cross-examines a group of *Mafiosi*. Her mother pounces upon a Micro Frog.

She has always tried to shy away from this sort of mysticism and today is no exception. She releases the ticket and grabs hold of its immediate neighbour. She knows that what she's doing with RAPP is important (both for her as an individual and for Betty's Bay as a whole) but she doesn't want her actions elevated to such vertiginous quasi-religious heights. She emerges, triumphant, with one of the original green ticket

stubs. "And the winner is..." Alf announces with a flourish, "Mr. Terrence Kitching! Mr. Kitching, could you please come and claim your prize from the artist himself."

Nobody comes forward. The wind forces the crowd to cluster together.

Herman leans over, and whispers to Selena, "It's Chantelle's new boyfriend, Terrence."

"You sure?"

"It must be. It's not exactly the most popular name."

"I just saw him and Chantelle. They were talking to Ali and Cathy."

"My daughter, Cathy?"

Selena nods.

"Cathy! Cathy!" Alf bellows.

Cathy appears from the crowd.

"Where're Chantelle and Terrence?"

"They went to the Cackle, for a drink."

"But why?" asks Alf.

"They were bored here."

"And Ali?"

"He went to open up," Cathy nods. "Says this isn't his scene."

The bag of tickets has been left unattended on the grass and a gust of wind seizes it. The *veld* is strewn with scraps of green and white and blue paper.

"Help!" shouts Antjie as she runs after the valuable litter.

People *do* rush to help, but most of the tickets have already been blown hundreds of metres from the Crassula Hall. They lie in ditches and gardens and water features.

Critical Mass

The fête disbands haphazardly and the bush is still flecked with multicoloured confetti as the members of RAPP struggle to carry the discarded doors and cobwebbed drawing boards which have been used as table tops. When Herman and Selena get back to the car, arm in arm and carrying the components of The Evolutionary Cycle, Mrs. Mathy is waiting to speak to them. Her blood red scarf is blown into the *taaibos* and while Selena rushes to fetch it, Mrs. Mathy addresses her son, “We’re going to go and find your sister.”

“Come on ma.”

“No. She left without saying goodbye last time she was here,” Mrs. Mathy says, “And I’m not letting that happen again.”

“Fair enough. But you know it’ll only make her worse.”

“A rock and a hard place, Herman, a rock and a hard place.”

Selena returns with the dust- and twig-ridden scarf. While Mrs. Mathy shakes and pats it clean, Herman whispers to Selena, “We’re going to the pub, my mom’s coming too.”

Mrs. Mathy has refastened her hair with the scarf and she speaks with purpose: “What are we waiting for?”

“Nothing,” says Selena, “Why don’t we give you a lift?”

“There’s no point. I’ve got to get home somehow.”

“See you there, mom.”

When they are alone in the car, Selena turns to Herman. “What’s got into your mom?”

“I don’t know,” he mumbles, “She and Chantelle have never really seen eye to eye.”

Chantelle, Terrence and Ali are Ali’s Cackle’s only occupants: when the weather turns foul on a Sunday afternoon, the weekenders go home early. The trio sits at one of the log tables near to the jukebox, which is playing a particularly gravelly, live rendition of *I Am Sailing*. Ali sips at a Black Label. The others drink cocktails. Ali is doing the twenty minute crossword in the weekend edition of the *Argus*.

What’s another word for dash?” He waits with the nib of his pen touching the paper. “Run doesn’t fit.”

“Élan.”

“What?”

“Élan.”

“Oh...that kind of dash. How’d you know that?”

“They always use it in crosswords,” Chantelle pauses, “I’m not stupid, you know?”

Ali is about to respond to this when Mrs. Mathy bursts into the pub. “There you are! You just disappeared.”

“Ag, mom, we stayed for a while.”

“Terrence won the raffle.”

“What?” Chantelle turns to face Terrence. “I thought we put *my* name on the ticket.”

"I bought another one. It was two bucks for God's sake."

Chantelle takes a gulp of her tannic cocktail. "What happened?"

"Where?"

"At the raffle—"

"I don't know. Ask your mom."

"I am asking her."

"Then why are you looking at Terrence?"

Chantelle takes another sip of her drink but is only rewarded with ice cubes clunking against her teeth. "What happened, mom?" she says, emphasizing the last word.

"It was an absolute shambles. The wind got hold of the tickets before they could draw another winner and everyone just left."

"I'm sorry, ma." Chantelle motions to Ali to pour her another drink. "But it's not our fault."

"And now you're just going to go back to Cape Town."

"We're not."

"Oh yes you—" Mrs. Mathy cuts herself short, realizing that she has been running on autopilot. "What?"

"We're not leaving today." Chantelle takes her refilled glass from Ali. "We're staying till Wednesday."

"Don't you have jobs?"

"I've changed my shifts. Terrence is a student."

Mrs. Mathy unties her headscarf, and approaches the bar. "Look, Chantelle, I'm sorry. I guess I just jumped to too many conclusions."

“You can say that again.”

“Why are you staying, anyway?”

“It’s Cathy’s eighteenth birthday on Tuesday, and you know me...” Chantelle blows cigarette smoke towards the ceiling. “Always up for a party.”

“I clean forgot. My memory’s not what it used to be.”

“Get a diary.”

“I’ve got one. I just never remember to use it.” Mrs. Mathy laughs at herself, allowing everyone else to relax. “No one told me she was having a party.”

“It’s not really a party. It’s more of a get together,” says Ali, “A welcome back, so to speak.”

“Welcome back where?”

“Here, of course. She’ll finally be an official barmaid.”

“Am I invited?”

“Everyone’s invited,” Ali assures her, “It’ll be great to just relax and forget about this whole poaching thing for once.”

“You’re not that enchanted with RAPP, are you?”

“No, no.” Ali puts his beer down. “I think it’s great, it’s just that...well, you know what I’m like with these organised things. I’d rather be in the pub, or on the beach. It may sound—”

“No need to defend yourself.” Chantelle laughs. “It’s a free country.”

“Does Alf know about this party?”

“Of course.” Ali rocks on his bar stool and leans against the wall. “What do you think I am?”

"It's a school night."

"It's holidays."

"You're right." Mrs. Mathy smooths the creases in the purple corduroy skirt which she wears over her dungarees. "I don't know what's come over me."

"Ma, you should go home," Herman pauses, "Get some rest."

"I know, I know." Mrs. Mathy cups her face in her hands and takes a deep breath.

"There's just been too much happening all at once."

"The fête was a great success," Selena says, "We sold almost everything we had."

"You're right. I should just go home and get to bed."

Selena takes Herman by the arm and whispers to him, "I think I'll go with her."

"She's alright."

"No, really. I feel I should."

"You sure?"

"You can spend some time with Ali."

"How'll I get home?"

"Ali can give you a lift." She turns to face his friend. "If that's okay with you, of course."

"Um, I suppose so, I mean," Ali stutters, "It'll have to be quite late, I mean, I've got things to do."

"On a Sunday night?" says Herman.

"The bloody septic tank's playing up again."

"I can't smell anything."

"It's not quite overflowing, but what with Cathy's party coming up—"

“You can never be too careful.”

“Exactly.”

Mrs. Mathy is still waiting at the door, “So...will you or will you not give Herman a lift home?”

“I will...it’s not a problem, really.”

“Don’t be stupid,” Chantelle says, “We can give Herman a lift home.”

“Why didn’t you say so before?”

“I don’t know. I wasn’t thinking.”

Eventually, Mrs. Mathy and Selena leave. It is three o’clock on a Sunday afternoon and Betty’s Bay is empty. The sea is pea green and iced with elaborate white crests. The larger exotic trees – pines, eucalyptus and New Zealand Christmas trees – bend in the wind, but the smaller indigenous shrubs and bushes do not need to: they are already shaped by the prevailing winds. The wind forms a vortex around Ali’s Cackle and manages to work its way in through the front door which is deliberately positioned on the west face, so that it can remain open in all but the most brutal of winds. Ali hangs a CLOSED ON ACCOUNT OF WEATHER sign on the doorknob and bolts the double-doors closed. None of the captives of this weather-induced ‘lock in’ have eaten since breakfast and the effects of a few drinks are already kicking in. Chantelle and Terrence leave to go to the shop next to the petrol station, to buy cigarettes and pies and samoosas. They take orders from Ali and Herman.

Ali gets a six pack of Black Labels from the fridge and takes one for himself and gives another to his friend. “You’ve got some catching up to do.”

“Ja.” Herman takes the beer and drinks half of it in one go. “I needed this.”

"Jeez, what's up with your old lady, hey? She's normally so chilled."

"Ag...she's getting old, feeling the pressure."

"Either way. Her problems, not ours."

"Precisely," says Herman. "Why's the Sucking Suzie coming on a Sunday night?"

"Don't ask me. Said it was the only time they could make it."

"Strange." Herman finishes what remains of his beer. "How's the fishing been?"

Ali dismembers the plastic packaging and passes Herman another beer. "Not bad. They've been catching a lot out at Silversands."

"*Gallie?*"

"Allsorts hey...*gallie, kob, hottentot*. I even saw a guy pull out a *baardman* the other day."

"And you?"

"I haven't gone much. Been really busy. Just a few *gallies*, and a really *lekker dassie* about a week ago?"

"I must come again. I miss it."

"Ja, what with Selena and all that I've hardly seen you."

"She's great though."

"Sometimes it's good to get out on your own."

"It's kind of hard when you can't see." Herman isn't sure what he means by this, so he takes a sip of his beer.

"Next time I go, I'll call you."

"Just like the old days."

“This week’s no good until Thursday – the tides are wrong.” Ali gets himself another beer. “Unless you wanna fish really early?”

“No, let’s make it Thursday.”

There is a loud knocking on the door and its handle swivels back and forth. “Must be your sis.” Ali’s assumption is partly correct: opening the door reveals not only Chantelle and Terrence, but also Judah and Alexis. Their dreadlocks are soggy and they both wear thick jackets and boardshorts. They are barefoot.

“I thought you guys were surfing,” says Ali.

“Not with this wind. It’s gone flat.”

“Ja,” says Judah, “We thought we’d have a *dop* to warm up.”

The group traipses to the table where Herman sits alone. Chantelle distributes the pepper steak pies and vegetable samoosas.

Ali returns to his rightful position behind the bar. “What’ll it be?”

“Two beers.”

“To warm you up?”

“And two Jägermeisters.”

Ali places the drinks on the bar and the surfers down the shots and chase them with Black Labels. They return to the table, and Ali and Herman eat their food.

Chantelle breaks the silence of eating and drinking: “Let’s play coinage.”

This suggestion is greeted with such enthusiasm that Herman ends up launching a gravied blob of steak with great velocity, into the centre of the table. This delightful display only serves to compound the group’s eagerness. Ali is the only one among them with any reservations: “We can’t play for long though.”

“Why the hell not?” asks Alexis, “It’s a Sunday evening.”

“I’ve got stuff to do here. They’re coming to clean out the septic tank.”

“So? They won’t care if you’re pissed. They’ll probably want to join in.”

“Ja bru,” says Herman, “You’re being a pussy.”

“And if my brother says that, then you you’re being a real loser!” Chantelle coughs as she blows smoke from her nose.

“Got to do my books. The taxman’s been bugging me.”

After what seems like endless rallying between Ali and the others, they reach a compromise: they will play coinage until sunset, and then they’ll go home and leave Ali alone. How he’ll be able to do accounting after a game of coinage is his problem.

Ali fetches his coinage cup – a yellow plastic mug which has been covered lovingly with a tanned and treated and shrunk gemsbok’s scrotum. It is a remnant of his years of conscription, when he fought in the Angolan bush war. He had a lot of spare time back then. Terrence provides the coin – one of the new two-tone five rands which haven’t reached Betty’s Bay yet – and Chantelle, as the only woman, has the honour of getting the game underway. She holds the coin between thumb and index finger and fires it into the hard railway-sleeper table. She favours a long, low trajectory, and the coin strikes the back lip of the cup and clatters to the bottom. She nominates Terrence to drink. Her next attempt is very similar, but it tumbles over the back of the cup and onto the table. She curses herself for missing. She never misses. She won’t miss again. The coin is passed to Herman, who feels for the mug, places it near him and bounces the coin, at an acute angle, straight into the middle of the cup. Blindness is no hindrance, and soon he has nominated everyone to drink at least once, and implemented the Buffalo Rule.

Eventually Herman's accuracy becomes so tedious that Ali surreptitiously moves the cup to allow the game to go on.

The collective skill of the players is incredible: ambidextrous Ali; Judah who nominates which side of the rim he will bounce the coin off; Terrence who is all line and length; and Alexis the prankster who pulls off shots from between the legs and over the shoulder and; once, a double-bouncing throw. If coinage was competitive, these people would all be professionals.

Drinking games are boring when everyone can play them well, as it is impossible to pick on someone. Judah tries to make it more difficult by placing the cup on top of a beer can, but still the coin hits the bottom of the cup all too often. Ali packs the landing area with table napkins. At first this makes no difference but soon it is too much: the coin won't even bounce.

And so it is that when the sun sets, the players are all drunk enough to have reasons to leave.

Ali watches as their taillights round the corner. The wind is so strong that he cannot even hear the engine of Alexis' beach buggy once it is out of sight. He goes inside and gets himself another beer. Sucking Suzie should be arriving any minute now.



Selena wakes early the following morning.

The sound of the road seems distant, liquefied. She can hear Herman snoring in the downstairs bedroom. He won't be up for a while. Selena slips out of bed, and forces herself not to shriek as her bare feet touch the tiles. She peers through the curtains. The wind has died in the night and a sickly mist smothers the coastline. The world is dulled and softened. She puts on her dressing gown and the sheepskin slippers Mrs. Mathy gave her, and goes downstairs and out into the garden.

The ring of sculptures is intact, touched only by moisture. The wetness makes the parts of her body seem fresh. She sits at the centre of the circle and waits as she feels the damp working its way through the crisp flannel of her dressing gown, soaking the skin of her bum. She can hardly see the bushes which she knows surround the lawn. Her only company is herself.

She had wanted Herman to sculpt her the night before, but when he got home he was drunk. He said he wanted sculpt her, but when she undressed for him he went straight for her breasts. She could see his erection. She should have known it would come to this. The moment she asked him to move in with her she was setting this kind of situation up. He kneaded her bum, but she pushed him away and told him to go to bed. He didn't even put up too much of a fuss.

She had been abstracted. Reduced to her formal elements.

But he does know you, she tells herself, just look around you. Nobody knows you like he does. He was drunk, and he's only human...worse, male too.

All men are like that, she continues lecturing herself, I mean if he was considerate and sensitive to your needs all the time, you'd have to worry.

She showered afterwards. But she didn't sleep well. She spent the whole night wanting to come out here and sit amongst the sculptures. To remind herself.

Hours, she presumes, later the mist starts to thin, changes colour. The pale yellow of a butterfly's wings. She turns towards the Palmiet River. The Bunsen sun is a diluted ellipse. She can see the bushes now: soaked, dripping. Sounds are closer too: an ambulance's siren, an oystercatcher on the beach. The sky above her is a cloudless, flat, unchanging blue. The dew on the stone sculptures is evaporating. Her segments have developed steamy auras. The wooden sculptures are still wet, they have absorbed the water in the same way that her dressing gown has.

The world is infinite again.

The sound of the telephone ringing underlines this return, and Selena rushes inside to answer it. It is Rupert. He wants to know how her research is progressing.

"Um..." Selena tries to pretend that she has just woken up. "Things have been really frantic here."

"I can imagine," he pauses, "I hear you've been quite involved yourself."

"Who told you that?"

"Oh, you know. News travels quickly on our little grapevine."

Selena laughs, to give herself time to think. "I've been making clandestine enquiries," she says, "But it's a delicate issue."

"Precisely why I called. Is there a story?"

She does not answer immediately.

"I hear you've moved in with some blind nutter."

"It's not what it seems."

"I mean, Selena, I've known you to be pretty mercenary, but—"

"I didn't move in with him for the story."

"I guess it's hardly my place to pry." He clears his throat. "Getting back to the point...is this movie worth making?"

"There's a story here, if that's what you're asking."

"But is it any good?"

"It could be amazing."

"Are you going to help me make it amazing?"

"I'll help you out, but I don't think I could direct it. I'm too involved."

"Come on...it's not the first time a director's shacked up with one of her—"

"I haven't—"

"I heard you were living with him."

"In that sense of the word, okay, I concede."

"So if you're not, you know...shagging this bloke, then why can't you tell the story?"

"It's this whole thing with RAPP."

"What?"

"I thought you...I've started this anti-poaching group."

"I knew you were involved. I didn't realise it was an actual organisation."

"It is. We just raised seven thousand rand."

"That's great."

"Bugger off."

"No. I'm being serious."

“Why do you care?”

“For the story.”

“Why?”

“Just imagine...” He coughs, again. “The woman who was meant to cast a cold researcher’s eye over the community got so embroiled in the saga of the town’s suffering at the hands of senseless criminals that she became an embittered campaigner for the community’s emancipation.”

“That’s a bit melodramatic.”

“I’m a filmmaker.”

Selena says nothing.

“Melodrama sells.”

“Last time we spoke you got on my case for me compromising my journalistic autonomy.”

“I’ve slept on it, and I’ve realised that although what you did was wrong, we can actually make it work.”

“You’re unbelievable.”

“So...are you still gonna make this film?”

“I’ll help you with the facts, but you’ll have to get someone else to make it.”

“When can we start?”

“Not yet. Months.”

“Months?”

“It’s delicate. We need to make sense of this murder.”

“I’ll call you.”

“No. I’ll call you.”

She puts down the phone, and boils the kettle for coffee. There’s too much happening all at once. She can’t help but appreciate the irony of the situation: she, a city girl all of her life, moves to Betty’s Bay (do you get more quaint and provincial than that?) and she can’t handle the pressure. It’s not turning out to be much of a holiday town.

She makes coffee, filter coffee, but it still tastes like shit. That’s one thing they can’t do here. She can still hear Herman snoring. Taunting her with the simplicity of his life.

She pours the coffee down the sink. The granules clog the plug, and she rinses them away with cold water. God she can be a bitch sometimes: ‘The simplicity of his life.’ He’s blind for Christ’s sake, Selena, get a hold of yourself. And most men snore anyway.

An article in yesterday’s newspaper catches her eye: 10 SIGNS OF MENTAL ILLNESS. Maybe she should go back to bed. Day cancelled due to preponderance of centripetal forces.

Herman’s snoring has ceased. He must have rolled over and be about to wake up. He’ll want breakfast: bacon and eggs to kick his hangover. She’ll make it for him, he’s blind, she tells herself, remember?

He’s awake now. Out of bed and straight into the kitchen. He wears pyjamas: grey with blue Paisleys. He scratches at his scalp and yawns. “Good morning.” He arches his back and removes the lint from his navel. “Sleep well?”

“Yes. Fine. You?”

“Ja.” He rubs the sleep from his eyes. “Listen, I’m sorry about last night, I’m not normally like that.”

“It’s fine, really.”

“I’ll sculpt you soon.”

“Promise?”

“Cross my heart, hope to die.” Herman doesn’t normally say things like this, either. “I was thinking...let’s go and have breakfast somewhere. Save you the trouble of making it.”

An apology. An invitation to breakfast. “Where are we going?”

“The one at the gardens,” Herman says tentatively, “Next to the pond?”

“Perfect.” Selena loves to sit at one of the tables outside and watch the frogs.

“Okay, just give me a sec. I need to shower.”

“Me too, but—”

“No, you go first,” Herman says, “I’ll make myself a cup of coffee.”

Selena hates herself in the shower. The man is blind, and he doesn’t complain. And if she’s honest to herself it was nice – in a way – to be desired again. The water is suddenly scalding, and Selena jumps out of its jet and shivers with her hands on her thighs.

The cold air addles her mind with rationality, and she is able to see the situation clearly: she came here to get a different life with new challenges and she has found both of these. She tries to convince herself that there’s no point in worrying about anything – she’s done nothing but worry since her accident – and that the only way for her to get out

of this rut is to take the initiative. She must sort these poachers out. Avenge Wilhelm's death. That'll make her feel better.

The shower is back to normal – it must have been Herman rinsing the coffee pot – and she soaps herself.

Legal Age

Cathy, Ali and Alf have spent the afternoon decorating. Ali's Cackle has probably never looked this jolly. It is festooned with shimmering red, gold and blue cut-out 18's; a snapshot chronology of Cathy's rise to majority; and a new coat of polish on the floor.

Cathy didn't tell people what time to arrive but they should be here any minute now. A few of her school friends are coming, but otherwise it's mostly Betty's Bay people. Ali invited the liquor licence inspector, but had the phone put down on him.

Mrs. Mathy is the first to arrive, carrying a three-tiered Black Forest gateau which oozes cream, and a shapeless gift wrapped in fynbos lino prints. Alf takes the cake from her and puts it on the bar. Mrs. Mathy swamps the birthday girl with a charismatic hug and hands her her present. "Be a dear won't you? Run out to my car and get the bread knife and cutting board from the boot." She winks at Ali and says with a laugh, "I know this place's limitations."

Mrs. Mathy is followed by a stream of other self-selected caterers. Selena brings trays of Italian finger snacks, Antjie arrives with twenty litres of home made strawberry ice cream and Oom Hendrik provides three metre-long strips of homemade biltong, made from a kudu he shot over Christmas.

By the time the sun has set almost everyone has arrived. A table in the corner has been designated as the present deposit, and it is piled with colour-clashing rectangles and circles and squares and lumps. A potted kumquat sapling, with a bow around its stem, stands in the corner.

Alf has supplied the booze (with one proviso: no vodka, cane spirit or alco-pops, because, “If it doesn’t taste like alcohol the youngsters will learn bad habits.”) and Ali ensures that nobody is empty handed. Most of the men drink beer: Black Label for the young, Windhoek or Castle for the old. Strangely, there is a trend among those who sport beards to drink brandy and coke. Cathy’s school friends, the guys from the arcade and a few others, drink cider with Terrence.

The women, however, are far more varied in their preference. They drink wine, (red and white; dry and sweet) sparkling wine, G&T’s, ciders, sugar free soft drinks, mineral water, beer, beer shandies, and there is even a scotch-and-ginger-ale drinker among them.

The gathering lacks pretension and only Selena is self-conscious: the dress she is wearing is casual, white linen with blue polka dots, her pearl necklace is understated, her shoes heeled, beaded slip-slops; but still she is overdressed. Her hair is what really does it: tied up in an intricate medusan web, with a fantail of francolin feathers to secure it. They do a lot of things differently here. Even the birthday girl wears jeans. She feels terrible; remembers her own eighteenth birthday. Her mother made sure that none of her guests would be able outdo her. The weirdest thing is that none of the women, not even Cathy, seem offended. And the men, well, they’re just being men. She’ll have to drink herself comfortable. Follow the trend.

Fail-safe topics such as rugby and weather and poaching enable young and old to mingle. The tide of alcohol waxes, opinions become stronger, laughter loudens.

Selena, Hendrik and Mrs. Mathy stand near to the entrance to the toilets and chat.

“Seven thousand rand,” repeats Hendrik, “That’s bloody incredible.”

“I’ve already spent it all.” Selena is on her third glass of wine.

“Nothing wrong with that.” Mrs. Mathy finishes her second G&T. “I trust your judgement.”

“That’s only because she took Herman off your hands.”

“God no! If that purchase was anything to go by she’ll be taking everything back within a week!” Mrs. Mathy realises that although Hendrik is in stitches, Selena is not used to this sort of humour. “No, seriously now, she does have her head screwed on the right way.”

“I’ll be the judge of that,” says Hendrik, “What did you buy?”

Selena holds her glass out for Ali to refill it. “For you patrol guys, I got a pair of short wave radios—”

“Walkie-talkies?”

“Yes.” She fiddles with a renegade francolin feather which seems to be planning a mutiny. “Was that a good choice?”

“Excellent,” Hendrik says, “Exactly what we needed. We can be in two places at once now.”

Selena smiles and leans against the bar. She crosses her legs. “And I got two pairs of handcuffs, real ones; and a whole lot of stationery – permanent markers, and glue and coloured cardboard – for the people who’re teaching in the schools; and –”

Hendrik cuts her short: “Did you go into Cape Town to get all this?”

“Just Somerset West. To the mall.”

“Sorry, you were saying...”

“Was I?”

“Glue...coloured cardboard?”

“Ah, yes, and forty cans of pepper spray.”

“You see what I mean, Hendrik? Wise beyond her years.”

“I was about to say the same. The pepper spray’s a damned fine idea.” Hendrik helps himself to a Castle from the row he has lined up on the bar. “Maybe it’ll stop the upstarts from bringing their guns on patrol.”

“Maybe.” Mrs. Mathy jerks her head in Wayne’s direction. He is buying a shot of Stroh rum for one of Cathy’s girlfriends. “But some people will never grow up.”

“That *outjie* needs a *bliksem*,” Hendrik explains to Selena, “He moved here a few years ago. Started a satellite dish installation company.”

“Thinks he’s suave. A city slicker.”

“Give me a few drinks,” Selena says, “And I’ll have a word with him. He won’t bring his gun again.”

“Feel free to try. He’ll be a tough nut to crack.”

Their conversation is brought to a halt by the tapping of metal on glass. Ali unplugs the jukebox at the socket. Alf stands on a crate, behind the bar. “I thought it best to get the boring bit out of the way early,” he says, “And I won’t make it long.” Alf holds a beer in one hand, his other is buried firmly in his pocket. “Cathy specifically asked me not to make a speech praising her for her immense beauty and cataloguing all of her wonderful qualities and achievements and, I have to admit, this threw me a bit off kilter: I’d already written something along those lines, and it ran to about ninety seconds.” Alf swigs at his beer in anticipation of the laughter which is, fortunately, forthcoming. “On a more serious note, though, if one were – like me – to have only one child, one could not

hope for anything half as fantastic as Cathy.” Alf pauses, to allow the sighs to subside.

“Cathy has, over the years, humoured my various hopes and plans for her, but in the end she has come through the obstacle course very much her own person.” Alf drinks his beer. “I only wish her mother were here to see her.”

The first kid vomits before anyone has a chance to be sombre. It’s a boy, one of the computer gamers, and he makes it to the bathroom. Not to the toilet itself, but to the bathroom at least. By the time the second wave engulfs him, he has reached the bowl and he kneels in his own puke as he spews a mixture of bile and cider and brandy. The brackish water hardly changes colour. Selena rushes to help him, but Hendrik holds her back. “Don’t get your dress dirty, he can handle himself.”

“Who cares?” Selena grapples with words, “He’s ill.”

“And he won’t be the first, you’ll see.” Selena stares at Hendrik, stupefied. “It’s worse with girls. Their hair gets in the way.” Hendrik laughs. “But Antjie’s an expert, why do you think she’s wearing gumboots?”

Selena had noticed this fact earlier; thought it a bit odd. “You can’t be serious?”

“Dead serious. She’ll have brought rubber gloves and plastic shower caps too.”

“Come off it Hendrik,” Mrs. Mathy reprimands, “The thing about the gumboots is true, but the rest...well, Selena, he’s just pulling your leg.”



Meanwhile, Terrence has been singling out the weakest animal in the herd. Her name is Marlette and she's still standing, with the help of the jukebox, the wall, and her friend Louise. A bottle of cider dangles above the hard tiles, pincered between her thumb and forefinger. The bottle is half full, the cider warm. Marlette is a natural blonde, but her curls are bought. Her Aryan eyes give her wan face its only lustre.

"So," says Terrence, "You surf?" He has read the legend, EDDIE AIKAU – WAIMEA BAY, which is emblazoned across her unleavened breasts.

"Body board," she slurs.

"I used to rollerblade...grew up in Joburg."

"Can't rollerblade on gravel."

"And you can't surf on tarmac."

Louise, who is also drunk, tugs at Marlette's elbow and says, "Let's go speak to Matt and them. They're outside."

Marlette slumps further into the corner between jukebox and wall, and lolls her head in refusal.

"Come on," she pleads, "Some fresh air'll be good for you."

"I like it here." The bottle's neck slips from her grasp and her drink smashes to the floor. She does not even notice as the syrupy flecks of glass splatter her sandaled feet. Louise and Terrence make an effort to clean up the mess, but Antjie rushes in and takes over. She sweeps the broken glass into a battered dustpan and instructs Louise to take her friend to the bathroom. Terrence stands, arms at his sides, for a few seconds, before leaving in search of Chantelle. Marlette is the second person to puke.

Antjie deals with this new crisis as effectively as she did with the first. She scrapes Marlette's hair back and uses the ponytail which has formed as a handle. She soothes her and shoos would-be onlookers away. When Marlette can vomit no more Antjie flushes the toilet and waits for the bowl to empty. Clean water surges in from the cistern but goes no further. Antjie waits for the reassuring gurgle as it empties, but it is not forthcoming. "I thought he'd gone and got the bloody thing fixed," she mumbles to herself as she strokes the girl's goose pimped upper arm.

"I want to go home," Marlette says.

"Don't worry darling," Antjie helps her to her feet and walks her to the basin. "Just wash your face and rinse your mouth out." Antjie runs the hot tap and dabs at Marlette's ashen cheeks with a wad of soggy paper towel. "Your dad'll be here any minute now."

When Marlette is re-humanised Antjie returns her to the care of Louise, who has been waiting at the entrance to the bathroom, and goes in search of Ali. She eventually finds him deep in conversation with Judah. "The toilet's blocked," she blurts out.

Both men are taken off guard by this abrupt interruption, but Judah is the first to gather his thoughts. "I thought you had the Honeysucker here yesterday."

"I did." Ali peels at the label of his beer. "The thing's a complete mare."

"Mare?" asks Antjie.

"Nightmare," Ali says, "A right royal dog show."

"It must be the plumbing," Judah says, "I mean it can't have filled up in a day."

"It's definitely the septic tank. The water table's really high."

“Don’t be ridiculous,” Judah shouts, “I’ll have a look at it right now. I’m sure I’ll be able to fix it.”

“Don’t worry about it.” The label on Ali’s beer tears as his fidgeting shifts up a gear. “Just enjoy yourself tonight...I’ll sort it out tomorrow.”

“I insist.” Judah rolls up his sleeves and puts his beer on the bar with a thud. He walks towards the front door, on his way to the septic tank.

Ali runs after him and grabs him by the sleeve of his shirt as he is descending the steps which lead to the parking lot. “Seriously bru, don’t worry about it.”

“Come on. I won’t be five minutes.”

Ali tightens his grip on Judah, and talks centimetres away from his face: “Leave it alone. I’ll get them to sort it out in the morning.”

“I didn’t realise it was so important to you.”

“I just know it’s not worth trying.”

“Okay, okay. Let’s get another beer.”

“Good idea,” says Ali, “Sorry if I overreacted.”



Mrs. Mathy and Alf stand apart from the throng of people around the jukebox.

“This is getting a bit out of hand.”

Alf looks at his watch and shakes his head. “Half past nine.”

“It’s just a few of them.” Mrs. Mathy drinks her wine. “Kids, *grootbekke* mostly.”

“The usual suspects.”

“Not only... Ali and Judah almost had a fight.”

“What?”

“Ja,” she says, “Antjie was just telling me. Something about the septic tank.”

“Pathetic.”

Mrs. Mathy nods her agreement. “Cathy should open her presents.”

“And?” Alf is unconvinced.

“It’ll slow things down. Give people something else to do.”

“They’re too drunk to care.”

“Not if we turn the music off.”

“They’re outside anyway.” At this point three of the drunker boys come inside and make straight for the bar. Their arms are interlocked at their shoulders, more out of camaraderie than for balance, one hopes. Alf turns to Ali and says, “Tell them you’re out of cider.”

Matt, who is even more red-faced than normal, is at the centre of the phalanx and he surges in front of his flanks, forming a stumbling arrowhead. He counts deliberately on his fingers, and recites his order: “Six Hunter’s Dries, two Savannas and a Black Label.” He looks up from his hands, and tries to meet Ali’s eye. “Please.”

“Who’s the beer for?” asks his right hand man.

“Cathy.” Matt watches as Ali goes to the fridge, but when he returns carrying only the beer in question, Matt is forced to speak: “What ab—”

“There’s no cider...can I get you something else?”

“Um...” Matt looks at his sidekicks. “We’ll have three more of these.” He brandishes the beer. “I’m not sure about the others though.”

At this point Alf taps Matt on the shoulder and says, “Tell everyone to come inside. Cathy’s going to open her presents.”

“Yes, Mr. Pauling.”

Matt does not hear Alf mumble to himself, “Doctor Pauling.”

The onset of relative peace is not immediate, but it is rendered swifter by Hendrik’s boisterous announcements. “Silence!” He puts his fingers in the corners of his mouth and whistles. “Day-corum!” he shouts.

Everyone stands around the table where the presents are stacked. Cathy sits, takes a long gulp of her Black Label, and waits for Mrs. Mathy to hand her a present. Matt and his two friends wince as they sip at their beers. Mrs. Mathy has selected a small, soft-edged rectangular item, which is wrapped in a page of the *Cape Argus* Classifieds. It has no card, or birthday message, but when Cathy tears it open it is obvious who has given it. It is a beaded surfboard leash, with the words, CATHY 18 IRIE, woven, without punctuation, on the ankle-strap. Cathy half-stands to kiss Alexis thank you.

Next, Mrs. Mathy passes her a hard cylindrical object, wrapped in silver cellophane. A matchbox-sized card reads, ‘Happy 18th Cathy! Lots of love Chantelle and Terrence. XOX.’ The synthetic wrapping does not tear easily, and Cathy peels a long lateral strand of sticky tape to open it. It is an aluminium cocktail shaker. A few members of the audience congratulate themselves on having guessed its identity correctly.

Already there is a feeling of impatience, which prompts Mrs. Mathy to hurry the process along. Cathy’s next gift is a pair of plain black, kitten-heeled shoes, from Herman

and Selena. Selena has never skimmed on presents. Cathy's girlfriends clamour to examine the footwear. While they do so, Mrs. Mathy passes Cathy the unwrapped kumquat tree. It is from Antjie, and the card explains, "In ten years time, when you're old enough to care, you'll be able to make the sweetest marmalade. But, if you still don't give a damn, just send the fruit to me!" She also receives an authentic Springbok rugby jersey from all of her schoolmates; a guillotine-like biltong slicer from Hendrik and Elmarie; a bottle of Amarula Cream from Judah; and various other gifts – cosmetics, flowers, chocolates – from those who know her less well.

The final gift is from Mrs. Mathy herself, and she presents it to Cathy in a spreadeagled embrace. It is a dense, soft lump and Cathy knows that it must be some sort of fabric, before she has even opened it. It is a handmade quilt, which features blue and white prints of crudely etched shells and dolphins; mountain and seascapes; fishermen and surfers. While Cathy thanks Mrs. Mathy, who did some of the linocuts herself, the group disbands and launches a bullring attack on the bathroom and the bar. Ali cuts the two-pronged manoeuvre short by standing on the bar and ringing the bell which is normally used to signal the last round. "Cathy!" he shouts, "Get yourself up here, I've—" Before he has a chance to complete his sentence, Cathy has been deposited on the bar by the surging swell of people. Ali holds a full beer glass in one hand, his other hand is hidden behind his back. "Cathy, happy birthday." He gives her the beer and she downs it in one awe-inspiring gulp, to the surprise and approval of everyone present. "And welcome back..." He presents her with a black barmaid's apron and a corkscrew. "To Ali's Cackle. We've missed you." Everybody cheers as Ali lowers Cathy down to the

staff side of the bar, and she ceremoniously takes her first orders. She has lost none of her speed or vitality, and she spends the next hour or so manning the bar alone.

The party gets a second wind. Ali selects an album entitled, 20 FAVOURITE GOLDEN OLDIES, on the jukebox and couples start to *sokkie*. Hendrik dances with Elmarie, his right hand prudently positioned in the middle of her back, his left arm straight, like the boom of a yacht. Selena persuades Herman to partner her, and he realises that it's far easier when you can't see what you're doing. Mrs. Mathy and Ali start a crocodile, which is soon thirty strong. They call Cathy from her station behind the bar, and dance around her, singing, "For she's a jolly good fellow," as they go.

Chantelle and Terrence drink tequilas at the bar, while Alf rounds up Cathy's school friends who are being fetched by Marlette's father, in his kombi, at 11.30. Four of them, two boys and two girls, have vomited while the remaining six are all on the verge of doing so. Alf eventually succeeds in corralling them on the *stoep* and by the time Mr. Botha arrives, at 11.50, they are passed out in a sprawled clump. Alf goes to the car to greet him. "Sorry about this."

"No, we warned Lettie to be careful," he mumbles, "And I'm sure the other parents spoke to their kids." He lights a cigarette and offers the box of Rothmans to Alf, who refuses with an open palm and a shake of the head. "I'm sorry I'm so late. There was a roadblock."

"Drunken driving?"

"That's what I thought at first." He takes a long, meaningful drag on his cigarette. "I was *kakking* a bit." He laughs. "But it wasn't even the traffic pigs."

"Really?"

“Ja, it was a army thing,” he says, “They had Caspers and everything.”

“Perlemoen, right?”

“They spent twenty minutes searching my car.”

“One person in a kombi in the middle of the night, I guess you fit the bill.”

“Definitely.” He drops his *stompie* and stamps it out with his heel. He lights another cigarette. “I tried to explain where I was going, but they wasn’t interested.”

“Good thing they weren’t...it’s about time they cracked the whole transport network.”

“I know. It’s a *blerrie* mystery how they get rid of the stuff.”

“I’ve a hunch they offload it at sea.”

“What? You mean straight onto a ship?”

“It’s the only thing I can think of.”

“Maybe you’re right...either way they’re a *klomp* of sneaky *skelms*.”

“If I ever find out—” Just as Alf’s voice nears a crescendo, one of the boys on the *stoep* begins to snore. “Anyway,” he mutters, “You’d better get these youngsters home. I’m sorry about the state they’re in.”

“They don’t look too strong, hey?”

“They’re not...it all happened so quickly that by the time I tried to stop—”

“Don’t worry,” Mr. Botha interrupts Alf, “I don’t think they’ll be doing it again in a hurry.”

“Ask Antjie about that one...she seemed to have seen it all before.” Alf chuckles.

“She was incredible.”

"I mean back when we..." He looks at the other man, and realises that Alf is almost a generation older than him. "When I was young, we didn't get this *dronk*, did we?"

"I don't know. There were always a few guys who did, but the girls weren't this bad," Alf's voice drops a notch in volume, "I think they want equality or something."

"Well they're not going to get it like that." He looks at his daughter, sprawled agape on top of Louise. "It's tough. She's our biggest."

"Cathy seems okay, but then..." Alf scratches at his elbow. "Maybe she grew up before I realised."

"Anyway, I'd better get them home." He walks over to Marlette and lifts her limp body over his shoulder. As he lays her down on a mattress in the boot, he speaks: "Thanks for having her."

Alf joins Mr. Botha in getting the children into the vehicle; a job which is surprisingly easier than expected. Although a few of them, including Matt, need to be carried, the majority are able to walk (with a little help) to the car. When the kombi is fully laden, Mr. Botha gets into his seat, rolls down the window, and shouts to Alf: "It's even worse than carrying shucked *perlies*!"

As Alf watches the kombi drive away, he stands on the *stoep* and listens to the merriment which continues inside. He lights the cigar which he has saved ever since he quit smoking, and goes inside to ask his daughter for a dance.



The next morning Selena wakes early, as always. She slips out of bed, but before she has even reached the cupboard Herman speaks: "Wait. Don't go."

"You scared me."

"Sorry," he groans, "Don't go."

She returns to the bed, sits next to Herman, and holds his head in her hands. "Are you okay?"

"Feel like I've been run over by a train."

"You weren't that drunk."

"With a *babbalas* like this I must have been."

"You didn't act like it."

"You probably weren't the best judge of that."

"I was definitely sober," Selena says, "By the end of the night."

"Soberer."

"How would you know?"

"Ag, let's just drop it. Who cares?"

"Why don't you go down to your room? Get some sleep."

"Why?"

"Chantelle and Terrence. We don't want them to get the wrong idea."

"They won't wake up till lunch."

"Just to be safe."

"We've got nothing to hide."

"I know, but..."

“Where you going?”

“To the garden.”

“Why d’you always do that?”

“I like it,” she says, “Do you mind?”

“I’d like to wake up next to you sometimes.” He runs his hands through her hair, gently loosening the nocturnal knots.

“It’s just that I love admiring your work.”

“Don’t go.”

“I’ve got a better idea.”

“What?” He rubs at his eyes.

“Why don’t you come with me?”

“What? And admire my own work?”

“Yes,” she says, “Why not?”

“Wouldn’t that be a bit narcissistic?”

Selena has read Ovid. “No. You’d be more like Pygmalion.”

Herman is confused and his head hurts. He says nothing.

Selena continues, “Which would make me...” She knows she should say ‘Narcissus,’ but she can’t bring herself to. “Galatea.”

Herman prefers not to understand. “Why don’t we go for a walk?” he says, “On the beach.”

They wear warm clothes, without shoes. Selena leads Herman downstairs, in spite of the fact that he can easily navigate himself, and outside. They walk through the garden, passing the ring of sculptures, and along the path which bisects the thick strip of *palmiet*

and leads to the sea. The pebbles, crushed shells and *duiweltjies* cut at their sleep-softened feet. Just before the path reaches the beach, there is a vicious band of serrated rock and they walk as if on knives. Eventually they arrive at what Herman referred to as the beach. It is, in fact, a steep slope scattered with stones the size of rugby balls, and clumps of grass. Dried out, weightless kelp forms an unsightly fringe at the high water mark. The beach extends no more than fifty or sixty metres along the coastline, in a tight crescent, before reaching the jagged promontories which separate it from its similar neighbours. Herman and Selena walk on the contour path just above the beach. They hold hands but the narrow track does not allow them to walk abreast. Herman drags behind her, clasping her maimed hand; remembering their first meeting.

Their pace slows as they pick their way through one of the many rocky coppices which separate the coastline into bays. Selena is careful to lead Herman along the path of least resistance, but still he stumbles.

If she hadn't been paying such careful attention to the terrain, Selena would probably have walked straight past the bevelled metal edge which protrudes from the foliage next to the path. She picks it up and it is cold and moist in spite of the morning sun. It is a lever of sorts, a smooth length of steel forged into an ellipse, with tightly wound twine for a handle. "What's this?" She passes the object to Herman.

He runs his fingers along its length, before scraping its edge against his stubble. Finding it dull, he tosses it from hand to hand before letting it dangle from the twine loop which is an extension of the handle. "It's a perlemoen spanner," he announces.

"Spanner?" She associates the word with mechanics.

"That's what they call it. I suppose it's more of a lever though."

“Who’s they? Poachers?”

“These days, ja...but really anyone who dives perlemoen.”

“And what do *they* use it for?”

“To get them off the rocks.”

Selena realises that although she has been campaigning for these creatures for the past couple of months, she actually knows very little about them. She’s seen their empty shells, and even the shucked meat, she knows a bit about their habitat and their importance to the ecosystem, but she’s never even thought about something as simple as how they’re collected.

Herman continues without being prompted, “Perlemoen live in very turbulent places – they need the movement of water to survive – so they have to stick themselves to rocks, like limpets.”

Selena knows this, but still she says nothing.

“They suck on to the rocks with so much force that you have to use a spanner to get them off.”

She breaks her silence: “How?”

Herman demonstrates with the spanner. “You take this end.” He taps at the smooth, slightly tapered point. “And you pry it in between the *perlie*’s foot and the rock.” He presses his hand against his thigh, and forces the spanner beneath it. “Like so.” Then, when you’ve got it in nice and deep.” He pushes the spanner until the handle presses against his hand. “You just flip it off.” He bores the point of the spanner into the flesh of his quadriceps and lifts the handle, at the same time allowing his hand to fall away from his leg. “It takes a bit of practice.”

“Isn’t it bad for them?”

“With a spanner like this...” Herman smacks the steel object into the palm of his hand. “Not really. But most of the poachers are using knives or screwdrivers, which rip into the flesh.”

“I suppose it doesn’t matter anyway.” Selena has been told of the poachers’ indiscriminate plundering of juvenile perlemoen.

“No. Not anymore.”

Selena takes Herman’s hand again. “Let’s go back.”

“Ja. Let’s.”

Selena leads Herman back along the path, which is now dappled with sunlight. After a minute or so she speaks: “What are you going to do with that?”

“What?” He stops, swivels his head, and finally allows his hand to flop under the weight of the spanner. “Oh, this.”

Selena giggles her assent.

“I can’t just leave it here.” He takes her hand and they resume walking. “I thought I’d give it to Ali.” Herman can hear only Selena’s breathing. “It’s a nice spanner.”

“What’ll he use it for?”

“Maybe someday they’ll sort these poachers out, and we’ll be able to dive *perlies* again.” Herman turns to face the sea. “We used to go quite often.”

Selena puts her hands around Herman’s waist, stands on tiptoes, and whispers over his shoulder, “I’m sure he’ll be able to use it sometime.”

They walk back to the house in silence and Herman, upon Selena’s insistence, showers first. She sits, circled by the ring of sculptures, and waits for him to finish.

Selena is happy to have Chantelle and Terrence to cater for. She'll make them a nice big lunch before they leave for Cape Town later this afternoon. It'll take her mind off everything.

The sculptures relax her and she goes over today's menu in her mind. A *porcini* mushroom risotto; a baked vegetable salad; and tuna steaks in coriander. She's looking forward to slicing the vegetables. The monotony of peeling onions; removing the pips from peppers; cutting the ends off beans and zucchini; dicing *melanzane*...all of this is therapeutic to her.

Herman shouts from his bedroom, "You can shower now."



Chantelle and Terrence have to be woken for lunch.

"God!" Chantelle says, "I need a ciggy."

"Ja, me too." Terrence turns to Selena. "Is there time?"

"It'll keep."

"Thanks. I think I might just die without a smoke." Chantelle laughs as they make their way into the garden.

When the couple returns, the plates are dished up and Herman and Selena are seated. "Oh my word!" says Chantelle, "You didn't have to do this."

"I enjoy cooking. Now let's eat."

The food is, as usual, magnificent, although Herman can't help but wonder if it isn't wasted on his sister. With the amount she smokes and drinks her taste buds must be pretty shot. Nothing quite like a square meal to sort out a hangover, though.

"Jeez this is good." Terrence takes another spoonful of risotto.

Selena who is at the stove, braising the tuna steaks, doesn't bother to respond.

"When you guys leaving?" asks Herman.

"Quite soon, I think. Terrence has an essay to write."

"When's it for?"

"Yesterday." Terrence laughs. "A mate of mine just SMSed me."

"What's it on?"

"Some crap about fishing quotas or something." Terrence helps himself to more risotto.

"Oh," Selena says, "Are you studying science?"

"No way." Terrence tugs at his blonde fringe. "I'm doing accounting...it's just this bullshit general course they make everyone do in first year."

Selena takes the tuna steaks from the pan, lays them on a platter and brings them to the table. The quality of the food puts paid to the conversation. Their collective hangover ensures that not a scrap is left over.

After lunch Chantelle and Terrence have another cigarette in the garden, before packing their bags and leaving. Chantelle promises to visit again. Selena wishes Terrence luck with his essay. Once they have driven away, she removes their *stompies* from the lawn.

Two Days in September

The southeaster has been blowing for six days. Herman remembers, years ago, eleven days of non-stop gale force winds. The wind works its way into everything. Beach sand collects under carpets and against walls and in hair and ears. It is too windy to cycle; to fly flags; to speak on a cell phone; to sail; to keep hair parted. Houses become alive: roof tiles and window panes shudder; doors swing and slap, eventually slamming; curtains wrestle with potted cacti and birds in cages; washing dries quickly but impales itself upon fences. Residents must make the choice between stuffy suffocation or bracing redistribution of goods. In time – usually after three or four days of unabated interference – when the wind has disrupted every physical aspect of Betty's Bay, it works its way under the skin of the locals. It whirrs around the empty spaces between cranium and brain, battering cochlea and swelling sinuses. People make rash decisions: they steam clean shower doors; dismantle defunct barometers; cut dogs' toenails and make jigsaw puzzles.

"Let's take my car for a spin."

"Which car?" says Selena.

"Have you never seen my car?"

"No."

"It's at my mom's house."

"Where do you want to go?"

“I don’t know.” Herman runs his hands through his hair. “Just get out of the house.”

“At last.”

“It’ll be good for her, too.”

“Who?”

“Skank,” he pauses, “The car.”

“You named your car?”

“You haven’t met her.”

They waste no time and Selena drives them to Herman’s mother’s house. The wind has drained the colour from the sun and it is a white disc against the dry, blue sky.

Skank is in the garage, covered by a tarpaulin. They pull it off and Herman bundles it carelessly and tosses it in the corner. Skank requires jump-starting, but once the engine is running you could never tell that she hasn’t been used for months. The upholstery smells of bait and the floor is coated with sand. Herman imagines Selena’s wounded hand against the black plastic of the gear-knob.

When they reach Clarence Drive Selena speaks: “Where are we going?”

“The coast road. The wind mightn’t be as strong there.”

She turns left and they travel in silence. Herman can visualise each corner, cliff and bay from the grate and grind of the engine as his car negotiates the winding road. He can also tell that Selena, like everyone who has not driven Clarence Drive often, is taking the journey slowly.

Selena clutches onto the steering wheel with both hands as she rounds the tight bends. False Bay, below her, is a whipped meringue. The wind whistles through the old car's air vents. "It's just as windy here," she says.

Herman nods.

They stop at one of the viewpoints along the way. The wind is so strong on the exposed mountainside that they can barely stand.

"Maybe I'll see a whale."

"Not with the wind like this."

Selena says nothing.

"A blow spout wouldn't even make it out of the water."

"I guess."

"We may as well go home."

"It's getting dark."

They go back the way they came and the panels of the car groan as it grapples with the pitted road to their house. Selena turns the engine off and they sit, seatbelts on, in the darkness. "I like your car," she says.

"So do I." Herman unclips his seatbelt and listens as the buckle clunks into the metal door on the way up to its repository. He visualises the metallic scuff-marks left in the green duco of the door by years of such collisions. "She's been through a lot."

"The other night, when you came home drunk..."

Herman shifts in his seat.

"...You were different."

"I wanted to sculpt you."

“But?”

“But I couldn’t.” He swallows, but his mouth is dry. “You have to try to fight it.”

“What?”

“Attraction. Sculpting is personal.”

“I know. I can feel it.”

“But it’s important to suppress it.”

“Why?”

“Your art suffers.”

“Suffers?”

“There’s a fine line between sentimentality and understanding.”

“You get sentimental when you’re drunk?”

Herman nods. “I do things I shouldn’t.”

“I’m not cross with you.”

“I’m cross with myself.”

“I know.”

“It was unfair. You need support.”

“You’re harsh on yourself.”

“It’s natural when things go wrong.”

Selena isn’t quite sure what he means by this. “Do you always feel like that?”

“Like what?”

“Like when you came home that night.”

“I try not to.”

“I’ve been trying not to for too long.”

“What does that mean?”

Selena leans over but her seatbelt holds her back.

Herman's hair stands on end and he fingers the door handle.

Selena unclips her seatbelt and she kisses him. The rear-view mirror is knocked skywards and the sculptures on the dashboard topple to the floor. She bites his lip softly. She takes off her left shoe, and extricates that leg from her jeans. She does not bother with the other leg and leaves the garment bunched around her right foot. She clambers onto his lap as quickly as the steering wheel will allow. Herman runs his hand down her arched back, starting at the wispy hairs which grow on her neck and following the knobbly path which separates her sharp shoulder blades until he reaches the T-junction of her underwear. Here he lingers, stroking and kneading her coccyx. She gasps and straightens her back, pressing herself against the cold brass buckle of his belt.

The car rocks just like in the cartoons.



The following day, Mrs. Mathy's routine is unchanged. She wakes, without an alarm, at 6.30. She breakfasts and walks to the gallery, via the café, where she buys the *Cape Times* which Garth has set aside for her. From there she walks along the path which cuts across the veld and leads to her gallery. The wind has stopped just as abruptly as it begun and the sound of birds chirruping is as ceaseless as an uncoiled bicycle wheel. She

lets herself in and goes straight to her desk. She has an hour to read the paper before she opens the gallery.

Poaching is in the news again. As soon as one story makes the papers all the others follow. Brief summaries or 'see page 7s' are placed at the end of larger articles. Thus, in one newspaper, on one day, Mrs. Mathy is able to glean more about poaching than has been possible in the past few months.

The story which elicits this spate of coverage is, naturally, sensational: a poacher in Gansbaai has been attacked by a great white shark. He is missing, and suspected dead. The article explains that the man in question and two of his 'associates' were swimming – going by boat would be too conspicuous – out to an area known as Shark Alley. The witnesses report that suddenly their friend disappeared and the water thrashed red. Fearing for their lives, they abandoned him and swam back to shore. "I'll go back to selling samoosas," said one of the men, "The money may be worse, but poaching is just too dangerous." Or at least that was how the newspaper translated what he said.

It's all very sad, Mrs. Mathy reflects, in spite of the stupidity of the men: they *were* swimming in an area which is known for its commercial cage diving ventures and shark baiting practices, after all. It's tragic that they were forced to do so, every way you look at it. People shouldn't have to swim hundreds of metres offshore to find perlemoen; people shouldn't be forced to abandon jobs they and their fathers and their fathers' fathers have done for years; the cage dive operators shouldn't be creating false concentrations of sharks; perlemoen shouldn't be so damned desirable...what's wrong with Viagra anyway?

They're invading Iraq; they're holding people in Guantanamo Bay for nothing more than having beards; Israel is building a wall through Palestine; and then there's the forgotten war in the DRC; the rainforests; the Patagonian toothfish; suicide bombers ...but news is worse when it's closer to home. Mrs. Mathy doesn't know why she bothers to read the papers.

The knock-on articles are not as exciting and they deal with routine police work and courtroom activity. A pair of men were arrested near Port Elizabeth with 564 shucked, and probably undersized, perlemoen. Police received an anonymous tip off and set up a road block on the N2, 30 kilometres beyond Humansdorp. The men are set to appear in court on Monday. Another item mentions that the suspects arrested after the police were tipped off by the 'ladies of the Betty's Bay anti-poaching group, RAPP,' have been sentenced, in the Caledon Magistrate's Court, to six months each, suspended for two years.

The final related piece of information is a ridiculous article admonishing the staff of a well known Waterfront restaurant for charging R700 for a serving of perlemoen in lemon butter. "'When I looked on the menu and saw SQ,' moaned a customer, 'I knew it wouldn't be cheap, but I mean seven hundred rand is exorbitant.'" The article is wholehearted in its defence of the customer and it even quotes a spokesman for the city's tourism office, "'If restaurants continue this kind of practice they will compromise their livelihood by frightening tourists away from the Cape.'" What is this world coming to? Mrs. Mathy asks herself. If someone is prepared to order an item labelled SQ without asking its price they deserve to be charged through the roof. Don't they know what SQ stands for?

These days even the frivolous articles in the paper are an indictment on humanity. She'll have to do the crossword, but even that's become nothing more than a test of synonyms.

As Mrs. Mathy pencils in the word DETER (it could be DELAY for all she knows) in response to the clue, 'to put off (5),' there is a knock on the door. She looks at her watch: 9.10. She should have opened already. "Who is it?" she shouts, as she fiddles with the various deadbolts and Yale locks and Trelidors.

"It's me." The voice is raspy. "Ali."

"Oh, that's lucky." Mrs. Mathy sighs as she finally succeeds in opening the various barricades. "I thought it was a customer."

"You'd rather see me, then?"

"The paper's put me in a bit of a mood," Mrs. Mathy says, "I'm not sure I'm fit for public consumption."

Her laughter is cut short by Ali: "What's happened? I haven't seen the paper."

"A poacher got eaten by a shark at Gansbaai."

"Fuck."

"He was swimming in Shark Alley."

"Idiot." Ali sucks his tongue against the back of his front teeth. "Serves him right really."

"I don't know. He's a victim of circumstances," Mrs. Mathy says, "It makes me sick to the core."

"It's why I don't read the papers."

"I like to know what's going on, but the reason I moved here was to put some distance between myself and the news." Mrs. Mathy takes her beret from her head. "I mean Betty's is meant to be a quiet little holiday town."

"It'll blow over. It always does."

"Hope you're right."

"Don't worry...soon everyone will have forgotten Betty's Bay even exists." Ali's voice fades away towards the end of the sentence, before resuming at volume: "Anyway I was just on my way to your son's house."

"Oh. That's nice. You two don't see enough of each other."

"I'm taking him fishing." Ali looks out of the window at the flat sea which meets the slate grey sky at a darker seam. "The *steenbras* might be biting."

A man in an olive suit with no tie walks into the gallery. Ali excuses himself, leaving Mrs. Mathy to deal with her customer.

The new arrival wastes no time. "I'm from a chain of curio shops – mmmZantsi Trading – based in Johannesburg," the close-cropped man says, "We're always on the lookout for new products." He has a boyish face with a permanent sheen of stubble. His hairline is low, his eyebrows high.

Mrs. Mathy reaches for her crossword puzzle. "Have a look around." She gestures towards the adjoining rooms. "Let me know if you see anything you like."

Mrs. Mathy hears the man picking his way awkwardly through the gallery. She hears sculptures wobble; doors open and close hastily; and a cry of, "Shit!" as what must be a block mounted oil topples from a stack. She sits at her small desk in what used to be the house's kitchen. His footsteps approach along the passageway.

“Thank you.” He does not make eye contact. “I’ll be off.” As he is leaving he turns on his heels and points at Mrs. Mathy’s chest. “Where’d you get that?”

“What?” She jumps at his question and breaks the lead of her pencil in the process.

“That pendant,” he says, “The mother of pearl one.”

“Oh this.” Mrs. Mathy thumbs the oval piece of polished perlemoen shell which hangs around her neck. “At the fête.”

“Who made it?”

“I’m not sure.” She searches in her drawer and eventually removes a pencil sharpener. “One of the ladies I guess.”

“My company might be interested in them. Could I get your number?”

“Take a card.” She motions towards the lino-cut cards which are housed in a *découpage* box on her desk. He takes one and leaves his own card, which is two-toned silver and black, and printed on matt cardboard.

Mrs. Mathy shouts, “Goodbye.”

He shuts the front door behind him.

It’s obviously going to be one of those days when the gallery is continually busy, because Selena’s voice fills the room even before the man’s car has started. “Who was that?”

“Just a buyer from some curio chain.”

“Oh.” Selena peers through the sculptures on the windowsill and watches as he gets into his car “What did he want?”

“Nothing from *my* shop.” Mrs. Mathy rubs frantically to erase an incorrect answer. “But he was interested in this.” She holds the pendant up.

“Really? But that’s from the fête.”

“That’s right.”

“We could sell them.” Selena’s eyes light up. “Make money for RAPP.”

“Shit. Sorry,” Mrs. Mathy says, “I hadn’t thought of it like that.” She gets up and turns the kettle on. “He left his card here. You want tea?”

Selena shakes her head. “Where’s that card?”

“There.” She shrugs. “On the desk.”

Selena is already at the desk and she finds it easily. “Murray Whiting,” she reads, “I’ll have to give him a call.” She puts the card in her slim suede handbag.

“You sure you don’t want tea?”

“I just had coffee,” Selena says, “Thanks.”

“What brings you here?” Mrs. Mathy puts the newspaper in the drawer and faces Selena.

“I’m going in to Somerset West for the morning, ’cause Herman’s fishing with Ali. Thought you might want something from the shops.”

“Can’t think of anything.” Mrs. Mathy fills a mug with boiling water and stirs the bobbing teabag. “If I change my mind I’ll call you on your cell.”

“Okay.” Selena takes her handbag from the desk, slings it over her shoulder and walks out of the door. The daisies which flank the path – blue and white and yellow and orange – are only half open in the pale sunlight, but the *keurbome* are sprinkled with deep purple flowers. She’s making a point of taking the time to notice such things. She drives

away, eager at the prospect of raising funds – and public recognition – for RAPP. Before she has even reached the petrol station, her cell phone rings. It's Mrs. Mathy asking for a punnet of strawberries.



As Ali is about to turn left into Herman's driveway he notices Selena waiting in the oncoming lane. He flashes his lights to usher her in. Their homecomings could not have been more synchronised. Ali offloads Herman's fishing tackle; rinses his reel, bait board and knife thoroughly under the tap; scrubs the sand and bait off his tackle box and deposits them all in the garage. Herman hovers next to him, eager to help, but Ali persuades him to go and have a shower. "I'll help her carry the shopping in," he says.

Selena has filled her car to the brim, and the boot, the back seat and even the passenger seat are laden with bags.

"Where did you guys go fishing?" Selena asks, "You normally come from the other direction."

"Palmiet." Ali puts a bag containing toilet paper and dishwasher powder and deodorant on the table. "The beach in front of the lagoon."

"Oh." Selena bends down to pack the vegetable trays in the fridge. "I've never even been that far."

“We had to collect prawns on the mudflats anyway.” Ali heads towards to the car to get another load. He shouts out over his shoulder: “And it’s normally quite good for *steenbras*.”

When Ali returns with the last of the shopping, Selena has a question waiting for him: “Did you catch anything?”

“No *steenbras*.” Ali struggles under the weight of a bag of fertiliser. “But Herman caught a huge skate.”

“What’s that?” Selena has moved to the pantry and is unpacking what seems to be an interminable supply of pasta.

“It’s kind of like a ray. They give a really good fight ’cause they’re flat.” Ali stretches his arms out and makes a squelching sound by sucking the saliva in his mouth towards his throat. “They stick to the bottom.”

“Did you keep it?”

“You can eat the wings,” says Ali, “But I don’t have time for all the preparation.”

A cold, gentle rain has begun to fall and the mountains behind them are the shiny white of an overexposed photograph. Herman emerges from the shower; his hair, which is getting long now, still glistening wet.

“I’d better go clean myself up too.” Ali smells his hands and grimaces. “Got a really busy day ahead.”

“What’s got into you?” Herman calls from the top of the stairs, “You never used to work so hard.”

“Times are tough, and I’ve got to get stuff sorted for the holidays...if I don’t make money then, it’s overs.”

Herman joins Selena in the kitchen once Ali has left. "I really don't get it," he says, "He's always busy."

"He's only trying to make a living."

"I guess." Herman puts his arms around Selena's waist. "How was your day?"

"Good." Selena turns and kisses Herman on the neck. "A guy came into your mom's shop who was interested in the perlemoen necklaces."

"Which ones?"

"From the fête, remember?"

"That's great...we can sell them for RAPP."

"Exactly what I thought."

"Have you spoken to him?"

"I'm going to call him now."

"We can package them nicely, with a whole blurb about perlemoen poaching," Herman thinks out loud, "I could even carve a whole lot of different shapes...dolphins and penguins. Tortoises. Frogs for you...we could make a killing."

Selena has never seen Herman this enthusiastic (apart from when he's sculpting her, of course) and she likes what she sees. It must be the fishing that's done it to him: he always tells her how much he misses it. She has a good feeling about this project. Maybe they will be able to buy that boat after all...

"Where can we get the shells?" she asks.

"Pick them up on the beach. The poachers just dump them in the sea."

"True," she mumbles, "I wasn't thinking. Anyway, let me phone this guy, um...Murray Whiting."

“Ja.” Herman is making rudimentary animal shapes out of plasticine, which he knows will be easy to carve. It reminds him of art classes at the centre in Worcester.

“You do that.”

When Selena phones Murray, he is in Hermanus scouting out the contents of the craft market next to the Old Harbour. “I’m so glad you called...the lady in the gallery didn’t give me much hope.”

“Sorry about that, she wasn’t herself. You’ll see.”

“Now the only thing is,” he leaves the last word hanging for an extra beat or two, “I’ve got to be back in Joburg this evening.”

“When’s your flight?”

“Six.” Selena hears the rustle of paper. “Actually, quarter to.”

“Mmm...that gives us a couple of hours. Can you come round now?”

“I was going to go through to Stanford, but ja, just let me finish up here and I’ll be with you in an hour or so.”

Selena rushes to organise everything for Murray’s arrival. She hasn’t even mentioned RAPP to him; she’ll have to give him something to eat; and he’ll have to meet with the ladies who made the pendants. She phones Alf first: he’s got to fetch Cathy from school, but if she can come along he can be at her house by ten past three. Antjie is second on the list: she’ll come a bit early and help Selena get everything ready. Catering won’t be a problem either...she’ll bring one of the banana loaves she baked this morning and she can pick up a *melktert* from the deli on the way. With people like this, Selena thinks to herself, RAPP could go far. Maybe this is their big chance. The last person she phones is Elmarie.

Oom Hendrik answers, and hands her over to his wife. “That’s wonderful,” she coos, “So exciting...now let me see if I’ve still got any.” She puts the handset down with a clunk. She’s back on the line: “There are about ten here, I’ll bring them with me. See you at three.”

Selena marvels at the ease with which everything has fallen into place. There really is nothing for her to do other than spruce her house up.

Herman has just finished moulding a tailing whale when he realises he hasn’t had any lunch. He makes himself a cheese and tomato sandwich, while Selena sprays and wipes and scrubs behind him. He is sure to put everything he uses back where it belongs.



Alf arrives with Cathy just as Murray is being shown inside by the posse of women. Once everyone is seated inside Selena and Cathy take orders for tea and coffee, while Antjie gets proceedings underway with Murray. “I know Selena didn’t mention it to you,” she says, “But we’re actually a charity.”

“Oh.” Murray shows no sign of concern as he helps himself to a buttered slice of banana loaf. “For what?”

“You must be aware of the perlemoen poaching problem.”

“I was reading about the shark attack just this morning—”

“There’s a lot more to it than that,” says Alf.

"I know." Murray takes his tea from Selena. "One of my colleagues has a brother who lives down here."

"Who?" the locals chorus.

"His name's Samson, his brother's Jeho..." he cuts himself short, "I mean, um, Judah, that's it. Judah."

There is a moment of shocked silence, before Herman speaks: "Of course," he explains to everyone except Murray, "He's why Judah got so into that whole advertising vibe."

The locals laugh.

"And then Judah did the same to Ali," Cathy adds.

"God ja." Herman laughs. "He was telling me all about his happy hour."

"Can I just point out." Murray puts his teacup down on the table and leans his elbows on his knees. "That Samson is our marketing manager."

"We don't doubt it," Antjie says, "But may *I* point out that you clearly don't know Judah." At this, everyone – including Murray – laughs.

It is the man from Johannesburg who speaks next: "Anyway..." He looks at his watch. "Let's get down to business."

"Sorry," Selena picks up where Antjie left off, "We're a charity, and we'd like to package every necklace with a little note about our organisation." She looks expectantly at Murray.

"I don't see any problem with that." He leans back in his seat. "As long as you understand that we're a business, and..." He raises his left hand and rubs his thumb against his index finger. "We've got to make a profit."

“Of course,” Selena says, “I’m sure customers will be more sympathetic to something in aid of a good cause, though.”

“Market research does suggest so.” Murray wipes a crumb from his mouth. “We could call it a win-win situation.”

Nobody knows what to say to this, but eventually Herman speaks: “I came up with some designs.” He leans forward and gives Murray the beer carton which is home to his plasticine models. “We could have a whole range.”

“I like the way you think.” Murray prods at the tortoise which occupies the bottom left corner of the box. “I’m really fond of the whale...wonderful things, I was just in Hermanus now, the tourists go wild for them.”

Herman says nothing. He doesn’t like this man. He doesn’t trust anyone who’s overly enamoured with money...or whales, for that matter: it’s just such a cop out, everyone loves whales, and dolphins and penguins. The last two he can understand, but whales? They just look like big, black rocks. Occasionally they flip up a fin or stick their tails out of the water, but the amount of people, foreigners, who come all the way to the Overstrand just to see the whales...he knows nobody agrees with him, but it’s always pissed him off. He doesn’t say anything because he knows his opinions won’t help their cause.

Whilst Herman daydreams the others conclude their business: “Selena,” Murray says, “I may as well liaise with you.”

Everyone nods.

“I’ll give your number to the marketing department and you guys can discuss the wording of the message and the packaging of the product.”

“Perfect.” Selena turns to face Antjie. “D’you think you could oversee the actual production?”

“For sure. I’ll try and get some ladies from the squatter camp.”

“Brilliant!” Murray rubs his hands together. “This is a marketer’s dream.”

“That about settles it.” Selena looks to Murray for confirmation.

He nods. “If everything goes according to plan, they should be on sale in a couple of months, well before the Christmas rush.”

“I hadn’t thought of that.”

Murray looks at his watch for the second time. “Time flies,” he says as he stands up, “It’s been a pleasure.” He offers his hand to all who want to shake it. “I’ve got a plane to catch.” And with that, he disappears in his rented 4x4.

New Ground

All ten of the men qualify as volunteer Sea Fisheries Inspectors. They have a celebratory drink at Ali's Cackle after the awards ceremony. They are the only customers, and Ali brings them their round promptly. Once he has made sure that everyone has a drink, he addresses the group: "If you don't mind, I'm going to finish up with my stocktaking."

They nod and murmur their approval.

"Just let me know when you need another round." Ali closes the door to the storeroom.

In spite of the fact that it's meant to be spring, a massive storm has set in. Almost no wind accompanies it, and it seems destined to rain itself out. Weak rolls of thunder can be heard in the distance.

"Maybe they'll shelve the water restrictions." Garth looks to the ceiling. The rain, torrential though it is, is no match for Ali's roof repairs and the room is dry but cold.

"We'll need about a month more of this." Hendrik gestures towards the portholes just below the ceiling. "Before they do that."

Everyone knows that Hendrik is right. The Western Cape's dams are alarmingly empty this year. Wayne breaks the silence: "At least it'll keep the poachers out of the water."

"Water restrictions?" asks Marthinus.

"No man." He laughs. "The weather."

"I don't know, hey, it's not that rough out there."

"It's bloody freezing."

"They don't care," says Wayne, "They wear four wetsuits at a time."

"Serious?"

"Didn't you know?"

"Surely not in this weather..."

"How would I know?"

"Come off it." Hendrik drains what is left of his brandy. "Ali!" he shouts, "Get us another drink."

"I'm coming. Give me a sec." When Ali emerges his forehead glistens with sweat.

"Thirsty work?" Hendrik leans against the bar.

"Tell me about it."

"Give us another round." Hendrik points at the table where the men are seated.

"And make mine a triple." While Ali is getting their order, Hendrik continues: "We were just saying...in weather like this, surely the poachers won't be operating..."

"Hell no!" says Ali, "I mean, I wouldn't think so."

"Exactly what I was saying," says Hendrik as he takes his brandy from the tray which Ali carries.

Once every man is furnished with a drink, Ali returns to the storeroom and the Fisheries Inspectors resume their conversation. "So," says Garth, "We're agreed the poachers won't be out in this weather?"

Hendrik chuckles. "If they are, they can have the bloody perlemoen." He raises his glass. "I'm staying put."

Everyone else laughs in agreement. "At least that's decided," says Marthinus, who remains true to form.

"I think we should split up into groups of two," suggests Garth.

"That's what the lecturer said," Wayne says.

"I know. I just meant we should choose pairs now."

"Good idea," says Hendrik, "I'll go with..." He struggles to remember the runt's name. "Wayne."

Once Wayne has been taken out of the picture, the other pairs form naturally. The men have known each other for years and they understand the undercurrents which make up the smooth surface of their community.

"We'll go out as soon as the weather clears."

Everyone nods.

"Good idea," says Marthinus.

Once they have finished their drinks, most of the men are ready to leave. They have wives and children to get back to. Supper will already have to be a bit late. They gather around the doorway, and pause to put their windcheaters and raincoats on. Wayne shouts to Ali to come, but when his call remains unanswered he turns to the other men and says, "What the hell is he doing back there?"

"Stocktaking," Marthinus says, "Don't you remember?"

"I'm gonna go get him."

"Why don't you just call him again?"

There is no stopping Wayne, though, and he walks around behind the bar and makes for the ribbed pine door to the storeroom. As he puts his hand on the chrome handle the door opens. "Oh." Wayne takes a step back. "There you are."

Ali says nothing, but closes the door and forces his way past Wayne.

"We were just leaving."

Ali puts his hands in his pockets. "Drive safely."

The men tighten the hoods of their rainwear and Ali holds the door open as they file out and run to their cars.



Midway through the following morning the rain abates, but the sea is a maelstrom of brown and white froth. The Disa River Estuary, normally nothing more than a stagnant puddle, has forced its way through the sandbank which separates it from the sea. The intertidal zone is a minefield of turbulence and rip currents. The mountains have sprung waterfalls in every crevice and valley. The sound of cars on the main road is drowned out by the grumble of the sea. A wind, inevitably, picks up and the roof of an unfinished house near Sunny Seas is blown into the foam splattered veld. For two days Betty's Bay is an austere landscape of violent aftermath.



On the third day the sun rises unhindered and spring returns.

Selena takes the opportunity to resume her cult, and she sits surrounded by the ring of sculptures – which has now grown to include all of the obvious segments of her body – her legs crossed, her feet bare. She no longer needs to touch the sculptures to receive their energy.

She eats, motionless, the most important meal of her day.

She doesn't regret having moved her relationship with Herman to the next level. It was just that: the next level; the logical progression of their association. It's the last thing she expected to happen when she moved to Betty's Bay, (particularly when she thinks back to the surly fisherman she met on the beach at the beginning of the year) but she can't try and pretend – not to herself, at least – that it wasn't in the back of her mind when she asked Herman to move in with her. She will try anything to overcome the numbness of the last year – it may seem mercenary, but there are no secrets here – and, sure enough, she can feel her nerve endings beginning to reactivate. When fruit trees blossom in spring their bark is still black from winter, but this changes in time.

But she's not doing him justice. He is more than a convenience. His patience and understanding of her predicament. His sense of humour and his utter disregard for his own tragedy. But most of all his sculpting. She looks around her and feels herself blushing. She loathes the conceit of it all, but she can't deny she's enjoyed rediscovering her own beauty.

Selena enjoys having emotions in the present tense again. Being angry now, about what's happening now, this second. Before she moved to Betty's Bay and became involved in RAPP and met Herman, her life – the here and now – had been an intermediary between the past and the future. It had been her way of coping.

The sound of a cupboard door banging is a cymbal which cuts through the cacophony of birdsong. Herman is up early, she notices, again. He's been busy with the pendants for the past few days. She's never seen him so eager. She tries to stop thinking about him and resume her meditation, but Nature conspires against her. A troop of baboons has abandoned the tubers and bulbs of the mountain in favour of the rubbish bins and fruit trees of the town. At first Selena sees a mother with a baby hanging from the fur between her nipples, but she soon realises that the bush around her is teeming with the animals. She tries to take Herman's assertions to heart: 'They're more scared of you, than you are of them,' he has told her repeatedly. 'All you have to do is shout at them,' he insists. But she cannot help herself. She is afraid.

She runs to the house and when she gets inside she is out of breath. She sighs.

"What's wrong?" Herman is at his workbench.

"Baboons," she says, "In the garden."

"Are the windows closed?" His voice is disinterested.

"I think so. I'll check." This activity serves to consume most of Selena's nervous energy and when she returns she speaks slowly: "How's it going?"

"Okay." Herman does not lift his head from his work. "I'm just getting the hang of using a file."

Selena says nothing. She tries not to be agitated, but she can't help herself. The sight of him working, working so attentively at that, on any subject other than her leaves her reeling. He has the same blinkered detachment from his surroundings as he does when he sculpts her. He is putting just as much effort and emotion into these trinkets as he does when he sculpts his inamorata. She knows she's being unreasonable: the trinkets are for her, her organisation at least. He's doing it all for her benefit.

"It's very different to a chisel." Minutes must have passed since he last spoke. "But I think I've almost got it to the point where I can give the ladies the templates."

"Great," is all Selena can muster. She goes upstairs to what has recently become *their* bedroom.



Hendrik phones Wayne as soon as he wakes up. The younger man explains that he has a satellite dish to install in Pringle Bay, but when that's done he'll give Hendrik a call.

Hendrik reads the Fisheries' handbook for the umpteenth time. He ties and reties his shoelaces. He oils the handcuffs which Selena bought and when the phone does eventually ring, he is three blocks from his house as he has persuaded his wife to help him test the range of the walkie-talkies. He conducts his conversation with Wayne through Elmarie. They arrange to meet at De Wet's Baai in half an hour. The barely inhabited coastline between there and the Palmiet River mouth is ideal poaching territory.

Hendrik rushes home and leaves before he has caught his breath. He waits at least twenty minutes for Wayne's *bakkie* to appear at the end of the corrugated gravel track. Hendrik has organised a set of keys from one of the owners of the private bay, and they walk straight down to the small beach which serves as a launching point for dinghies on calmer days.

The path is narrow, at times almost indiscernible, and the men's thick jeans scrape against the prickly leaves of the plant known as climber's friend. As they clamber over a rock they startle a pair of *klipspringers*: a male, with his short needle-like horns, and a female.

"It's good to know they're still about," Herman whispers. The buck stand, heads turned, and stare at the men for what must be a minute, before disappearing into the fynbos.

"I've never seen one here," Wayne admits.

"We used to see them often at night. There were *klipspringers*, *duikers*, *steenbokkies*."

They continue in silence. It is probably this silence which allows them to catch the man red-handed. He is wearing a black and white nylon tracksuit, and sits cross-legged, next to a small rock pool situated along a fault line in the rocks. He shucks the perlemoen expertly, using only his thumb to pry the foot from the inside of the shell. He throws the shells and guts into the sea and puts the perlemoen in a blue and black diving bag. For once Wayne says nothing and he and Hendrik creep towards the suspect. They hide behind a boulder covered in orange lichen. They catch their breath and discuss their plan of attack in hand signals.

They give each other the thumbs up.

Hendrik lifts himself over the rock with a grunt and is upon the poacher in three teetering downhill steps. The man makes for the cover of the bushes, but Wayne has anticipated this and he waits to the left of the boulder. The poacher slips on the slimy rocks and Wayne grabs the side of his tracksuit top. The man reaches for the knife which pokes out above the waistline of his pants, but Hendrik stamps on his wrist.

“Okay, okay,” he pleads, “*Julle het my.*”

Hendrik rolls the man onto his stomach and Wayne applies the handcuffs. They help him to his feet and Hendrik holds him in a loose but threatening headlock, while Wayne counts the perlemoen. There are ninety-six in all, twenty-eight of which are tiny juveniles known as *siffies* or Venus’ ears.

The man – or rather, the kid – shouts at a diver who surfaces thirty metres from the shore. The diver raises his hand in a thumbs-up, and disappears.

“What we going to do with him?”

“I don’t know,” says Wayne, “We don’t want to get caught up with all his mates.”

Hendrik nods. “There could be ten, fifteen, of them.”

“We must get him to the cops.”

“I know.”

“I’ll phone them.” Wayne takes his cell-phone from his pocket. He looks at the screen and mutters, “No reception.”

“Shit.” Hendrik tightens the headlock briefly. “We’ll have to take him to Herman’s place.”

“But that’s miles—”

Hendrik cuts him short: “Not his mother’s house. His new place, with Selena. It’s just here.”

“Oh, you mean that place.” Wayne points in the direction of the house, which is not visible from where they stand. “I’ve always wondered why they didn’t have satellite,” he says to himself.

“Let’s go.” Hendrik leads the kid up to the path. Wayne follows with the diving bag. They traverse the inlets and promontories of the coastline for at least a quarter of an hour, before turning left – inland – onto a waterlogged excuse for a path. At first they try to avoid getting their feet wet, but they soon realise that a soaking is inevitable. Their feet plug in the thick black mud. They struggle not to lose their shoes. And then, the path breaks free onto higher, dry ground and the house is suddenly only fifty metres away.

When they get to the big French doors at the front of the house Selena and Herman are at the table, having lunch. Selena tenses at Hendrik’s rapid three-beat knock, before composing herself and rising from the table. She opens the door for the men, and when they linger on the lawn she says, “Come inside.”

“Our shoes.” Hendrik lifts an offending muddied foot. “We just need to use the phone.”

“Is this a poacher?” Selena points at the kid, who is staring at his own feet.

“We caught him with ninety-six *perlies*.” Wayne opens the diving bag and shows its contents to Selena.

“Well done.” Herman has also risen from the table now. “That’s awesome.”

“He was just shucking them,” says Hendrik, “There were a whole lot of other *ous* in the water.”

“I’m so proud of you guys.” Selena kisses Hendrik on the cheek. “I’ll phone the police now.”

Koos and Jakobus (Wilhelm’s replacement) arrive within twenty minutes. They put the suspect in the back of their van, before returning to obtain details regarding his capture. Wayne gives the policemen the diving bag; Hendrik provides an elaborate description of events.

“He’ll probably only get a fine,” says Koos, “And a suspended sentence.”

“Ja.” Hendrik clears his throat. “I just wish we could have caught the bastards in the water.”

“They’ll have dropped it all.”

“I don’t even know about that. They’re so bloody cocky they may still try and get it ashore.”

“Maybe we could catch them.” Selena interlocks her fingers with Herman’s, and squeezes his hand.

“It’s too dangerous.” Hendrik gestures towards the policemen. “Even if you two came along.”

“We’d be outnumbered.”

“Although.” Koos tugs at the loose skin surrounding his Adam’s apple. “We could get those army guys.”

“Jeez, I forgot about them.” Jakobus smiles. “They can get off their arses and do something for a change.”

“Look...we’d better get this guy back to the station, but I’ll get hold of the army and let you know what’s happening.”

‘Thank you,’ says Selena, ‘Please try to make them come.’

‘Don’t worry. I feel just as strongly about this as you.’

Selena gives Hendrik and Wayne a lift to their cars and promises to let them know as soon as she finds anything out.

Selena and Herman spend the afternoon locked in their house. A truckload of a dozen or so soldiers arrives. They march through the bushes in a neatly formed squadron. Only their machine guns and helmets poke above the bushes. A helicopter swoops low over the sea. Herman and Selena sit next to the phone, waiting for it to ring.



The phone wakes Selena. She lifts her head from Herman’s chest and stumbles to answer it. Herman snores.

It is Koos: ‘The men of the 54th battalion performed a search...’ He sounds like he is reading. ‘In the vicinity of the old Blomhuis, for suspected poachers. No such suspects were found.’ He clears his throat. ‘But infantrymen did find evidence of the presence of such criminals.’

‘Which means?’ Selena is slowly waking up.

‘They found some diving stuff,’ Koos speaks easily now, ‘But the poachers have disappeared.’

‘Could they still be in the water?’

‘No,’ he pauses, ‘They’d be dead by now.’

‘It’s safe then?’

“Safer today than ever before.”

She thanks him, and puts the phone down. Herman is stirring. She sits next to him and strokes his hair. “Let’s go for a walk,” she says.

He groans. “What’s the time?”

“I don’t know.” She squints as she looks out of the salt-smeared window which faces the sea. “The sun hasn’t set yet.”

“The poachers!” he is remembering.

“Koos just phoned.” She pats him on the head. “Says everything’s okay.”

“What happened?”

“The army didn’t find anyone. Just some diving equipment.”

“You sure it’s safe?”

“That’s what Koos says.”

After a cup of tea, they walk down to the sea. Selena holds Herman’s hand and walks away from him, tugging his arm to its full length, only to come back to him and snuggle. The beach has been littered with junk from the storm. Seaweed and fishing line; half a body-board; broken perlemoen shells. But most of it is garbage, “From the Japanese fishing trawlers,” Herman says, “Bloody Nips.” There is also the body of a penguin. “Must have got lost,” Herman explains, “We’re miles from the colony.”

At the water’s edge there is a large, dried out tree trunk. Selena leads Herman to it, and they sit down. Herman plays with the hair which curls on her neck. “I’m happy for Hendrik.”

“And Wayne.”

"I think we may just get rid of them." He kisses her on the neck. "And it's all thanks to you."

Selena squirms away from him. "It's been a group effort."

"I've really enjoyed designing those necklaces."

"I've noticed," Selena says, just a little too curtly.

"What's wrong?" Herman nuzzles ever deeper into the nape of her neck.

"Nothing." She turns and kisses the scarring around his eyes.

"No. Really." He draws away from her. "What's wrong?"

"Nothing." She puts her hand down the back of his shirt. "I just don't like seeing you sculpt anything else."

"But...it's for you."

Selena has had this conversation in her head a thousand times. "I know, I keep telling myself that. I just don't enjoy it."

He kisses her. "The necklace designs are finished now." He smiles. "What's left of you to sculpt?" He lifts her onto his knees, so that she sits facing him.

Selena has a crazy thought. "All of me," she says without reconsidering. She's sure Herman won't want to do it.

"I don't have the stone."

"We could use this." She slaps the log which they're sitting on. Selena is sure she has made a stupid suggestion. "Or is it—"

"I could try." Herman lifts Selena from his lap and crouches next to the log. He runs his hands over the grain which has been rubbed smooth by the sea. It is as long as he is, and there is a round knob at one end which must have been a branch once. He is still

for a long time. The sun has set and he has not said a word. He rubs his face against the damp wood. It smells of the sea. Selena is happy to be quiet. Herman is at his most beautiful when he is working. "It might well do," he announces.

"Great." Selena rushes to embrace him. "We'll get it tomorrow."

"Now. I want to sculpt you now."

Selena remembers that the darkness means nothing to Herman.

They drag the log up the beach and into the lounge. It dirties the carpet but they do not care. Selena lies on the floor next to the log, resting her head on her hands. Herman lies beside her and his hands move over her body like ghost crabs when the full moon is out. They scuttle frantically, stopping irregularly to excavate and explore. Their beach is camouflaged by irritating clothing and they claw and scrape at this. Selena is soon naked. Now the crabs are unhindered and they travel. Over the white mussel shells which are her shoulders; through the corrugated dune valley of her back; around the neat sandcastles of her bum; and lower, lower to her bow shaped driftwood shins. He knows her body so well. Far better than any man who can see. But still he rubs and smells and feels her for hours. He suckles her ear and inhales the smell of her neck. He massages her scalp and untangles her hair gently. He traces the shape of each of her ribs and kisses the sharp twin *koppies* of her pelvic girdle.

Neither person says a word and they do not have to. Finally he gets up and begins to sculpt. Selena is comfortable in spite of the cold stone floor and she does not move. Her body remains loosely curved: neither outstretched nor bundled up.

Herman starts at the smooth end of the log and he sculpts her feet. He loves her feet almost as much as she does. Selena's eyes do not shift as he chips away at the

desiccated wood. She waits patiently, transfixed, as he replaces his chisel with a sharper one. He moves up and onto her shins. Hours must have passed and Selena speaks: "Can we take a break?"

Herman nods.

"I didn't want to stop, but..." Selena laughs. "I've gone completely numb."

"I'm sure. I don't know what's got into me."

"I know...you're like a man possessed."

"What's the time?"

Selena finds her watch in amongst her discarded clothing. "Nearly four."

"Already?"

"Want to call it a day."

"No."

"Neither do I."

"But we should." Herman pauses, "This is going to take days."

The next morning Herman moves onto her thighs and her mesmerizing navel. He has never sculpted so much of her, and Selena shivers with excitement as she watches herself grow from the bottom up, like a plant. Her replica is brittle and pale. Smooth, bubbling marzipan.

"We should eat."

"Really."

"It's almost dark."

"What day is it?"

"God knows."

“This is insane.”

“D’you mind if I just make scrambled eggs?” Selena says, “I’m finished.”

“Anything.”

They eat on the couch, next to one another and fall asleep with their plates on their laps. A barking dog wakes Herman. He gets up and goes to the door to investigate.

“What are you doing?”

“Just locking up. You can go back to sleep.”

“I don’t want to.”

“Why not?”

“I want you to sculpt me.”

“It’s the middle of the night.”

“So...”

He whittles the wood away, creating the almost indiscernible ripple of her ribcage, which is soon replaced by the undeniable swell of her breasts. These take shape and they gleam in the lamplight. He sculpts her nipples like frozen peas, and she lowers her eyelids in surprise. This only serves to confirm his accuracy. “I don’t know what’s happening to me.”

“They say when you’re in solitary confinement you lose track of the difference between day and night.”

“But this isn’t—”

“Let me finish...and it’s meant to be one of the worst tortures a person can go through.”

“We’re not alone.”

“I think that’s the difference.”

Herman returns to the sculpture. The log tapers, towards the creased knot, to form her neck, and she waits for him to move onto her face. But he sculpts her hands instead, taking special care with her left hand. It has always been his favourite. The log lies in the middle of the room: lifelike and life-size, apart from the rough knob which rests on her hands. Herman stands up and walks to the bathroom. When he returns his face is glistening wet.

“Want a break?”

“No.”

“Why not? You look—”

“It’s finished.”

When she looks at the gnarl it is even more beautiful than her face.

Selena drags herself along the smooth polished tiles, to her wooden counterpart, and kisses it on the bursting split which she imagines to be her lips. She presses her nipples against the hard wood and brings her maimed hand round to shelter in the small of its back. While she lies there she can hear Herman putting his tools away. He never breaks this routine.

His voice plucks her from the embrace: “Let’s go to bed.”

She moans in agreement, and runs her hands along the sculpture’s length as she first kneels and then stands. She kisses Herman and hooks her thumb into the back pocket of his jeans. They walk up the stairs so attached, and Herman undresses and gets into bed. He waits for Selena as she brushes her teeth and closes the curtains. The moon is about to

set over the ocean. Selena does not bother to put her negligée on and she clambers on top of Herman and strokes him through the sheets. „

Fame and Fortune

Within minutes the moon has been replaced by the sun.

Selena knows she has hardly slept, but she gets up nonetheless. She puts on her dressing gown and goes downstairs. The sculpture lies on the floor, just where they left it. She takes its head in both hands, lifts it, and holds it against the side of her hip. She walks, like this, towards the door which leads into the garden, with the sculpture's feet scraping and scuffing the tiles. It is cumbersome, not heavy. When she gets to the door she lowers her likeness gently and rests its hands on her feet while she opens the door. She drags it and does not bother to close the door behind her. A wind blows and the sun has not yet reached the garden. The sculpture's slender toes tear at the strands of buffalo grass as they bounce across the lawn. Selena navigates its passage between elbow and hand expertly, and she sets it down in the centre of her shrine. Selena's usual position is occupied and she sits in the crescent of grass left by the curved body. Her left knee is lodged against the sculpture's stomach; her right knee against its thighs.

When she thinks about it she knows one of them shouldn't be there. The shrine is completed by this final sculpture and Selena is an intruder on her own perfection. But she can't bear to deprive herself. She takes the hand from where it rests, and runs it over the eggshell wood. The limestone leaves faint markings on the completed sculpture.

Limpopo-green streaks of desire.

Now she has consummated her relationship with Herman properly.

The sun has risen above the mountains and Selena relishes its heat on her scalp. She must have woken up later than usual. In confirmation of this thought, the phone rings. She stands up, knocking the sculpture onto its back in the process, and runs to answer it.

It is Rupert. "I've been thinking Selena," he says, "We could make two documentaries."

"What about my journalistic autonomy?"

"I'm sorry about that."

"You should be."

"I was an arsehole."

"You were."

"Moving along, now..." He laughs. "You see, with all this hype around the perlemoen poaching. We could make a sort of 'taste of what's to come.'"

Still Selena says nothing.

"A ten minute soupçon that makes everyone want to devour the main course."

"Why?"

"It's guaranteed airtime. I've spoken to the SABC...they want an insert for 50-50."

"But we're still going ahead with the big one?"

"Of course, Selena, of course."

"So..." Selena pauses to order her thoughts. "What? When? How?"

"Slow down." Rupert laughs again. "We want to start filming in the next few weeks."

"What? You can't be serious!"

"It'll only be a short thing...lots of voiceovers and landscape shots. A couple of substantial interviews."

"And you want me to script it?"

"Just give us ideas, we'll work with them...I've put Morgan on the job."

"Morgan?"

"He's matured a lot. You'll see."

Selena hopes this is true. "Who's directing?"

"Zade."

"He'll be perfect."

"I know. He's just got back from Europe and he's free for a few weeks before the local season kicks off."

Selena is a lot more confident about the project now. "You haven't heard about the pendants."

"What pendants?"

"We're making these pendants..."

"Who's we?"

"RAPP. The anti-poaching group."

"Mmm hmm..."

"Out of perlemoen shells, in all different designs. Tortoises, dolphins, whales, you name it..."

"Sounds good."

"We're selling them in aid of the charity."

“And?”

“And I was wondering if...”

“If we’d want to give you a little free publicity?”

“We’ve got women from the local squatter camp making them.”

“I’m warming to this.”

“Wives of poachers.”

“Okay. You’ve sold me.”

“It’s a real win-win situation.”

“Hey...that’s one of mine.”

“When are they coming?” Selena knows he will already have organised everything without her.

“First of November,” he says, “Should give you guys plenty of time.”

“What d’you need from me?”

“Just some background history. Line up a few interviews. Some suggestions for locations, a couple of...”

“The usual.”

“Ja. Zade’ll be in touch.”

“Perfect.”

“Just remember what the man said.”

“Who?”

“Roy Keane.”

“Fail to prepare.” Selena knows all of Rupert’s stock phrases. “Prepare to fail.”

Rupert laughs and puts the phone down.

Selena goes to the kitchen and makes herself a cup of coffee. It's already ten o'clock and she has not heard even the slightest murmur from Herman. She's started getting used to him waking early, but it seems as if he's back to his usual self. Now that the pendants are designed and he's sculpted her completely, he has the time to sleep. She wants to talk to him, to anybody, about this development. She sneaks upstairs and into the bedroom. He lies sprawled, with the sheets tangled around his waist, one hand on his chest, the other stretched out to her side of the bed. He does not snore, but grunts softly in his sleep.

Selena cannot bring herself to disturb him and she goes downstairs and phones Antjie instead. She recounts everything Rupert said to her.

"We're going to be film stars," Antjie shrieks, "It'll be great."

Selena laughs. She can see the ring of sculptures in the garden. She's accustomed to being behind the camera, but she likes the idea of getting on the other side of it.

"The ladies have already started working," Antjie says, "Herman's designs are *pragtig*."

"He worked really hard at them."

"He's good."

Selena mumbles her agreement. "I don't even know if we'll be in the film though."

"Why not? You've got to be in it. You're the boss, man!"

"Rupert's in charge. Who knows what he'll want."

"Ag come off it. The camera's gonna love you."

"It's not important anyway. As long as RAPP gets lots of publicity."

“What a saint you are! Why don’t you come over here and see how things are going?”

“Brilliant. Herman’s fast asleep, and I need to do some shopping anyway.”



When Selena gets back from Kleinmond, Herman has just woken up. He is in boxer shorts and is frying himself eggs. “Morning!” He tilts the pan to allow the oil to run over the egg whites. “Where’ve you been?”

“Kleinmond.” She dumps a load of bags on the table.

“Shopping?” Herman ladles the eggs onto the waiting slices of toast.

“Yes,” she pauses, “I went to Antjie’s too.”

“Nice,” he says between mouthfuls, “What does she have to say for herself?”

“They’re making a documentary about us.”

“Antjie?”

“No.” She drops a bag filled with tinned goods on the table. “If you woke up in the morning like any normal person I wouldn’t have to tell you this.”

“I’m sorry.” He yawns. “We did have a rather late night.”

“It’s past lunchtime.”

“So?” He mops up the residual yoke with half a slice of toast. When Selena says nothing, he continues, “Who’s making this film?”

“It’ll take some explaining.”

"I'm listening."

"You know I told you I'm doing some research."

He nods.

"And I've never really told you what it's about."

"I know."

"Well, here goes...I work for a film company. They want to make a film about environmental exploitation in this area."

"Why didn't you tell me?"

"It's not the way we do things. We like to worm our way into the community..."

"And sleep with them?"

"Jesus Herman!" she shouts, but then her voice trails away, "I thought you knew me better than that."

"I'm sorry...but I think I'm allowed a little bit of leeway here. We've shared everything, but you wouldn't even tell me about your bloody job."

"I haven't really been doing my job."

"You said you had to get to know the community. Find out what they do behind closed doors. I'd say you've done a pretty fine job of that."

"I've started an anti-poaching group, for God's sake! I've taken centre stage. That's completely against the rules."

"What did your boss think about that?"

"He wasn't impressed," she pauses, "But I told him he had to deal with it."

"What about asking me to move in with you? I'm sure that was all part of your malicious plan."

“As a matter of fact, my boss wasn’t too charmed by that either.”

“Oh really? Then why didn’t he get rid of you?”

“I’m good at my job. If he fired me the other agencies would’ve snapped me up.”

“Modest too.” Herman realises he has taken this too far. He is not happy with the situation but he knows he doesn’t want things to get much more personal. Both of them have too much ammunition, so he decides to detonate the social suicide bomb. “I’m sorry.”

“So am I.” Selena says. “I didn’t want it to come out like this.”

“You were telling me about this documentary.”

“Where was I?”

“Environmental exploitation...”

“You know...the whales and the penguins and Somchem.”

“What about the hack?”

“What?”

“A group of people meets on the first Sunday of every month to try and get rid of alien vegetation. They’ve been going for over forty years.”

“Why didn’t I hear about this?”

“Jesus Christ! You don’t stop, do you?”

“I’m trying to tell you something...”

“You’ve left out the poachers.”

“Bingo! You’ve hit the nail on the head.”

“If you don’t change your tone...”

“What? Are you going to hit me?”

"No, what do you think I am?"

"Sometimes I wonder."

"Okay. Just tell me about your bloody documentary."

"They want to make a ten minute snippet about the poaching for 50-50."

"Bastards!"

"Why?" Selena knows exactly why.

"You know." Herman knows that she knows why.

"No." She's not going to make this easy for him.

"We don't need all of that nonsense here," Herman says, "Everybody who lives here came here to get away from that shit."

"I know," she concedes, "But it'll raise awareness, and help promote the pendants. Maybe we'll make enough money to give the poachers a real kick in the pants," she pauses, "Surely that's what you want?"

"I don't know. But one thing's for certain..." His voice fades away into silence.

"What?"

"Nothing."

"No really," she says, "You can tell me."

"You asked for it..." he pauses, just to make sure he wants to say it, "My opinion's gonna make fuckall difference."

"And why should it?"

"Because I live here!" he shouts, before lowering his voice and speaking with calm menace, "And what about the others...Ali, Alf, Judah...they've been here for years."

“How d’you know what they want?”

“Trust me.”

“This is exactly why the whole poaching thing got out of hand in the first place.”

“Why?”

“Because you’re all so bloody apathetic! You just sit here and say to yourselves ‘We live in Betty’s Bay. It’s always been a quiet little town, and if we wait a while it’ll become quiet again, all on its own.’”

“At least we don’t bugger it up with film crews all over the place.”

“Herman! If it wasn’t for me they’d have murdered more of you.”

At this point the argument implodes. Selena sits next to Herman and puts her hand on his thigh. “I know where you’re coming from,” she says, “I just think we have to take everything we can get.”

“I understand. But I don’t agree with you.”

“They say you should never trust an artist’s politics.” Selena laughs.

“That reminds me...what happened to the sculpture?”

“I took it outside, with the others,” Selena says, “It’s beautiful.”

“I don’t think I’ll be able to sculpt for a while.”

“Why not?”

“I’m all spent.”

Neither Herman nor Selena knows what to make of this comment and they sit in silence. Selena lifts her hand from Herman’s thigh and uses it to play with her hair.

Eventually Herman speaks, “Can you take me to the pub?”

No response.

"I think I need a beer and a chat with Ali."

"I can do that."

"What are we waiting for?"

"Nothing. Let's go."

Once she has dropped him off she goes to the beach for a walk. The southeaster is almost gale-force now, and a thin milky veil of clouds has formed around the Blesberg. She walks for hours and when she gets back to the car the clouds have been turned a nuclear yellow by the sinking sun.



The bar is empty except for Ali and Judah. Herman is given a Black Label before he has even greeted them, and he holds the bottle to his lips and takes three measured swigs. He slams the bottle down on the bar and sighs from deep within his throat. "Thanks," he says.

"Long day?"

"Yes and no." Herman takes another gulp of his beer. "Shouldn't you be at work?"

"Beauty of working for yourself." Judah sighs. "It's half-past four, anyway."

"What?" Herman coughs as he sends 'America's Lusty Lively Beer' down his windpipe.

"Half four."

Herman is still coughing and Judah smacks him on the back with the palm of his hand. After this, Herman is able to produce words. "Shit," he wheezes, "No wonder she was so pissed off."

"Who?" says Ali, "Selena?"

Herman nods, to save himself the trouble of speaking.

Ali won't let him get off this easily, though. "What's wrong?"

"I guess I overslept."

Ali and Judah laugh. "It's half-past four!"

"For God's sake!"

"Come on." This time, even Herman laughs. "I've been awake at least an hour."

"Who can blame her?" Ali supplies Herman with a fresh beer.

"We also had a fight about this film crew that's coming."

"What film crew?" Judah says, with a mouth full of peanuts.

"Ja?"

"Haven't you heard about it?"

"No," the men chorus, "We haven't."

"I suppose I'm the first to find out."

"Come on...hurry up!"

"They want to make a film about the poaching."

"Who?"

"Selena." Herman stares with empty eyes in Judah's direction. "This company she works for."

"Whoa," says Ali, "Slow down."

“Seems I’ve got a lot to tell you,” Herman holds his beer up to gauge its status. “I think I’ll need another.” Ali obliges and Herman tells them the story of Selena and her motives for being in Betty’s Bay. He is well into his backup beer when he finishes.

“It’s not that bad.”

“What?” Ali turns to face Judah. “The film or the fact that his bitch lied to him?”

“Neither.”

“Are you *mal*?”

“No...I mean it must have been hard for Selena having to balance everything. She came here to do a job. She didn’t plan on meeting Herman.”

“What about the film?”

“It’ll probably be good for the poaching problem.”

“Speak for yourself,” says Ali, “Soon this place’ll be like Plett.”

“Plett’s better than Manenburg,” says Judah.

“Shut up. You’re a bloody drama queen.”

“They’ve already murdered someone, and you’re calling me a prima donna.”

“It was an accident.”

“How do you know?”

“Must have been,” Ali pauses, “How do *you* know it was the poachers, anyway?”

“He had three bullets in his chest.”

“We don’t want a bloody film crew coming here and stuffing everything up.”

“But we *do* want a bunch of criminals hanging around?” Judah downs what remains of his beer. “Sometimes I just wanna give up on you.”

Herman is glad to see that the topic is one which is universally sensitive. He had been starting to think, in the car on the way to the pub, that he had overreacted. But Selena and Judah do have a point. He'll hate having a film crew around, but if it gets rid of the poachers it'll be worth it. Obviously he's offended by the way Selena has handled the situation, but he's willing to forgive her. She's done so much for him and, as Judah says, it must have been hard for her.

The fact that he's blind will make dealing with everything easier. He won't have to concern himself with the film crew. He'll just sit it out at home. He speaks: "You know at first, I said exactly what you're saying, Ali," he pauses for effect, "And Selena said exactly what Judah's saying," he pauses again, "And it got nasty and Selena brought up the murder and I took offence..."

"We get the picture," says Judah.

"But," Herman continues as if nothing has been said, "Now I think I'm starting to warm to it. I don't want the film crew here...but I *really* don't want the poachers here."

"Who says the film crew'll get rid of the poachers? We'll just end up having a film crew *and* a poaching gang."

"Selena thinks it'll work."

"What does she know?" Ali feels obliged to temper this, "Sorry, bru, but you know what I mean."

"She's got a better track record than any of us."

"Exactly," says Judah, "We've no right to sit here and complain, if we're not going to do anything about it ourselves."

“If either of you can tell me exactly what difference a film crew is going to make, I’m all ears.”

“For one...” Judah makes a fist and extends his thumb. “It’ll increase awareness of the problem. Secondly...” He raises his index finger. “It’ll make money, some of which – correct me if I’m wrong, Herman – will go to RAPP.”

Herman nods.

“Which in turn will improve their efficiency.”

“I just thought we were above all that *kak*,” Ali swallows his words, “I guess I was wrong.”

“I see you managed to fix the roof,” Judah says.

“That was months ago.”

“And you found a solvent.” Herman’s beer develops barbs the moment he tries to swallow it, and he sits sullen.

“Eventually.”

“That’s great,” says Judah, but he does not mean it.

Ali walks over to the jukebox and plays *How Can We Sleep When Their Beds Are Burning?* He wants something upbeat, but he doesn’t know what the song is about.

Herman makes another attempt at drinking his beer, but the new soundtrack makes this even more of an impossibility. “I’m gonna go,” he announces, “Can I use your phone?”

Judah interjects before Ali can reply, “Don’t worry, I’ll give you a lift.”

The pair leaves the bar and Ali locks the door behind them. He’s had enough for today.

When they get to the parking lot, Selena has just got back to her car. “What’re you doing here?” asks Judah.

“I just went for a walk.”

“There’s not much point in me giving Herman a lift home then...”

“No.” Selena turns to face Judah. “Thanks for the offer though.”

Judah helps Herman into the passenger seat of Selena’s car, and leaves. Selena gets into the car but doesn’t turn it on. “Sorry,” she says.

“No,” Herman says, “It’s me who should be sorry.” He leans over to her side, knocking the rear-view mirror in the process, and kisses her on the forehead. “I don’t like to admit it...but you were probably right.”

“Probably?” She laughs, but is only half-joking.

November

Sunday dawns bright and still again. Selena wakes even earlier than usual, for today she will hold an extra long vigil. She dresses, and goes to her shrine in the garden. Surrounded by pieces of herself she, like any good Catholic, takes stock of recent events in her life.

Betty's Bay has been at its best in the days leading up to the film crew's arrival. The sea has been, day in day out, an endless flight of ripples, like stacked documents; and the sunsets really have looked like the covers of illustrated bibles. Most of the locals see it as an omen, and those who have lived in Betty's for any length of time insist that the weather will have the last laugh. Selena tries not to think about this.

At least one of the pairs of Fisheries Inspectors set out every day for the past ten days. Most days there were three or even four pairs patrolling. On Thursday, Garth and his partner caught an old man with four perlemoen in his canvas backpack. He was out of the boundaries of the reserve, and the *perlies* met the size restriction of old, but he had broken the law and they were forced to fine him. He explained that he needed to put food on the table and that his family had been living off the sea for generations, but he left Garth with no alternative. It's incidents like this that make Selena push on with what she's doing...that old guy would have been allowed to get his quota were it not for the poachers. He's not a criminal, but he's been forced into breaking the law.

No other arrests were made. Selena doesn't know whether this should make her happy or sad. Does it mean that the poachers are staying away from the water for fear of

being caught? Or are they just being more careful? The men feel good about what they're doing, at least, and they did find Alexis' Frisbee washed up kilometres from where he lost it!

Selena thinks back to when she was young. Being dragged along to church, and going to confession. She used to think it was unfair to unburden herself to a faceless stranger. But this – confessing to herself – is so much more difficult. She knows it is this way for committed Catholics too, but she is a solipsist, and her God is the most critical of all.

The documentary has been the talk of the town. Some people embraced it from the word go: Antjie, Hendrik, Judah and shopkeepers, restaurateurs, estate agents and hoteliers. Others took a bit of time to warm to it: Herman and his mother in particular. Ali, it seems, will never accept it. It's natural, Selena tells herself, to be sceptical of change, maybe even to fear it. But sense has prevailed and most of the community realises that it's for the best. She only hopes she can prove them right.

Zade and Morgan have been easy to work with. Their proposed script isn't groundbreaking, but it should serve each of the various agenda. It gives them plenty of time to explain a bit about the poaching, and RAPP, and the pendants.

And at least she can take solace from the fact that the production of the pendants is going smoothly. The ladies have learnt quickly, and apparently Herman's templates are foolproof. Selena has taken a few pendants for herself – not without paying, of course – and they really do look good. She's wearing a tortoise today and it glints in the early morning sun.

Selena knows that she has forced herself to go over these issues in her mind in order to avoid what is really plaguing her, but now she can put it off no longer: she is bored by Herman. She has nothing to say to him. He's still sleeping, as usual, but it's even worse when he's awake. Ever since he sculpted her for the last time, he's been nothing more than a self-satisfied lout. He sits around the house, content in the fact that he has created what he terms, 'The sculpture I've always dreamed of.' It is amazing. She can't deny that. But that's not the point...you can't just give up on your life's ambition at the age of twenty-five.

In Italy, Selena watched a lot of soccer. Italian teams have a habit of trying to score an early goal or two and then hanging back and sitting on this lead. Herman is doing the same thing: when he slept with her he scored the first goal (perhaps from the penalty spot) and in his completion of the sculpture he scored the second (a far more spectacular affair, maybe even a bicycle kick from thirty metres). This ploy of defending a lead often comes back to haunt the teams that employ it.

She knows more than ever now, that environmental filmmaking is the way she wants to go. It may make less money than fashion or advertising but it's what she has to do. She'll complete the research for this documentary, and then do other environmentally minded assignments. She is remembering why she studied what she did, and she knows that she can make an impact. Whatever it takes, she'll do it. She's not going to waste away.

Maybe it's just the fact that Herman's got so much talent which he isn't using that irks her. Maybe they're just very different people. But she knew that all along. It's what attracted her to him in the first place. She always saw him as a solid landmass which she

could tether herself to. Now it seems as if he's sinking ever deeper and is dragging her with him. She knows he's proud of her, and he keeps on telling her that he loves her. When they first met she remembers being attracted to him because he had a thirst to understand her completely. Now that he thinks he has achieved this it leaves her dissatisfied. He has reaffirmed her beauty, but he has taken it no further than that. Now that she feels beautiful again she needs more than an unfailing admirer.



Cathy is in her last year of high school and she has long finished classes. She is, some would say, slap bang in the middle of her matric exams. She would say that she's 'got exams at the moment, but it's cool.' She has written Geography and English, she still has four more subjects to go: Biology on Friday, then there's a long gap until Home Economics and then she finishes off with Afrikaans and History on consecutive days. All of this would suggest that she should be tucked away at her desk, studying hard. Instead, she is tucked away behind the bar at Ali's Cackle, with a Biology textbook on her lap. Now that she's eighteen she's allowed to manage the place alone, and she can legally drive home. It's really opened up Ali's schedule, and she loves the independence. Having a job actually means that she does more studying than she would otherwise – going for a surf isn't an option. Ali is out at the moment but he should be back soon. Judah and Alexis sit at the bar drinking Black Labels.

Cathy reads about protozoa and mitochondria, but her studying is peppered with sound bites of ‘insane lefts,’ and ‘hectic lulls.’ The men finish their beers and she provides them with replacements without being asked.

By the time Ali returns she has moved onto stamen and chlorophyll. He interrupts this: “Get us a beer Cath.” He sighs. “Heavy days.” He sits on the stool next to Judah’s.

Judah and Alexis take little notice of Ali’s obvious stress. He’s been like this for a few weeks now. They’re just hoping it’ll be replaced with genuine industry as soon as the holiday season begins.

“I’ve been thinking about visiting my family up in PE,” Ali talks to Cathy as if there is no one else in the room, “And it seems now is the perfect time to go.”

“I thought you were so busy—”

“I was...I am, but sometimes family comes first.”

“It’s the film crew. Isn’t it?”

“No...I mean not really,” he pauses, “I mean ja.” Another pause. “Is it that obvious?”

“What does it matter? It’s something you believe in...who cares?”

“True. I just feel bad about it.”

Cathy stares at him blankly.

“Everyone else wants it.”

“You’ve made the right decision. They’ll film with or without you.”

“They’re going to come and drink in here,” he says, “I don’t want to have to be here to see it.”

"It'll pay the bills," Judah says, "Hopefully they'll have a big end of shoot *skop*...even invite some of us locals along too."

"I think I'll leave before I hear anymore."

"Where you going?" asks Alexis.

"PE. Weren't you listening?"

"Nought bra. We've been rapping about the surf."

Ali should have expected as much, and he is forced to explain: "I'm going to visit my folks in PE."

"Serious?"

"I'll check you guys on the flip." He leans over and shakes the men's hands.

"Wait a sec," says Judah, "It's six in the evening..."

"Ja." Ali looks at his watch to confirm this. "Ten to. In my car I'll get there by dawn's crack."

Alexis giggles at this joke, even though he must have heard it hundreds of times.

"You don't dig the traffic, hey?"

Ali ignores this, and kisses Cathy on the cheek. "If the sceptic tank blocks," he whispers, "I've left the number next to the phone. Speak to Werner. He'll sort you out."

Cathy barely has time to shout out, "Enjoy it!" before Ali leaves the building. Ten minutes later she hears him starting his Land Rover. It starts at the third attempt and the engine's noise increases only to recede again as he drives away, in simulated Doppler effect.

When the growl of the engine eventually gives way to silence, Alexis' head shoots up, and his eyes pop open. "When those film *ous* coming?"

“Tomorrow,” Cathy says.

“Hectic.” He rests his goateed chin on his hand. “You reckon they want to get some surf footage?”

“Dunno.” Cathy giggles. “Speak to Selena...she’s in charge.”



The film crew brings the rain with it, all the way from Cape Town. They come in vans across the Cape Flats, in and out of the valleys and spurs of Clarence Drive, and up, over the hill and onto the plateau from Rooi Els. They drag the rain over the slopes of *Leucadendron*; (bringing with it cables and lights and reflectors and dollies) past the disused rubbish dump which is being turned into a soccer field; past Rondevlei and Grootwitvlei; and – symbolically – past the municipal offices and into Betty’s Bay. The rain will only leave when the film crew takes it back with them.

They meet Selena at Betty’s Bay’s most notable manmade landmark, Ali’s Cackle. They huddle on the *stoep*, behind the sheet of rain which spills over the gutter.

“Let’s have a beer,” suggests Gert, the director of photography.

“It’s nine in the morning,” says Selena, “It’s closed.”

“What do you think I am? We never drink on the job.”

“Not when the boss is with us,” adds the photographer’s assistant.

The crew laughs. Selena giggles.

“Let’s get to work,” says Zade, the director. He is a slight, but angular Indian, and his facial hair is configured so exactly that Selena has long since concluded it must be achieved with the aid of a setsquare.

The crew mumbles its approval, and Selena takes control: “I’ll take you to your B&B. Just follow me.”

They drive in convoy, with their headlights on bright, to the Oystercatcher B&B. Sarah, the owner, welcomes them and shows them to their rooms. While they settle in Zade and Selena have a cup of coffee together.

“Don’t like the look of this weather.” Zade blows the top of his cappuccino.

“It’s been perfect for weeks.” Selena sips at her espresso. “Everyone said it would do this.”

“Why?”

“Because you were coming.”

“They not happy?”

“They’re okay now,” she says, “They just know that Betty’s Bay isn’t exactly what you’d call obliging.”

He chuckles. “If it carries on like this, we’ll have to come back some other time. It won’t take long though.” Zade gestures to Elsabé, the waitress, to get him another cappuccino. “I mean the scene with the patrol guys...” It is hard to tell whether he has a lisp, or if it’s just his accent. “Would be quite nice in stormy weather,” he pauses, “We could just wait till it clears a little and it could be all manly and tempestuous.”

“I love working with you...you’re awesome.”

Zade ignores this compliment and lifts his cappuccino to his lips. "The lighting's going to be tricky," he lisps, "But Roger's good." He takes another sip of his cappuccino. "And besides, we can always sort it out in post."

Selena's stare asks him to clarify this.

"Post-production. The stuff they can do these days." He tosses his hands skywards. "Quite mind-boggling."

While their conversation has been taking place the remainder of the crew has assembled in dribs and drabs. Now it seems as if everyone is ready to go, and they wait expectantly in the covered courtyard – out of the rain, and out of the bosses' way.

"Before we go, I'd like Morgan to fine tune the script." Zade spoons the last of the cappuccino's foam into his mouth. "You were saying there was someone he should speak to?"

"I've got just the man for him. Alf Pauling...he's actually a retired scientist, but now he's the town's undisputed historical authority."

"Perfecto," he says, "Let's go."

Again they drive in cumbersome convoy. Zade, Selena and Morgan take the lead in Zade's black Mini Cooper; the lighting and grip vans bring up the rear. They all go to Alf's house where, having made the necessary introductions, Selena leaves Morgan.

They drive through to Antjie's house in Kleinmond. The rain follows them, and the Palmiet River is in spate when they cross it. Indian Dream, Antjie's B&B, has been temporarily closed down to make way for what is in effect a pendant factory. With eighteen employees Antjie is obliged to use every room in her house. The bedrooms are used for the less dirty functions: as storerooms and pack sheds; while the kitchen and

dining room are the main production zones. In the kitchen, eight women sit around the table carving the pendants. Today, they are all carving frogs. First, they draw, with permanent markers, the outlines of the larger amorphous template on the shell. They then saw and chisel and file the shell to this shape. Once this has been achieved they trace the precise shape of the frog onto the shell. The delicate file-work which remains is rendered far easier by Herman's ingenious two-step process.

In the dining room, six ladies sit around the mahogany table which is covered in a thick layer of newspaper. They sand the rough edges of the shells; drill holes in them through which to pass the leather necklaces; and finally buff them up until they shine kaleidoscopically.

Zade is heartened to discover that three of the women's husbands have in fact dabbled in poaching. He'll definitely include a minute or two of tear-jerking interview in the documentary.

Meanwhile, Gert and his assistant are performing a self-guided tour of the house. They're scouting it out for possible shots. They know they've hit upon a winner when they discover the bedroom which is used as the packing room: two overweight, middle-aged women sit with their feet dangling over the edge of the top bunk bed, which is littered with children's fluffy toys – a pink flannel teddy bear; a synthetic penguin with an ink stain on its front; and a leopard which is so faded that it has almost lost its spots – all of them relics left by Antjie's children. The women pass the cellophane-packaged pendants to an accomplice who sits on the lower bunk, packing the individual parcels into shoe boxes, which are already stacked as high as the ceiling in places. "It'll make a great visual metaphor for sacrifice," mimics Gert.

“Zade loves that kind of *kak*.”

Gert laughs, and calls Roger from one of the adjoining rooms. The ladies carry on working, as if no one has intruded on their workspace. “Rog,” he says, “I’m gonna want subtle light in here, so we can get a nice low angle shot of the ladies on the top bunk.” He kneels and arches his back, to demonstrate where the camera will be positioned.

“Easy.” Rog chews on a cheap ballpoint pen. “If the weather lets up for a few minutes, we can just put a couple of redheads outside the window there.” He points to the only window in the room. “And reflect them off a screen, and onto that wall.” He gestures towards the wall furthest from the window.

“Are you thinking what I’m thinking?” Zade has made an entrance. “This is perfect.” He smiles at the ladies who, now more than ever, bury themselves in their work. “The camera loves you.” He faces Roger and Gert. “Anyway boys...Selena and I are going to go and check out the other locations – weather permitting, of course.” He runs his hands lightly over his hair. “If you guys set everything up here, I’ll be back in an hour or two to shoot.”

Nobody voices any objections and Zade and Selena set off for the tiny commercial perlemoen farm in Kleinmond, where they intend to get shots of living perlemoen and interview the resident marine biologist.

Zade shifts his attention from the road, and turns to speak to Selena. “We just need to find a location for your interview.” He focuses on the road again.

“May as well do it at Ali’s Cackle.”

“You mean that dreadful pub we met at this morning?”

“It’s got character once you’re inside,” she says, “And it’s the birthplace of RAPP.”

“I thought that was New York.”

“I didn’t mean that kind of—”

He turns around again, shifts his hand from the gear knob and taps Selena’s knee.

“Very bad pun. Don’t worry about it.”

Selena laughs involuntarily.

“I trust your judgment.” He lifts both of his hands off the steering wheel. “We’ll check it out later this arvy.”



Selena has time to go home and shower after the interview. They’ve shot all they can with the weather as it is, and seeing they’re already booked into the Oystercatcher, Zade has decided to get everyone together for a few drinks at the Cackle. It’ll be their way of thanking all of the people who’re involved in RAPP. Herman has finally woken up, and he sits in the living room listening to his Discman. Selena removes his headphones and tells him their plans for the evening.

“Okay,” he says, “How was filming?”

“It went well. But they’ll have to come back when it’s stopped raining.”

“Thought as much.” He chews on a piece of biltong. “Not really the weather to be doing stuff in.”

Selena has nothing to say to this and she goes upstairs to shower.

They drive to the pub in silence, and the sound of the windscreen wipers .. ploughing through the deluge is amplified in Selena's mind. Chug. Chug. Chug. Her head is cloven. When they get to the pub the parking lot is full and they park on the lawn. The car's tyres squelch in the soft turf, and Selena has a fleeting hope that they won't be stuck for the night. She's too flustered to give it any serious thought, though, and she leads Herman inside and straight to the bar. She orders herself a gin Martini.

"I don't know how to make that." Cathy is the lone barmaid.

"Just..." Selena forces herself to appear relaxed. "Pour a few tots of gin into a glass, and wave the Vermouth over it...you can pop an olive in, if you've got."

"No olives," Selena says without having to check, "Which glass?" She holds up a tumbler and a wine glass.

Selena points at the wine glass. "That'll do."

Zade has found the jukebox, and when Selena approaches him he is talking to himself. "Buddy Holly," he says, "Isn't this classic?" He presses the button to see what else the machine has to offer. "Westlife! Dance remixes. Stunning!" Sensing someone's presence, he turns round to face Selena. He puts his hand to his chest. "You frightened me," he pauses, "I dig this place."

Selena stares at him nervously.

"In an ironic way...of course."

Selena is seldom able to think of a response for the things Zade says, and this is no exception. She has to make do with a laugh.

“Anyway, if you’ll excuse me?” He leans forward and puts his hands on his knees. “I’ve got to go to the gents’.”

Selena wanders off in search of other conversation, and she finds Roger and Gert talking to Hendrik. “You see,” Roger is saying, “We don’t normally do this sort of... what do you call it? Charity work. It’s quite an exciting change.”

“What’s in it for you?” Hendrik drains his brandy and coke. “Apart from the free *dop*, that is.”

“Not much. But it does enable us to sleep a bit better at...”

Roger is not allowed to finish his sentence, because Zade comes running from the direction of the bathrooms, holding his nose closed with his left hand, waving his right hand up and down, and wailing, “Help! Blockage! Help!”

Hendrik stops him in his tracks with an outstretched arm. “What’s wrong?”

“The toilet,” he says, “It’s overflowing.”

“Don’t worry.” Hendrik’s voice appears to be even more gravelly than usual. “It happens all the time.”

“I flushed, and it just kept on coming.”

Antjie comes to the fore. She is not wearing her gumboots, as she had expected a tamer affair, but she steps into the breach nonetheless. She is gone for ten seconds or less. When she returns she announces: “Nobody go in there.” She goes to the sink behind the bar and washes her hands. “I’ve dammed it up with a towel and closed the door.”

“We’d better call Sucking Suzie.” Cathy is already rifling through the pile of papers next to the phone. “Ali left their number.”

“Screw that,” says Judah, “I’m sure I can fix it. Ali never lets me have a look, but now that he’s gone...”

“Ja, what is that about?” asks Herman.

“I don’t know. He’s a pussy. Doesn’t want to get his hands dirty.”

“Gert,” Roger’s voice is filled with excitement, “We could get the Wendy lights out.” He turns to Judah. “It’d be like working in daylight.”

“Wendy’s?”

“Ja, they never got taken out of the van.”

Everyone troops out into the garden. The rain has abated at last, and the group of about thirty waits for Roger and Gert to provide light. When they do so, it is blinding. Selena shields her eyes with her hands, and she blinks involuntarily. Gradually her eyes become accustomed to it, and although the scene before her – a waterlogged lawn; a mouldy wall; and a clump of daisies which denote the presence of a septic tank – is bleached white, she is thankful for the light.

Gert emerges from the van carrying a camera on his shoulder. “Thought I’d catch some of the action.”

Everyone laughs.

“Isn’t that a waste of film?” asks Alf.

“Hell no.” Gert chuckles. “We’re shooting on HD, which is basically hardcore digital.”

“Can I start?” Judah asks Gert.

“Ready when you are.”

Judah locates the point where the sewerage pipes leave the building. “Oh,” he says to himself, “They’ve done it like that.”

Herman voices the question on everyone’s lips: “Like what?”

“No.” Judah trudges towards the daisies. “He’s got two pipes – one from the gents, one from the ladies, I guess. Going to separate tanks.”

“What?”

“Don’t worry about it,” Judah says, “It’s perfectly normal.”

“Oh. Good.”

“What have we here?” Judah scavenges amongst the daisies, and eventually succeeds in finding a round asbestos lid. He lifts it a fraction, and peers into the tank below. “Lots and lots of shit.” He laughs. “Which is also perfectly normal.”

“What’s the problem?” Zade says.

“With the water table like this.” Judah presses his hand into the soil and his fingers are fringed with muddy puddles. “He should have put in conservancy tanks, but I still can’t understand why he has *so* many cock ups.”

“Ja, whenever we have a party there’s a problem.”

“Maybe I should just call Sucking Suzie,” Cathy says, “It’s what he told me to do.”

“Don’t be ridiculous.” Judah stands up. “We’ll get to the bottom of this.”

“Bottom!” Zade clenches his face in both hands..

Some laugh at this. Others pretend not to have heard.

“This is odd.” Judah kicks at a V-shaped patch of soil, which is not covered by grass.

“What?” they chorus.

“It looks like they’ve done some repairs here.” He follows the patch of bare soil to its source, and finds the lid of the second septic tank. “They’ve diverted the pipe which used to lead to this tank into the first one.”

“Why?”

“No idea.” He begins to open the lid of the second tank. “Only one way to find out.”

Hendrik and Alexis rush to help Judah, but the lid lifts easily. It is not tied down by the roots of plants...the daisies actually seem to be growing out of the lid. It topples over in a backwards somersault, and lands with a splash.

Gert and Roger lead the crowd’s advance towards the hole.

“There’s no shit in there,” says Zade.

The hole is covered by a yellow PVC sheet. Judah tugs at it, but it holds fast. He searches for an opening, and eventually discovers that it is secured to the rim of the tank with Velcro. He tears it loose.

The tank is three-quarters filled with cardboard boxes. Wine boxes and apple cartons; boxes which held Simba chips; and others which held mouthwash.

“Crumbs!” says Alf, “The little devil!”

Judah lies on his stomach and reaches into the tank. He manages to get hold of one of the boxes.

“Need a hand?” asks Alexis.

“Nought bra,” he groans, “It’s not heavy.” He lifts the box out of the hole and places it on the grass next to him. It is sealed with brown plastic tape. Hendrik takes the

penknife from the leather pouch on his belt and hands it to Judah. The crowd is silent.

Judah slices the box open. It is filled with greenish disks of varying sizes, like extra large communion wafers, or flat, stale meringues. "It's dried perlemoen," he whispers.

Nobody says a word.

The rain begins to fall again.

No one moves.

Herman is the first to speak, "Bastard," he shouts under his breath, "I'll kill him."

"He probably killed Wilhelm," adds Judah, "Fucking scum..."

"Let's not jump to conclusions." Alf forces himself to be a voice of reason.

"He must know who did it at least."

"If I get my hands on him, he won't know what's hit him."

"Sucking Suzie," Cathy blurts out, "The phone number."

"What about it?"

"He said I must speak to Werner," she thinks out loud, "He must be in on it."

"Now," Selena says, "I don't want anyone leaving here, or making any phone calls," she pauses, "I'm phoning the cops. They can come here and do a full search. They'll follow all the leads."



When Selena and Herman finally leave Ali's Cackle it is well past midnight. As they round the bend before the cutting the car lurches towards the veld, and its front wheels mount the sloping kerb. Selena jolts awake, and clutches at the steering wheel.

"Wha—" Herman puts his hands in front of his face and leans forward, ready for impact.

Selena steers the car back onto the road smoothly. "Sorry," she says, "I'm finished."

"As long as you get us home." Herman puts his seatbelt on. "You've had a long day."

"We all have."

"It's been tough."

"Tell me about it."

"I still can't believe it."

"It'll take a lot longer than a few hours."

"He was my best friend."

Selena has successfully negotiated the driveway to their house. She parks the car as close to the front door as possible, instead of in the garage. She fumbles with her keys, looking for the small bronze one which opens the Yale lock on the front door.

"I should tell him."

"What?"

"Tell Ali."

She gets the door open, but she drops her handbag, spilling its contents. It is pitch black in the hallway and she mutters to herself as she switches on the light. Two lipsticks;

a folding hairbrush; credit card slips; a mobile phone; a red leather purse; some tissues and a canister of mace scatter the floor. "What?" She throws her keys on the small table which greets all who enter the house.

"I should tell Ali what happened."

"Herman." She kicks the contents of her bag towards the skirting board. "You cannot tell him." She enunciates each word slowly.

"He's my best friend."

"He's a criminal."

"Trust me," Herman pauses, "I'm far more angry about this than you are."

"Then surely you want to see him behind bars."

"If I tell him he'll hand himself in." They are still standing in the entrance hall, with the front door wide open.

"How do you know?"

"I know him well."

"Not well enough to work out that he was the main Goddamn poacher!"

"Come on Selena," Herman shouts, "You didn't have a clue either."

"That's not the point, it's all just so bloody typical..."

"What?"

"You and your stupid moral high horse. You sit back and let everyone else do the work—"

"I am blind," he pauses, "It is kind of hard."

"You're also drunk."

"So are you."

“You don’t even take an interest in what we’re doing.”

“Who?”

“RAPP.”

“I made the pendants.”

“And I can’t thank you enough for that, but ever since then you’ve...” Selena’s voice trails off into obscurity, before returning. Calmer. Steadier. “You’re drunk Herman,” she pauses, “Just go to bed.”

“I’m not drunk. This is important.”

“We’ll talk about it in the morning.”

“You promise?”

Selena nods. “There’s no point in talking to you now.” Herman starts to climb the stairs. “You can sleep downstairs tonight,” she says, “Please.”

“I want to be with you.”

“Just this once. I need time to think.”

Herman goes straight to bed, without brushing his teeth or urinating. When he lies on his back the room spins around the light fitting. He doesn’t have time to turn off the light before he falls asleep.

Selena performs her usual routine, executing each individual chore with added application and care. Instead of tossing her continental pillow on the floor she holds it close to her chest. She lies on her side, with her hands clasped, touching her lips.

When the first fringes of the sun appear above the mountain she still has not slept. Selena gets out of bed and puts on an old jersey and a pair of jeans. She digs in her bags and finds her running shoes, which she puts on over her sleeping socks. She goes into the

garden and strides towards her shrine. She takes the hand and tucks it under her left arm. She crouches and lifts her right foot by its amputated ankle. She takes these sculptures to the front of the house, and puts them on the ground behind the boot of her car. She returns to the shrine and fetches two more sculptures: this time the one of her hair, and her right elbow. She makes seven such trips, each time transporting two sculptures, one big and one small. When all fourteen body parts have been relocated she returns to the shrine for the last time. She lifts the comprehensive sculpture, the sum of her parts, by its neck and drags it round to the front of the house. She lays it down next to all of the other sculptures and goes inside. She sweats. She repacks her handbag. She takes the keys from the table, goes outside, closes the door quietly behind her, and unlocks the car with the immobiliser button which doubles as her key ring. She opens the doors of her car, and tries to put the back seat down. She struggles at first to work out which knobs to push and which handles to pull, but in time it all comes back to her, and the back of her station wagon is flat and ready for its cargo. She opens the boot and dusts her hands off. She starts with her full replica. She lifts it by the shoulders and rests its head on the threshold of the car. She goes round to its feet and raises it until it is parallel to the ground. She pushes it into the car and its head thuds into the back of the passenger seat. Its toes protrude, in danger of being slammed in the door. She curses, but then she realises that it will fit if she lays it diagonally across the space. She clambers into the car, and crawls forward. She drags the sculpture's head until it is behind the driver's seat. The feet fall from their elevated position and the whole sculpture fits snugly. She starts packing the other pieces into the spaces which remain. It is like making a 3D jigsaw puzzle. At times it is a puzzle which she thinks she will never complete, but eventually all of the

sculptures are in the back of her car. She will not be able to see in her rear-view mirror, but life, as her mother says, is all about compromises.

She goes inside. Herman is still sleeping. She switches off his light and goes upstairs. She throws her clean clothes in her suitcase and forces it closed. She gathers her toiletries; a few books; and her research papers and puts them all in a straw basket. She carries the suitcase in her right hand, the basket in her left. As she is leaving the house the suitcase bangs against the frame of the front door. Herman doesn't wake up.

Selena goes to the car and puts her bags on the passenger seat. The suitcase has to stand on end and it cramps her when she changes gears. There is no wind and Grootwitvlei is a mirror disturbed only by the occasional tardy cormorant or red-knobbed coot taking off from its nocturnal roost. The sun is up now and her windscreen is streaked with dusty dew. She turns her wipers on and squirts it with water. The brown grunge is relegated to the extremities of the windscreen, and it gathers in two thick ridges which quiver in the rushing air. Some of the mud drips onto the bonnet but most of it is slipstreamed around the vehicle.

Take Two

Zade and his crew return in the first week of December, the beginning of the holiday season. Betty's Bay is innocent. The beach is white and the sea is blue. If you go out beyond the breakers and float on your back you can see only the mountains.

They drive to Ali's Cackle where they are met by Alf.

"What's happening here?" Zade points at the pub, which is boarded up.

"Police seized the property. All the drying machines and stuff."

"Still no sign of Ally?"

"Ali?"

"That's it."

"He's on the run." Alf draws unidentifiable patterns in the gravel with the toe of his boot. "He spent that first night at his folks' place, but he hasn't been seen since."

"But how?"

"Someone must have tipped him off."

"Who?" Zade gasps.

"I don't know...Betty's is a small place, people talk." Alf kicks at the ground to remove the pattern he has been making. "He's got friends here."

"I suppose."

"At least they got Werner."

"And he won't say where Ali is?"

"He's probably skipped the country."

“Surely every policeman in South Africa is on the lookout for him.”

“SA’s a big country,” Alf says, “Have a haircut,,drive up the Orange River, swim across to Namibia...you’ve as good as disappeared.”

“Shit, you’ve thought about this a lot.”

“As I said, Betty’s is a small town...”

Zade laughs. “And Selena?”

“What about her?”

“Has she come back?”

“Not yet.”

“I can’t believe she just dropped RAPP like that.”

“She hasn’t really. She’s moved to Gansbaai and started a branch there.”

“Oh...I knew she’d quit our company, but Rupert was under the impression she’d gone back to Franschhoek. She told him she wanted time to herself.”

“She’s trying to make a full length documentary on the *perlies*.”

“I knew she wasn’t a quitter.”

“She’s a fine woman.” Alf resumes drawing pictures with his foot.

“That she is.”

“I’m sorry I took so long in coming back,” Zade says, “I’ve just been really busy with other work.”

“Not a problem.”

“It would’ve been nice to wrap up that footage we got of the bust.”

“The cops wouldn’t have let you in.”

“Really?”

“They were very secretive. Said they couldn’t trust anyone.”

“Fair enough.”

“How is the stuff you got that night?”

“What stuff?”

“The footage.”

“Oh that...overexposed. Badly composed. But it does the job.”

“As long as the story’s there.”

“Exactly. We’ve edited it, and it’s come out quite well.”

“Shall we go shoot these scenes?”

“Mmm. The weather’s perfect, hey?”

“On days like today this is the most beautiful place in the world.”

“You’re lucky to live here.”

“We are.”

They drive to the beach in Zade’s car.

While they are walking over the dunes, towards the sea, Zade speaks: “How’s Herman?”

“Not so good,” says Alf, “He’s moved home with his mom.”

“Shame man, poor boy.”

“He wants to teach me to fish.”

“Of course,” he pauses, “To take his mind off everything.”

“It’s his way of dealing with things,” Alf says, “And he can’t exactly go alone.”

Zade puts his hands in his pockets. “It’ll take time.”

“It will.”

“I’m sure it was good for him, though.”

“It always is.”



Gert and his assistant set the camera up on a dune which overlooks the path to the Main Beach. The first holidaymakers have arrived in Betty’s Bay and they are taking advantage of the weather. Whenever people walk onto the beach Roger films them. His footage will be edited to make it appear as if there is an endless stream of arrivals. They carry bodyboards and surfboards, cricket bats and cricket balls, umbrellas and spades, sunblock and Stingose, airport novels and newspapers, Valpre and babies, bananas and Frisbees, towels and Chihuahuas, paddleskis and fishing rods, beach-balls and beach-bats, armbands and six-packs, bird-books and beach dresses, pineapples and anti-chafe cream, sand castle moulds and disposable nappies, car keys and cellphones, walking sticks and devil sticks, watermelons and *skottles*.

Satisfied with this footage, Roger attaches a wide-angle lens to his camera and pans across Betty’s Bay. The dune is not high enough for him to get a good view of the town, and snatches of chimneys and balconies and windsocks are the only clues to its existence. The mountains dominate the scene. He starts at the Blesberg and moves clockwise. Voorberg. Disakloof. Platberg. Leopard’s Kloof. Elephant Rock. Then blinding light. The camera struggles to adjust to the sudden loss of backdrop, but it manages to focus again. The sea is flat and glossy. The kelp beds groan like an oil slick.

A ski-boat has dropped anchor off Jock's Bay, probably waiting for crayfish nets to fill up. An ocean liner headed east interrupts the horizon. Blesberg comes into focus again.

Roger looks at the ground. His feet have made a circle in the sand.