Listening through the Cracks

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A dissertation submitted in fulfillment of the requirements for the award of the degree of Masters in Creative Writing

Faculty of the Humanities

University of Cape Town

29/02/2008

COMPULSORY DECLARATION

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

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ABSTRACT

Kyne is an outsider: a white, Danish girl, living in a country where the majority are blacks and the few whites are English. Her sentiments of belonging and integration are lost when her family's farms are taken away by the dictatorship government in 2004. The country, Zimbabwe, spirals out of control: murder, starvation and chaos becomes the way of life. Kyne and her family are left with nothing.

Kyne travels back in time to the bizarre life of her childhood on their farm in Rhodesia during the war in the 1970s. It is a nostalgic yet often horrifying return to her past as she uncovers the strange, sometimes idyllic lifestyle that was once a very normal way of life to her. The story unfolds in a landscape that is both harsh yet beckoning. Kyne confronts her relationships with all those around her beginning with her Danish parents who are determined to continue farming in a land which they call home, even if war threatens their lives. The reader meets Pencil the Cook who allows Kyne into the silent calm of his kitchen, his family, and the secret, adult world in which Kyne will learn of the terrifying reality of war. She describes the workers on the farm who are pulled between loyalty to their employer and to the blacks who seek independence from white rule. Finally, she describes the other white families nearby who are attacked, tortured and killed for attempting to the only way of life they have ever known.

PART ONE – The War Years, 1972 – 1980

Chapter 1

We sat cramped together on the long, front seat of the truck that made the backs of my knees sweat until they felt hot and sticky like old chewing-gum left on a stone in the sun. I sat squashed, caught like a flea between my mother, who was driving fast along the dusty, red dirt-road that seemed to be going nowhere, and the man who smelled. I dared not look at the man. He leaned against the window, groaning.

He had an axe in his head.

The dust swirled around us, seeping into the car, into eyes that we blinked to wash the dryness away, and into our mouths as we breathed. "Mummy," I whinged, "it stinks in here."

My mother wound down her window, something she never did. She hated dust in the car as much as getting wind in her hair. "My hair is flying!" she would yell at my father every time he rolled his window low to wave or call something to the workers we passed on the farm. The dust gushed in and onto everything in the truck, always a dirty red from my father's boots and the farm roads. I was thankful for the wind that swooped in with the dust and took some of the bad smell away.

"Why does it smell?" I whined.

My mother, not taking her eyes from the road as she raced along, replied in Danish, "It's him."

I rolled my eyes sideways, not wanting to look at the axe-man who sat collapsed beside me, moaning and bleeding. "Why does he stink?" I whispered back, afraid he might understand our secret language.

"Drink," she said softly.

I did not understand. How could a drink smell like that?

"What drink?" I persisted, "Like old giraffe-juice?"

Giraffe-juice was something my grandmother would make for children with sore tummies or a cold. It was a disgusting, gagging mix of warm milk, honey and soda-water.

My mother shook her head. "Their beer."

I realised that it was the same smell that hung like an angry shade over the young gardener every Monday morning. His name was Mishek, but since I was only four, and I liked to annoy him, I pronounced his name Me-cat or Mycat. Yet there was more to this smell than just beer. It reminded me of our dog after she had been in the shallow, winter river and was covered in green mud.

One night, some time ago, someone had run over a jackal and the next hot morning the dead stink had hit us with a foul groan. For days we had moaned as we passed the place where the dead jackal lay, thinning and reeking. No one had dared move the carcass because no one could. Then the dry, winter dust, red and thick, had floated over with the breath of passing trucks and tractors and had covered it, slowly burying it. We tried to forget about it, but we would always call that place Jackal's Bend.

Now the smell seemed to have returned from its other world of the lost and almost forgotten. It was a harsh, thick stench that took a seat right beside me, making my stomach lurch with every turn in the road. The sick feeling crept, uninvited, into my bones and sat, heavy and gooey, in my throat.

And there was the terrible, sharp smell of pee. I wondered if the man beside me had wet his pants, but I was too afraid to ask my mother; even in Danish.

It was a very dry season and the road seemed pitted with anger from many months without water. With every bump, the man and the axe made a knock-knock sound against the window as if he was asking to enter our conversation. Dust lay thick in the roadside ditches and had powder-painted the tall elephant-grass and thin Masasa trees lining the road in a deep orange-red that stretched ahead endlessly.

My mother had made me come along with her because she did not want to leave me alone at home even though Pencil the cook or the house-boy and the gardeners were always around. My father was away on the other side of the farm, counting cattle for the

big tick dip that was often needed in the dry season when the elephant-grass was tall and parched yellow, its seeds hiding the countless little brown-black ticks that could swell to the size of a dung beetle after a short day of sucking warm blood. I liked to pick them off Biddy's knotted ears and pop them, one by one, upon the hot stones, squealing in thrilled pleasure each time the red-black blood burst out.

My mother had shoved me into the truck then roared down the road to the compound where Pencil the cook and some others were waiting in a circus circle around someone who sat on the ground. I saw them haul him up, his white shirt all dirty, torn and red. He had a funny thing sticking out of his head. As he stumbled towards the car, I saw it was an axe.

"Don't stare!" my mother said hoarsely. But my eyes would not listen; they grew bigger until they hurt so much I had to shut them tight.

The onlookers were trying to lift him into the back of the truck, so that he could lie down, but he kept rolling around and moaning in pain every time he jolted his head or the axe against the rusting truck floor. They tried to get him to sit up with his back against the cab's back windows, but he lolled forwards like the ragtag golly-wog a neighbour's wife had given me for Christmas.

My mother then told the workers to put him in front as she did not want to be seen driving along the main road with a man with an axe in his head. There was a long, silent pause, their faces looking this way and that and then down to the ground as the man groaned. "But Medem," somebody had said, "how is he to sit?"

I had hoped that there would be no room for me, that I could stay at home and play with Biddy and ask Cook to make me pancakes, but my mother had organised everything before I could finish thinking and suddenly I was bundled into the car, squashed between her and the axe-man. His door had been locked so that he could lean against the window, giving enough room for the axe handle which stuck out above me like a broken branch. My mother had told Mishek, the young gardener, to come along. He had tried to unlock the door and squeeze in with us, but my mother told him not to be daft and pointed to the back. He shrugged his stooped shoulders and sauntered sourly to his place where he slumped down, his back hunched against the back window as he pulled his hat over his face, crossed his arms against his chest and feigned sleep.

At the clinic, my mother drove straight up and parked in front of the sad, peeling ambulance. She stalked inside, passing all the people who sat clustered together in groups and lines with small, fed-up eyes. I moved over and sat, huddled, in the warmth of her seat. Mycat looked around and nodded to everyone, chatting loudly to those who were bored enough to talk back.

I waited anxiously for my mother to return. I knew she would be re-organising the clinic, making sure that the top doctor was being called and that the man, who still sat groaning beside me, would have the best bed and all the attention. It felt like a whole day before my mother returned with some nurses. I watched for their eyes to grow big and white when they saw him, but they did not. It seemed normal to them, to pull out of our truck, a smelly man with an axe in his head.

I wanted to drive straight home, but my mother had to stop somewhere in Bindura to buy some ammunition.

"I need to shoot a cow," she said, before disappearing into the darkness of the shop. She returned, followed by a young black boy who began laughing loudly as he talked to Mycat. He opened the door and put a brown paper bag down upon the floor beside me. He looked at the blood on the seat, then at me, before banging the door shut. "Don't slam the door!" my mother yelled. He stopped and turned, his dark face shining and sweaty in the bright sun, "Sorry Medem."

"Ok. Thank you," she replied as she reversed out in front of a lorry and sped off towards home.

I sat close to my mother. The smell was still strong and nasty where the man had been and I did not like to sit where a man with an axe in his head had sat and bled, with wet pants and clothes torn and covered in dirt. My mother had closed the windows so that her hair would not fly around and I was feeling sick.

As we turned off into the red dirt-road that led us towards our blue hills, my mother told me that the man had been drunk and had got into a fight. I did not understand how he had landed up with an axe in his head, and did not ask. I turned around, lifting my head high to peer through the window behind us and saw Mycat's slumped figure, his head down against the dust that swelled up behind the truck. The smell of blood and dirt and beer was making me want to vomit. I sat on my hands to make myself high enough to

look out the window, but the trees rushed by in a whirr of red and made me feel worse. I looked down to where the axe-man had sat; his blood, now dry upon the black, fake-leather seat, was the same colour as the road ahead. I began to pick at it with my nails; it cracked and flaked like the mosquito-scabs on my legs. Then my mother sighed, as dry as everything else. "Your father's going to be furious," she said. "That's his best tractor driver."

At home Pencil was waiting for us at the back door. He was standing stiffly in his starched, white cook's uniform, wringing his hands as if he was anticipating the gruesome end of a grim fairy-tale.

"He'll probably be fine, Pencil," my mother said to him, "but please ask Mishek to go and tell his family."

My mother ate in a hurry before she began cleaning her rifle. I refused to have a nap, whining to come with her to shoot the cow. It was for the farm labourers' ration meat: my mother did not want them killing the animals themselves.

I had been with my mother the last time they had slaughtered a cow, watching the scene though her fingers as she tried to cover my eyes. They had tied the large, silent beast to a fence post with frayed rope before swinging a blunt axe down into its neck. It had not fallen. It stood, desperate eyes bulging, moaning in deep groans of agony, its neck twisting, stretching out, soaked red with blood that spilled like a sacrifice. Finally they axed it to the ground. It lay there, legs quivering, moans racking like a bad cough that spattered thick and crimson into the dust.

My mother had asked them afterwards why they had not bothered to sharpen the axe. They had shrugged their shoulders, wondering what difference that would have made. She had been too angry to explain, but told them to call her the next time; she would shoot it for them. They liked that idea.

A few weeks later someone had stood at the barbed wire fence by the horse stables, calling the gardener to tell the cook that someone wanted my mother to shoot a cow for their meat. She had nodded, saying to the cook. "Tell them I will do it tomorrow."

But then the next day had come with a man with an axe in his head so the cow had to wait.

I followed my mother down the stony hill towards the workshop. The rifle hung over her shoulder and I watched it move with her rhythm, knowing not to walk in front of a gun. We were at war so I knew just what a gun could do.

We saw the cow meandering near the large thorn tree that spread its dappled shadows like a dream upon recently slashed grass, its head low to the sweet smell as it tugged and chewed. My mother stopped. I stood just behind her, peering round her trouser legs, intent not to miss a moment. I saw the many faces of the workers who had come to see the Madam shoot the cow.

She raised the gun, and whistled. The animal looked up and around, and began ambling towards us, swishing and shivering its head to loosen the flies from its face.

The shot echoed, bouncing off the trees and far walls of the shed before disappearing down the red, gravel tractor road and into the quiet of the open fields. The cow fell to its knees as if begging forgiveness. Then rolled sideways and fell over into the dust. It lay very still.

By the time we reached it, flies were sitting thick around its lolling eyes, like strange, quivering eyelashes. They had gathered on the tongue which was turning a deep blue-black. Blood trickled from the forehead where its hair gathered in a small swirl, an authentic cows-lick. I imagined it being made upon the new-born calf as its mother licked it clean of all her blood and slime, leaving her signature.

Now it lay in front of me, a big, dead cow. Its mother's mark eradicated by a mark from my own mother. My mother took my hand and dragged me away before I could see the men cut the cow into pieces.

We began walking back up the hill towards the house. It was hot. I was tired and my sandals were slipping in the gravel. I was staring at the ground when my mother suddenly ordered, "Stop! Stay behind me. Don't move!"

She carefully shifted her leg so that she stood close to me. Then she moved again, slowly, to stand in front of me. I peered between her legs; on the path in front of us a cobra reared up, its hood wide and angry. Its small black eyes were watching us, staring us down. I felt my mother's trouser legs rise, and knew she was lifting the gun.

"Close your eyes." she whispered. But I was too excited. She fired, and the ground burst into a shower of dust and small stones. The cobra lay writhing, its body twisting and coiling. Then it slid off into the grass, headless.

My mother was bending over, looking at the holes in her trousers where sharp shards of stone had cut through like shrapnel. She was rolling up her trouser legs to inspect the cuts, and did not see my sister come trotting down the hill. I did not say anything. I did not warn her.

My sister had come to see why there was a second shot. She was seven and could count and understand differences. Suddenly she screamed. My mother looked up and began to run towards her but I stood my ground.

My sister had stood on the head of the cobra, and in response it had risen up and was hissing, black eyes glaring. It looked like it wanted to bite her. But its neck was too short. My mother knocked it back with the butt of her rifle and held it down, pressing it hard into the ground, squeezing until its eyes went dull. Then she kicked it into the grass. I imagined the body still squirming around in there, trying to find its other half.

I wanted to go and investigate but my mother ordered me to come back to the house. Late that afternoon I snuck out and went looking for it with Biddy, our Irish Setter whose red fur was always full of clingy grass heads and black-jack seeds that were impossible to comb out. But we found nothing. No body, not even the very dead head. I asked Mycat to come and look but he was too scared, making me believe that the snake had put itself together again and slithered off. My father said that was ridiculous. The snake was dead. It had been shot in half. A hawk or a mongoose had probably come by and found a freshly killed meal. He told me to stop worrying, to forget all about it, but that we should wear proper shoes the next time we left the house.

But I could not forget the snake head that came hissing angrily up from the dead. Nor the jackal-smell of the man I had shared the truck seat with, who had sat with an axe in his head.

That night, tucked deep within the shadows of my bed after my father had switched off all the lights and the world was suddenly too black, I kept seeing the snake swaying as it reared its mocking hood, its piercing, tiny black eyes staring me down. It was striking closer and closer, hissing until it was a black face with large white eyes above which an

axe stuck straight out. And I felt upon my face the syrupy smell of death that seemed to whisper of bad things to come.

Chapter 2

I stood by the barbed-wire fence, my hands holding on to the strand of wire second row from the bottom. That is how I measured my growing, by my height against the barbed wire fence that criss-crossed its way throughout the farm, securing the cattle in their various paddocks. I was annoyed by my large, red and white chequered sun-hat. It kept flopping over my view, so I shook it off and it hung down my back, its elastic strap itching and tugging at my throat. I was watching my mother sneak off with a shotgun. She had told me to stay away; that it was dangerous and baboons get angry, especially when shot at.

The hills were always a strange, purpley-blue in the early morning's haze, before the hot sun baked down upon them and desiccated them into a dry green. The baboons often came down from there in large, raucous troops to feed on the ripening maize that grew between their hills and our garden. For the past few days they had been moving closer. That morning, Sixpence had found them in our vegetable garden.

Sixpence was the head gardener, an elderly, stout man with very dark, shiny skin and a large black wart on his nostril that looked like a plump tick. He came from Mozambique and only ever spoke a few, fumbling words of Shona and not a mumble of English. When he spoke with my mother, their strange words and gestures made their arms fly around before they pointed to the ground like crazed, starving birds. When their garden conversations became unmanageable they had to call Pencil, who stood in between, trying to interpret.

Sixpence was always the first to arrive in the mornings, at six o'clock sharp. At twelve, when the midday sun hung precisely overhead and gave no shadows to his steps, he would leave for lunch and return at the stroke of two, working until four o'clock exactly. He passed through the garden entrance never a minute early or late. He did not own a watch. My father would tease him, asking him the time of day, and Sixpence would look up to the sky, eyes squinting to the sun, and reply, "No, no, Baas. Time not right for Sixpence to go."

An hour after dawn, Sixpence had come to the kitchen door, his dull, overalls hanging tattered, showing the fading colours of other clothes underneath. He never took his clothes off; just layered them with a new set whenever he could afford to, or at Christmas when he was given a new overall that he worked and slept in, until it too, fell off him in torn, worn pieces.

My mother was still in bed when Pencil knocked gently on her door, bringing her tea on the red tray with the chipped corner that she refused to discard because it had come with her from Denmark.

"Morning Medem," he said, his gentle voice resonating like a slow, ancient song. "Sixpence has found baboons in the vegetables. They are not afraid. They still there, eating. Sixpence is very, very cross, Medem."

I had heard the loud click and sharp turn of the gun-safe opening, and left my bed in anticipation, running after my mother as she swung the shotgun onto her shoulder, her pale dressing-gown trembling and billowing with air as she marched across the grass. I saw her stand, surveying the vegetable garden from her hide behind the hedge. Then she turned, muttered something about there being so many and her needing more ammunition. She saw me and ordered me to remain indoors. I followed, reluctantly, and stood in the cold morning shadow of the doorway, as she moved back to the gun safe. On her way out she stopped beside me, wagging her bossy finger, "Don't move! Don't you dare leave the house."

She strode away, almost tripping on her dressing gown that sagged so low in the front from the heavy pockets that hung, bulging full of cartridges. She made a large loopy circle around the vegetable garden. I followed her, watching her moves carefully, ever ready to hide in case she turned around. I stopped by the garden fence, as she sneaked her

way along the outside tractor road. She wanted to trap them as they fled back to the safety of their hills.

I put my head and chest through the lower gap between the bottom wires, craning my head forward; the barbs sunk into the skin between my shoulder and chest. I was watching my mother tread carefully, silent and deadly, through the thick dust of the small road that wiggled and squirmed its way up over the ridge by the horse stables. Then I saw her stop in the middle of the road. She lifted the gun from her shoulder and loaded it; the gentle, early morning breeze brought the clear sound of its clicking as if she was standing beside me. She lifted it up and pressed it into her shoulder, making herself and the gun become one. It looked like a shrug, as if she was shifting, shrugging the whole scene off as a bad joke. She spread her stance wide, letting her slippers settle deep in the dust. She stood very still. Everything hushed. Even the grunts and yelps from the baboons were silenced, their movements and feeding suddenly stilled by the hostility they sensed coming nearer, lurking not far from them. Then my mother shouted out, "Sa! Sa!"

I heard the male reply, a large bark that warned his family - and my mother. She stiffened. We heard their heavy thuds as they lumbered through the vegetable patches, the sticks that held the fading seed packets cracking under their tread as they trampled seedlings and tore down bean fences in their scramble for safety. Then they were tearing across the road as my mother fired, her body jolting slightly sideways and back with the two shots that flung bright red cartridges into the dust. She was quick to reload, but not quick enough; the male, who had sent his females ahead, took advantage of the heavy hush that echoed after the shots and came lurching out, his colossal frame crossing the distance towards my mother in a few, galloped strides before he stopped and confronted her.

He barked, baring his large, yellow teeth in a sinister snarl. She fired straight at him. The shot was at close range and hit him hard, lifting him into the air as his head flew backwards, pulling the body into a somersault that made him fall with a heavy thud to the ground. Red dust shivered up and hung in the silence. He lay there, still and stretched out large, resembling a sleeping man.

Then, pandemonium. The females began twisting and turning in sharp, tight circles, screeching their terror. I thought that they were all wounded until I saw the others return

from the maize and then they began the same strange, lunatic dance. My mother lifted her gun up and began shooting. They did not run away; they continued until they were thrown by the blasts into different directions, hitting the ground and shuddering before lying still.

Then suddenly it all stopped.

A screech rose above the commotion, an anguished wail lifting high into the air. The others stilled, my mother stopped firing. A female was facing my mother. My mother lowered her gun. Then the female bent down and picked up an infant and turned to face my mother full on, lifting up her child as if to show my mother. The infant dangled limp within her outstretched arms. Its head hung low, lolled backwards as if watching the maize fields, looking back towards the hills and its home. Its body was matted with blood, its fur a red that shimmered like the glimmering sequined outfit of a clown. My mother shifted as she brought the gun down, but the baboon held her baby high. Then my mother turned and walked away. As she walked towards me, she did not see the mother clutch her dead baby against her chest, turn and then limp away into the maize.

My mother pushed the gun down on the lowest row of fencing, spreading the barbed wires apart so that she could clamber through, but her dressing gown caught on the barbs. She stood up tall and yanked the bottom of the gown. There was the awful sound of something beautiful tearing; then she pulled my hand and dragged me away. We had only gone a few steps before she turned and began shouting at me, her pitch high and shaking as she spat each word, her mouth contorted with distress, "I told you to keep away! I told you not to follow me! You never listen!"

Then she dropped the gun and began spanking me. I shrieked, shamelessly mimicking the wounded baboons as I circled my mother, trying to escape her smacking hand. Suddenly my father came through a gap in the hedge and demanded to know what all the shooting and screaming was about. I took the chance to run off.

I slunk back into the cool shadows of the house and went to find Pencil in the kitchen. "Pencil," I wailed, "Medem hit me! Medem hit me hard!"

"Shame, little Miss," Pencil said, shaking his head as he picked me up and put me on the counter beside the open window. "Pencil, your friend, will make pancakes now,"

he said as he busied himself with the beating of the batter. I only calmed when I heard the sizzling on the large, wrought-iron pan.

Sixpence came to the back door and, in agitated mumbles, tried to tell Pencil something. Pencil told him that he was busy and that he should come round to the window. Sixpence suddenly stood there, standing on his toes, his large, very black face pressing itself through the open window; I could feel his sour breath on my arm. He was muttering on excitedly, looking at me every once in a while and smiling, shaking his head in glee. I frowned and looked at Pencil, "What's he going on about?"

Pencil did not look away from his pancakes. "He is telling that the Medem kill many baboons. They are lying on the road. And the chief baboon is big, like a man."

"Yar. But she hit me, Pencil."

"Tsk," was all he replied and shook his head as he flipped a pancake over. Sixpence would not leave the window, he stayed there, talking in excited sentences that no one really understood, nor paid attention to. Then my mother came into the kitchen and he disappeared. I tried to do the same, but she caught me by the door. She tried to say something to me, but I was struggling and squealing like a panicky pig. She released me, but I did not go far. I hid around the corner, by the dog's basket under the table. I wanted to know if she was going to shout at Pencil for making me pancakes. But she did not shout. She only asked him, sarcastically, what he was doing.

"Yes, Medem," he replied, gently but firmly, "I am making pancakes for the little Miss."

My mother knew that I had told Pencil about her smacking me. It was nothing new. Sometimes she felt that I was deliberately disobedient, so that she would spank me and I could then go to Pencil for pancakes.

"She disobeyed me, Pencil."

"Yes, Medem."

"I told her to stay in the house."

"Yes, Medem," and then I heard him loudly whisking the thick batter in the bowl.

"Pencil," my mother firmly said, "she did not listen to me."

Silence.

"Yes, Medem. But still, it is not good to hit a child."

I heard through the quiet a new splat of batter sizzle up upon the pan before Pencil added, "And you killed many Baboons, Medem. Sixpence says that Medem shoot good."

"Pencil," my mother spoke, her voice loudening, rising a pitch at the importance of what she was to say, "I had to kill those baboons. You know that. And not because they were eating my veggies. I had to smack Miss Kyne too, and not because she saw what I did, or because I am cross that I killed a baby baboon. I did it because it's too dangerous. Because I have to. I cannot have those baboons near here. One day they may come in and take one of my children. You know they can do that."

Then she left the room, leaving Pencil alone to finish the pancakes. I sat in the gloom with the stale doggy smell of Biddy's basket. She came and curled herself beside me. I saw that her nose was wet and red from sniffing the dead baboons, so I tried to push her out but she was stubborn and lay down on the cement beside me, thinking that I wanted her bed for myself. But I wanted to be left alone with nothing but the thoughts that jangled inside me.

I was thinking of my mother's words: of the danger of the baboons, and how they would steal somebody's child and kill it. Yet my mother had done the same. I knew that this had upset her. Everyone knew that it was wrong to hurt a child. How very wrong it must have felt to have killed one.

Chapter 3

The distant barking songs of the baboons drifted down to us from the hills, as if reminding us that they were far away, but not to be forgotten. The calls became clearer at dusk when the air was thinner, quieter, as if the late afternoon world was unsure of which way to go: not wanting to move forwards into darkness nor back into light.

I would run to my mother and tell her that the mother baboon was still wailing for her baby but my father, sitting in the dwindling light with a brandy, ordered, "Stop your nonsense! They're only barking at the leopards."

"But it's not barking," I would insist. "It's crying!"

"Oh shush! The baboons have forgotten all about that baby by now."

"Have they, Mummy?"

My mother never replied. She just continued counting her embroidery stitches.

I believed the baboons remembered. It was a long time before a small troop ventured back down the hills into the maize fields.

Sixpence had long since raked away all their prints and mess, returning the vegetable garden to quiet order as only he could. He wound the beans back up the thin poles with careful precision, planting new lettuce seedlings in the bare patches and made a covering for the strawberry bed by plaiting long grass into a thin mat that he set over it like a roof to keep the plants from burning in the midday sun. We ate the trampled vegetables for days until my father complained he was becoming a vegetarian, so my

mother gave the rest away to the gardeners, who probably then longed for the baboons to return.

I liked to watch Sixpence sitting on his haunches, hacking up a thick cough each time he shifted his weight, his arms outstretched at a strange distance to the plants he tendered with cautious care. Yet, whenever I heard Mycat approach, I would hide. If he saw me, he would bend over and hop around, making snorting, whooping noises like an ape, and then laugh as I ran off. Sixpence would eye him sternly but never said anything. I told Pencil who went off to scold him, but it made matters worse. One day my mother heard him and came around the hedge, her hands on her hips, lips tight like a zip. Mycat nearly fell over in shame. He tried to creep away but my mother told him to go the bottom of the garden and dig a big hole.

I wished that she would forget when to stop and he would dig himself lost.

Early the following morning, I heard the harsh rustle and swish of the stiff, orange broom sweeping the night dust from the terrace, and I knew Mycat was back. I lay in bed, pondering revenge. I knew that my mother was on my side now, so I dared taunt him back.

Outside, I took a long, green hose-pipe and crept up behind him. The top of his overall was hanging free, tied around his waist by its shredded sleeves. In my eyes it made the perfect hold for the hose pipe which I shoved down the back of his trousers as he bent over to sweep a pile of dirt into a sack.

"Mycat!" I shrieked in delight as I ran off to a safer distance, "Mycat! Mycat's got a tail!"

He screamed as he spun around to catch me. His eyes had grown so large and white I was afraid they would pop out of his head like pebbles from a sling-shot. Then I saw Pencil shake his head at me from the kitchen window, and I turned away to find Sixpence laughing, a laugh that I thought would kill him, wracked with coughs and splutters and the fierce rolling of his very dark-skinned, sweaty face. But then he sat down on a brick and pulled a small, brown rusted tin box out of his overall pocket. He opened it tenderly, took a big pinch of something dark between his fingers and stuffed it up his very large nostril, snorting the blackness deep inside like a wild, dangerous bull.

I giggled and turned back to the window, but Pencil was still shaking his head within the shadows of the kitchen, so I decided to miss breakfast and go and find the dog's ball in the garage.

Inside the garage gloom, I heard a queer and desperate sound from the corner, where the car tyres stood stacked. I clambered up them only to look down into darkness, but I knew that something was lost down there, and very afraid. It was a grey, newly born kitten, still blind and mewling with hunger. I did not care about Pencil anymore: I marched into the kitchen and demanded some milk.

Pencil did not allow animals in his kitchen. But he gave me a saucer of milk and told me to feed it outside with my little finger. I sat on the warming concrete steps clutching the kitten. It sucked very hard and then went to sleep in my lap. Mycat then came past and looked at me angrily. I lifted the kitten up to him and said, "My-cat. A real one."

I gave him my special spoilt smirk as I christened the kitten a name that would always annoy him.

I was eating a late breakfast, forced upon me by my mother, when the agric-alert buzzed and wailed its emergency signals. I was relieved for the excuse to scuttle away from the cold porridge. By the time I came running into the office, hugging the mewling kitten, my parents were already there, listening to the crackling voice telling the community of its first attack. My mother suddenly saw me; clapped her hands and shooed me out of the room, as she would an unwanted baboon. Later, when I followed her out to the veranda and asked her what had happened, she put her head into her hands and sobbed. Pencil came in with a tea-tray and placed it silently in front of my mother. On the tray was an embroidered cloth of red hearts which my mother used only at Christmas.

Pencil thought it would cheer her up. Upon it was her special tea-cup and matching small tea-pot; beside it a small crystal glass and a bottle of Danish Aquavit. My mother did not ask how Pencil knew where she hid it; it was something she only brought out on special days.

Maybe Pencil had remembered its hiding place from the Sunday before. We had been on our way to a luncheon when a man had suddenly stood by the drive, holding his jaw and complaining of a big pain there. I stood beside my mother in the new, white

frilled dress that scratched and bit like angry army ants in my under-arms. She looked inside his mouth, then pulled back, her face all squeezed strange, as if she were the one in pain. She told Pencil to call for my father, who came down in his smart brown pants and pressed white shirt, his polished shoes crunching the gravel irritably. He held a pair of pliers. Within moments he had pulled the tooth out. My mother had felt so sorry for the man that she brought him a glass of her sacred schnapps.

The man went off smiling a new, holed grin, the rotten tooth in his pocket, waving as we passed him in our car.

Pencil poured my mother a cup of tea and then took my hand and led me and the kitten away. While he was making me a snack in the kitchen, he told me not to disturb my mother, "She is too sad today, Miss Kyne."

"Why is she crying?"

"It is not good. That talking box was speaking of bad things that happened last night."

"What?" I pleaded.

"I cannot tell you. But one day, you will know what it is big people are afraid of."

That afternoon we went to a farmer's meeting down at the Country Club. Outside on the veranda, ladies were pouring tea and trying to smile as they proudly served their sausage-rolls, cakes and short-bread. No one ate. The men went into the bar. They were not ready for the meeting; no one wanted to go inside the hall where the plaited plastic chairs sat in long, neat rows.

I stood silently beside my mother, lost amongst this strange confusion of adults who did not know where to be or where to go.

"Isn't it awful, Inger?" a lady asked my mother. I saw my mother's saucer shiver above me and I moved behind her, afraid of the hot spill of tea. My mother shook her head.

"You were close, weren't you? Poor dear," and then the lady's arm went around my mother. I heard her heave in air, trying to stop the sob that was on its way. Other ladies came and surrounded them. They patted my mother's arm and face, took her other hand as they shook their heads, saying how terrible it was.

"And they had just moved onto their own farm," my mother told them. "After so many years of working for others."

"Near Bindura, wasn't it?" someone asked.

"Thank God they didn't have children."

And then the voices all mingled into one, until my mother saw someone else she knew, and pulled her close, "Oh God," she said, "she came running to you. Tell me what happened."

Suddenly there was a crowd around my mother and I was slowly pushed out. All I heard was something about it being very early in the morning, no moon and very cold. I tried to worm my way back to my mother until a lady with a stiff blue cotton dress saw me and with a stern face told me to go and play with the other children in the playground.

As I walked away I saw the men milling outside the bar area. Someone was trying to get them into the hall for the meeting, but they were not ready and held their beers and drinks close to their chests in false comfort.

I found the deep, loud voice of my father, his accent a song amongst the others, and moved up to him. He was holding a large gin-and-tonic and did not notice me. I caught small snitches of their talk; bar talk that I did not really understand.

"Bloody dogs didn't even bark; must be an inside job," said a man with a large, beige hat and a beer close to his lips.

"Yar, some local guys close to the couple; someone who knew them well enough to know their dogs."

"And they were barefoot. Either it's a farm job or they wanted to be really quiet. They sneaked right into the house; down the corridor and into the bedroom –"

"Probably knew it was a creaky corridor. Gotta be an inside job."

"No way," another murmured, his legs stretched round and wide as if he was riding a fat horse. "It's the Terrs, man. They're coming, I tell you. It's war, man."

Another rough voice rose, "They didn't take a thing. Nothing. Just hacked those people with bloody home-made knives and machetes, as they slept. Shit man, what's the world coming to?"

"Bloody munts man. Savages. A pack of jackals would have been kinder."

"Yar. Couldn't even do the job properly. Whacked an axe in his head and ran off."

"Well, if this is war, it's ugly, but we'll beat them if that's the best they can do."

The men made strange, muffled laughing sounds as they shook their heads and took another gulp of their drinks. As they were passing cigarettes around and lighting matches for each other, I heard my father's voice, "Maybe they were suddenly scared of what they'd done. Ashamed. Maybe that's why they ran off."

There was a silence, heavy and pestering, and he felt it too.

He sighed, deep and dangerous, "No. I was in Kenya, during the Mau-Mau. Hell, you have no idea what these people can do. And what's worse? We become just as bad."

"Like how, Jorgen? How can we become that callous?"

My father took a long, slow sip of his drink, his eyes moved from the group of men to the cracked, red concrete floor. "In the Mau-Mau, some police chaps couldn't be bothered to move all the corpses back to the station for I.D. and finger-printing. Said there were too many bodies. So they just hacked off the right hands and brought those back. Left the bodies out in the bush to rot."

I heard drinks swallowed, slow and heavy. Then someone said, "Well I want revenge. I want to get those buggers and do worse to them."

"You'll never get them," someone sneered. "They're gone. Hiding –"

"No," my father said. "No one can hide in Africa. The grasses are always whispering. Secrets are never safe. These men won't be found because someone's protecting them, training them, indoctrinating them, so that they'll be better next time."

Then someone was ringing a gong and shouting for everyone to get inside as the afternoon was darkening. I was left behind as they filed silently into the hall and took their places on the rainbow-coloured chairs, unravelling with age and use.

I sat on the polished concrete veranda wall that always made a red patch on our bottoms like ox-blood. I heard voices rising within the hall, questions and the shouts of angry men seeking some sort of understanding, demanding the truth. I never heard my father's voice.

Years later my mother told me about how her friend had escaped, leaving her bludgeoned husband behind as she crawled upon shredded limbs past the door and out of the house. She had managed to run, stumbling through the darkness of a moonless night, across the

unknown contours of their new farm, to neighbours they barely knew, falling at their feet in a heap. Her arms and face were lacerated, disfigured; she was unrecognisable. But she had managed to call for help. Maybe that was what the gang knew, why they fled. Or maybe they believed that they had accomplished their task, when they swung down a machete and split open her husband's head. He lived, but not to tell the tale, for he never spoke again. He could not. He never did anything again. For the remainder of his life he sat hanging lopsided in a wheelchair, drooling in a mostly unconscious state, in a home in England, supported by his pension from the British Army.

And she, my mother's friend, never grew old. With every look at her husband, she was reminded of all that they had lost. She lived only for a short while after he passed away, preferring to follow him than be left behind, alone and with nothing.

It was the first attack in our area. But I never really understood, then, what had happened. That evening in the kitchen, as Pencil was washing dinner dishes, I told him all I had heard from the talk of the grown-ups at the Club. He listened, his eyes bulging white, every now and then smacking his lips in disbelief, anger, and fear.

We did not know that at the meeting that afternoon, the attack had been hushed down by local white politicians who did not want an upset community.

The farmers now realised something else: this was war, where no one could be trusted and no one was safe. They did not see it as political struggle but a personal one against them, against their land; the acres of bush they owned and ploughed and cherished. It became the moment of truth: take up the fight, or leave.

"Pencil," I asked, "What are the big people afraid of?"

But Pencil did not say. He turned his back on me and began to wipe the counter top with a yellow rag.

"Pencil," I begged, not wanting to be ignored. "They said it's war. What's war?"

But he shook his head as he wrung the rag into the sink.

"And Pencil," I continued, "What's a Terr?"

Pencil turned suddenly towards me and said, with words sharp enough to cut the air that hung around the kitchen like bad breath, "You are a little child and must not know the talk of big people!"

He turned away again. I was insistent.

"But Pencil, *you're* one of the big people. You must tell me so I can also be a big people."

Pencil sighed. His whole body shuddered; then he whispered, "No, no, Miss Kyne. It is not right –"

"Please?"

He walked towards me, wringing the cloth in his hands. I sat very still and stiff upon the blue table, afraid I would miss a word.

"This thing war is very bad," he said quietly. "People can fight, can kill you."

He took a deep breath, his eyes seemed too sad to be his own. "A Terr is the white name for Terrorist. That is what they call those people who make too much nonsense and kill farmers. But you never tell your father that Pencil tell you."

I nodded my head in promise. "But who're these terrorists?"

"I don't know, Miss Kyne. They are many people, who say many things."

"Like what?"

"Too much things that make many of us Africans afraid."

Pencil folded his arms across his chest and looked down at the floor. I waited for more, but he kept looking down, as if his newly cleaned floor would tell him what made him so scared. "I do not want this war. It's not right to kill. I want my job, to feed my family and my children go to school, so they can be clever, like white children." Then I saw Pencil's eyes leave the floor and drift away as if they were following something dream-like moving past the kitchen window and out into the darkness.

He stood very still. I dared not move. There was a silence I had never heard before. Like a very quiet wind that could only hush; like a breath that came slowly through a hole that should not be there.

It seemed as if Pencil had forgotten who and where he was. He stood there, staring blankly into the deep blackness of the night. And then he said, in a slow, soft voice, almost a whisper, as if he were afraid that the insects might overhear, "But these people, they also talk of something more. They shout of freedom for us Africans. They say about the white man; he has taken our land. The farms are ours. They tell us we will live in these houses, drive the big Benzes. They want us to help them, fighting, for a country they call Zimbabwe; for the African to be in power. They will give us all these things."

Pencil paused, shifting his slim shoulders as he sighed, "This thing, it has happened in other places. Even in Malawi. But I do not want to go back to Malawi. There's no more money; no jobs. I do not want these people to come and make me fight or go back to Malawi. There is nothing for me there."

"You must never go, Pencil!" I blurted, as my eyes grew heavy and full. "Please, Pencil, you must promise. You're my friend."

Pencil's head suddenly shook, and his eyes rolled around as if trying to find out where they were. He looked strangely at me, trying to focus. Then he forced a smile. It hurt me. Like it was not real or that he was afraid to smile at my friendship. "You go now," he said quickly. "I must finish work. I must go home."

He turned away and began putting away the pots he had just scrubbed and dried; quietly and gently, as if the sound would break the night.

I slipped away into our bedroom and began telling my sister of what I had heard at the club. I added a few of Pencil's answers to act smart. Lisa frowned and was silent. "Are you sure?" she asked. "You're not just making it all up?"

There was a jealous tint to her voice, "You weren't meant to be snooping. It's rude."

Before I could retort my father came in to say goodnight and she began babbling about the things I had heard.

I was terrified my father would shout at me, or pull my ears. But he just sighed. He sat down on Lisa's bed and opened his arms to me. I hesitated. My big sister had a rule about me on her bed and she was very strict about it. But I took my chance.

Once we were wrapped in my father's arms, he tried to explain everything to us. "I don't know if there will be a war. But I will not let anyone come near here. This is our farm, our house. And I will never let anyone hurt you, or Mummy. I promise –"

"But the terrorists?" Lisa insisted. "Do they have guns?"

"They have machetes," I informed her.

"They have whatever they can get hold of," my father continued. "But they will not get far. We will stop them. They will never come here. I promise."

"Will Pencil have to go to Malawi?" I asked.

"Will we have to leave?" my sister whined, "What about my pony?"

"We will all stay here. Nothing bad will happen to us. I promise. Now you must go to sleep. It's very late."

He hugged us extra hard and kissed our cheeks until his stubble scratched. I felt it long after he had left us in the dark and his tread had faded down the passage. He closed the door to the office so that we could not hear their talk and it was then that I was frightened.

My sister and I tried to talk to each other, but we did not know what to say. We were afraid of our own words. Nothing could comfort us. When Lisa began to sniffle into her pillow, my body went stiff and cold. I thought of Pencil walking home in the dark, all the way back to Malawi with his family. I closed my eyes to imagine what a Terr looked like. I saw a big black man with an evil grin clutching a gun and a machete. He wanted to fight my father. But my father had promised that no war would ever come to us, that we would never have to leave the farm, that he would keep us safe, that nothing would ever happen to us, and that we would never have to be afraid.

I trusted him. I believed in him.

Chapter 4

A heavy, miserable silence hung about our home like an unwanted loiterer we kept brushing against, trying to ignore. Nobody would talk about it, yet we all knew it was there. My father began locking the doors at night, though it brought no comfort. It just made us more nervous. I began to fear the night as a playground for intruders who waited all day until deep, dark shadows could hide them, and then they would come to our doors. Never to knock.

My parents could no longer shrug off the war that was creeping closer. The attacks on the farms were becoming more frequent, bloodier.

One morning I awoke to the heavy sounds of digging and voices calling out, my father giving orders that splintered the still, early air, Somewhere further away, I heard the hacking of a tired tractor engine battling beyond its means, its heavy tires rumbling and bouncing on stones and gravel. The choking silence was now gone.

I had no time to eat breakfast and ignored all calls to the table. I had to be out there with all the wonderful noise that had chased the oppressive stillness away. There were workers swarming all over the garden. The dog was running around, bemused and confused by the sudden intrusion, barking and yapping in agitated, happy circles.

I walked with some workers towards my father's voice and found him, just below the hill, telling men to dig the trench deeper. I slipped my hand into his. He was busy. I followed him, stopping beside him every time he did, scuffing the dry dirt with my heels. Shovels rose and fell like the steady rhythm of a song. He would suddenly halt to inspect,

give orders or watch, his hands on his hips, occasionally lifting one to tilt the brim of his veldt hat lower as it lifted and buckled with the heat.

I trudged behind my father and the dog trotted after me back up the hill, to the tennis court, across to the horse stables, down to the cattle dip and then my stomach began to hurt. I was hungry and annoyed that he had no time for me. I still did not know why there was all this digging. Then a tractor and trailer drove up the sandy drive and the men began off-loading large, heavy rolls of wire. I ran in to call my mother. She was still drinking coffee at the breakfast table; her face hard and set like cement baking in the sun. I told her about the wire, but she just shook her head and looked away. I told her about the digging in her garden, and her face became more rigid, her jaw jutting and locking before she muttered something about it being good that we, at least, had a big garden. I had never thought of it as big. I had never thought of the garden with any notion of its size. There were some flower beds near the house, and sometimes, though only during the summer rains, the lawn would stretch green and wide and seem to float over the rise and down the hill where the grass grew wilder, untamed, full of black-jacks and small, fat- headed weeds that in winter would pale and dry into thorns. Then, as the hill sloped, it became veldt grass, high and thick, until it rolled steep and stony down to the workshop and fertilizer sheds.

There were the vegetables that grew behind the house and all the way across to the horse stables. Then there was the road that came behind and lay between us and the maize fields where in summer the baboons would come down from the hills and feast through the nights, calling and whooping to one another. But I never thought of the road as a cut-off point between us and the farm. The fields and the hills were just an extension of us and the garden. There was only a small barbed-wire fence at the other side, below the stables, which was to keep the cattle in their pastures and out of ours, though often a calf would be found gently lumbering around in the vegetables, leaving small double dents everywhere. And while I was thinking of this, it hit me like a stone thrown to my head: They were putting up a fence! I asked my mother if it was true.

"Yes," she nodded with a strange moan in her voice, "now we are no longer like wild animals. We are those that have been caught."

In one short day the security fence was erected high around our garden and a large, metal double gate was locked at the end of the drive that swerved between enormous, tumbling bougainvillaea hedges. The garden had become a small, intimate world, cut off from the rest, its few hectares suddenly becoming a designated area, a difference we pretended not to notice. We all felt caged in, especially my father, who seemed at every sunrise all the more eager to escape the confines that clutched and restrained. He never spoke of it, as it was, to him, just another actuality of the strange African lifestyle. He would explain to the curious friends who came to Sunday lunches - their pressed, white town clothes stained with the heat of noon and the dust of the drive - that it was only for his family's sake. My mother planted Christ-Thorn and other fast growing thorny bushes along the outside of it. To make it seem prettier was her comment, though she knew these plants to be more of a deterrent than the fence itself. Later mortars were put in the ground, hidden in the plants like invisible, terrible tricks. They could be triggered from a little grey box beside my parent's bed. We had to learn, more important than spelling and numbers, which small levers with the gaily coloured red and green buttons would detonate which area in the garden. And suddenly the garden was no longer a wild, free place of play. It too had restricted areas.

Attacks were getting closer, surrounding us from all sides.

One evening, during dinner, my sister and I felt a strange tension that held the mealtime in a strong, silent grip. My father kept looking over towards my mother who looked away. Every now and then we would feel her gaze upon us and when we looked up, her eyes seemed somehow awkward, sad and sorry at the same time. Pencil felt it too and tip-toed around the table as he served the meal. After he had returned to the kitchen where his tidying up could be heard down the dark pantry passage, my father's voice broke the stifling, silent air.

"We have to talk. About -" he looked to my mother, who shut her eyes. "About being attacked."

The air suddenly crashed down around us. "You must get out of your beds - fast," my father said, in a voice soft yet hard, coming from a father who loved so intensely and a strict school teacher who was losing his way. "Just fall to the floor. Then listen. If the

attack - the noise from guns and grenades - seems far, then just stay under your beds. Don't move. Mummy and I will come and get you."

He took a deep breath, as he shifted on his seat. My mother was lost in a silence, her eyes upon a spot on the tablecloth. "But if it's close," my father continued, lowering his voice to meet my mother's look, "If they're shelling the house, especially your bedroom walls, then get out. Fast. You must pull your blankets over you and crawl on your tummies to the passage. Just watch out for shattered glass. Get to the passage as quickly as you can; it's in the middle of the house. It's the safest place. There're no windows."

My mouth was dry, wringing itself like an old kitchen cloth. I hated the passage that lay between our room and my parents. Especially at night when spiders fell onto us in the shifting, evening heat as we scuttled like frightened beetles down to our bathroom at the end. Once we had made it there safely we would peer anxiously into the toilet. Once we had found a squirming snake there which, even after several flushes, still fought to keep its head reared and refused to drown.

Now I was being told to squirm my way down this dark passage with its splintering teak-tiled floor to the safety of my parents while the house was being blown up around us. My food felt like the stubborn snake; it would not go down. Then I made the tears come before my mother told me off. She never said a word; she sat there, still and brimming with the silence that had seeped in from my father.

It stayed within her, like a strange disease, filling, saturating, so that when she held us close as she hugged us a soundless good-night, she seemed larger, fuller, almost bursting. I was afraid that she would wobble away down the passage, her slim figure inflating, and pop like a red party balloon. A large bang that would send us scampering under our beds.

I did not want to sleep alone that night; or any night afterwards. My father tried to console us by explaining that early the next morning he was putting up sand-boxes outside the windows that would catch any grenades or bullets before they could smash the glass or hurt us.

Had I known it would be my last night of lying in bed, watching the outside world open with each billowing of the curtain in the warm breeze, I would have relished it and

kept myself awake until dawn. Instead I was thinking of grenades that might whiz through the air and blow holes through the roof and machine-gun fire that could rat-a -tat-tat punctures through our walls. I had recently seen a neighbour's house like that: it looked like an old shed with the measles.

I was imagining people hiding on the other side of the fence, watching our every move, waiting for the stillness of sleeping, for our silence to deepen so that they might destroy it. I lay wondering where they could be. Which area would be, for them, the best to hide in? Behind the guest house? Down into the deep, hungry shadows by the jacaranda trees? Behind the stables? Would they cut a thin slit in each horse's throat as they had done to a stud of neighbouring racehorses, letting them slowly fall, winded and bleeding, to lie floundering until they were found the following morning, eyes bulging and soaked with fear? I wanted to ask my father if our horses were alright, and the dogs and cats. And what about Pencil? What about the compound?

Though my sister lay stirring in her bed on the other side of the room, I was too afraid to move from my bed and venture along the darkness of the corridor. I needed some comfort, some reassurance that I was not all alone.

"Lisa?" I whispered. "Are you still awake?"

"What now?" she sighed, as if I were the cause of her tossing and turning.

"I want my kitten, Mycat. Will you come with me?"

"Don't be ridiculous," she scoffed and rolled over with a grunt so that I knew that her back was round and turned against me.

I lay for a while, measuring my desperation for a purring comfort against my fear of the dark and who might be hiding therein. Then I thought, if something were to happen, I would not be allowed to run and get Mycat the kitten, so it would be better if we were all prepared and Mycat was already with me. I slipped of bed and let the cold floor awaken my feet before cautiously padding out the room, feeling my way with my hands along the walls, following its cold breath down the passages and into the kitchen where Mycat lay in a box next to Biddy's basket in the scullery. My mother had given in to my whines and had allowed the kitten to sleep there, because our last tame kitten had slept in the garage but one morning, it was gone. My father had found jackal tracks in the sand and dust of the drive.

I hugged Mycat close to me; yet I felt guilty about leaving Biddy who was so overjoyed to see me behind. But I knew that she would always find a way out if something happened. I unlocked the swing door for her, just in case.

Back in my bed, my kitten lay upon my chest under the blankets and purred a calm, tender song into my body. The moon, peeping through gaps in the curtains that thinned and went wide with the sigh of the night and its soft wind, lulled me to peace with its beams. It would be the last time I could count on that light.

The next morning my mother was annoyed to find the kitten in my bed. My father was furious that I had unlocked the swing door and did not calm down when I earnestly explained that Biddy would need to get out if someone ever came.

"There's no point! She's a dumb pet, not a watch-dog!"

I had never heard my father speak badly of any animal before. I did not think Biddy was dumb. She was a dog who liked to chase porcupines even if she came home howling with quills in her face; she acted much like all the other dogs I knew, bouncing for a walk, bouncing for her food, bouncing for a ride with the horses or otherwise sitting panting and dribbling in the heat. Besides, Biddy had more manners than the others. She never came into the house unless asked, and she never begged. She could sit and lie down and she understood "no".

I followed my father, trying to explain all of this to him, but he sighed like an oblivious breeze and told me he was busy. I slipped my hand into his when some men came walking up the drive, lugging large, strange boxes, each one carried between four men. It looked like a funeral for very squat giants. My father moved off to help them place the boxes under the windows and did not notice my tugging.

Throughout that day, the hammering and drilling made us all move out into the garden. The bulky, wooden boxes were bolted up against our bedroom and bathroom windows; then they were filled with sand and cement and sealed. When we returned indoors, we stood with Pencil and looked at the small gaps left at the top. But then the men stood on ladders and covered each gap with a thick, wire mesh that darkened all hope of light.

The boxes were painted white but it did not help. Black would have been more honest. Our bedrooms now lay suspended within their own, unrealistic world of neither here nor there, in a gloom that filled and suffocated.

Chapter 5

My memories from early childhood are permeated with cracks and flaws that mimicked our home. Our house at Dimwe Estate sat upon a fault that lifted and sunk, depending on the mood of the season; how wet it felt, or how drought dry.

A wind or silent storm, or the slamming of a door by a breeze passing through, would cause the old house to tremble. It was like, a tremor of fear running along its spine, goose-bumping its dark corridors.

When the cruel heat of the day, which had sat fat, heavy and wet upon us, lifted and lightly drifted away with the dusk, and the cooling evening imposed its darkness, the house would heave and sigh as if the change in the temperature was unbearable to its arthritic walls. The agony of it all, with its poor build and old age, caused it to creak and groan into the night. I would lie in my bed fretting that the house would fall into a ruined heap around us, and we would poke our sleepy heads out of the rubble and move off into the trees.

I was glad that I had learnt the ways and could climb the trees, but doubted my mother and sister would ever manage the higher, safer boughs. I wondered how my small tree house, which my father had built in a tall Jacaranda tree with a view over the mealie field, would ever accommodate all of us. And then there was Biddy. I had tested her out, but she was not much good at climbing, and once heaved up, never managed to hold onto the boughs.

I told this to my father one afternoon as we were standing by the small stream that only trickled its way through the farm after a storm. He was looking for the python some

men had claimed to have seen stealing a calf that had gone missing. He had immediately checked their houses, but found no sign of meat, bones or hide and so had decided to search for the snake, knowing that it could not go far on a full stomach. My father found nothing: no snake, no culprits, and no evidence; only an intuition that rises up in the gut, a strange, mocking feeling that comes after many years of living in Africa.

But the afternoon was not lost for me. I had spoken relentlessly throughout the tedious, searching hours about my Jacaranda tree house being too small for the whole family, and how Biddy was a feeble climber and how the new security fence that stood so close to my tree was making me feel claustrophobic. I also tried to explain how the sand-boxed windows made my world dark and miserable as well as irritating my asthma and everything else. My father thoughtlessly promised me something else, even better.

I reminded my father, hourly, every day, until one morning a small orange tractor and wooden-slatted trailer came bumping up the drive and dropped off some men and a pile of gum poles stained black from anti-termite treatment. I hung about, too thrilled to leave, and watched my father work with the men. I waited for the moments when our eyes would meet, as his arm rose up to wipe the sweat off his brow with his sleeve, his eyes peering through the gap between face and his elbow, squinting with pleasure at the sight of me standing there, stifled with excitement. I stood in the shade of the large flamboyant tree whose glory was coming to an end. Its blooms fell, little bits of red dripped down in a slow and gentle drizzle, leaving a pool of still and silent red upon the ground that dried and shrivelled in the midday heat.

By late afternoon the hammering and banging that had echoed around the Jacaranda wood suddenly stopped and left a heavy muted hush around the finished structure. It was a large room on stilts, creating a shaded outdoor spot underneath: my very own veranda. A wooden ladder led up to the entrance and there was a window opening on each side so I could keep my view of the baboon hills.

The next day the men who did the thatching on the farm huts came and put a large, grass, hat-like lid upon my new tree house, and then I moved in along with an old, green camp-bed from my parents' safari days in Kenya, a small and warped wooden table, a very collapsible chair and a torn, leather pouf for the dog or a guest. A tin of biscuits waited on

the table to entice Biddy up the ladder though it was much simpler to ask Mycat the gardener to carry her up.

After I had moved in, my mother hardly saw me again in the house, except for meals and sleep. I was never again forced to take afternoon naps, realising only then that naps are not for the benefit of children, but for parents' peace. Now that my mother no longer heard me, she had no reason to complain. I was glad to have my own space where cobwebs were as welcome as dust, and the rains fell in a strange song upon the thatch, unlike the harsh pounding on the red and green corrugated iron of the house. And I no longer had to hear all the grumblings about the house and its cracks and dust.

We all had our complaints about the house. Even Pencil would sigh when the dust wafted in on the silently whispering wind and sat in satisfied layers upon the furniture. He always seemed to be more at ease in the dark shadows of the kitchen; tall and straight in his white starched uniform as he stood over the yellowing-brown Aga, or bent double on his hands and knees to polish the red floor to a deeper crimson, his long bare feet with toes opened wide like a fan spread on the grey, cracked concrete. My mother would sometimes peer into the large crack which streaked its way across the shadowed floor, and ask him to stop sweeping the kitchen dirt of dust and scraps into it. He would simply reply, "No Medem. I do not sweep the kitchen into the crack. It just goes there."

It was not the only crack my mother despised. The whole house was full of fractures that split and ripped like the pork crackling my mother would roast with apples on Danish holidays. A large crack tat snapped its way down the wall of our bedroom, from the ceiling to the floor. In summer it was thin and weak, but in the dry winter months it would gape wickedly, loud and angry, bringing the cold nights right into our beds. We would shiver as the cold tried to settle down beside the warmth of our bodies, while we twisted our limbs into knots so that it could not enter the deepness of our sleep. My mother thought this crack was dangerous, for it opened her children's bedroom to the dangers outside. One winter, it grew so fearsome that I could squeeze through it sideways.

After the sand bags were bolted onto our windows, I yearned for the crack to open and gape so that I could slip out, unbeknown to my parents, into the secret wonders of the night and feel once more the wind of freedom rustle my hair and tickle my skin into goose-bumps. I would never venture far, for fear gripped me too tight and I was always looking

around corners, thinking every shadow was a lurking terrorist. So I sat beneath the large security light and let the Christmas beetles whiz about and fall into my hair and clothing.

Around the house there was a wide path of thick, defectively laid cement blocks which joined at the back into a square terrace. In summer we drank tea there, as the afternoon sun caused the small trees to cast long thin shadows which cooled without stifling the light. My mother's scrap metal pieces of art hung in a bizarre design above the tea table creating illusory and dreamlike shadows across the wall. The cement blocks followed the rhythms of the house, swelling and contracting during the seasons. I watched their slow, subtle movements carefully, waiting for the perfect time when my racing would be smooth and fast. I had a little wild and red go-cart, with peddle-pushed rubber wheels and the number 52 painted in white on the back of the black synthetic seat, where a plastic Farmers Co-op bag, filled with the necessary junk of play, hung in full rhythmic swing. Teddy, legs and arms stuck out stiff as if in fear, sat squeezed beside me.

In summer, the concrete slabs fought in the heat and knocked each other, with scorching blows, out of position. It was a rough ride, and Teddy had no choice; he was a forced passenger and co-pilot who sat in a perpetual, bewildered silence. In winter, the night frost forced the concrete blocks apart into silent gapes, so the go-cart, Teddy and I toppled each corner turn.

The concrete slabs, apart from forming the grand-prix runway of my speedily fleeting childhood and planting within me the impatience of slow driving, also held beneath them a dark and unknown world. Hidden under the concrete slabs were cement drains lain down to catch the storms from the gutters and whisk the wild waters away in a flurried wash of leaves, bits of tired corrugated-iron roof and old birds' nests. During the arid and parched winter months, when the dry drains were of little use to the survival of the crackling and crumbling house, they were home and sanctuary to countless species of beetles, bird-eating spiders, scorpions and lizards that crawled their ways and days in and out of the slabs and into my bottled collections. The scuttles and slithers of the lizards intrigued me the most, for I had to be quicker than them if I wanted more than their detachable tails as prize for my mother's discarded jam jars and shoeboxes.

Ants made their colonies there, forcing the slabs to rise high, tottering precariously as a roof above them until my father stood above, stamping steadily, his dusty grey, leather

boots pounding a strange rhythmic dance that never seemed to deter them or bring on the rains.

During the last of the summer season, when the rains had left us to cooling skies but the concrete slabs were still warm with the midday sun, wild cats would hide their kittens there, just out of reach of the jackal's paws. If one put an ear to the hot slabs, one could hear the soft mewling of the newborn and their slow, gentle thrashings scritch-scratching their long, sharp claws against the rough cement. I would wonder about their thoughts of their new world, as I sped above them, screeching the changing of the gears, or my father's heavy boot tread, disturbing their cat-napping dreams. The wild cats had their breeding times perfected, for when winter did come and the cement slabs parted in the frost, the kittens would be large enough to fend for themselves, and then one morning they would be gone. They never left a trace behind. No nest or straw or hair; even the warm, milky smell had vanished. The cold nights would cause the slabs to gape wider still and the snakes would slither in, hiding deep within the leaf-clogged tunnels, curling tightly into hibernation until the heat returned and drew them out again.

One afternoon, a wild cat stood meowing at the back door of the kitchen. Pencil summoned me with quick, concerned motions and when I saw the cat, clutching a black kitten in her mouth, I screamed and ran to call my parents.

My mother set up a surgery of newspapers and wet cloths upon the blue kitchen table. Pencil stood beside her, shaking his head at the disorder and impending mess, though his eyes shone in awe of my parents' systematic order and care. My father sat down at the table as my mother held the kitten, black and mewling, in torture from the safari-ants that covered it in a crawling coat. Slowly and precisely, my father picked the ants off the kitten with a pair of tweezers, dropping them into a bowl of boiling water. The wild mother cat seemed tame as she quietly watched before suddenly disappearing. My parents looked at each other, thinking that they had been left with an orphaned kitten that I would now want in my bed. But the cat returned with another kitten which she gave to my mother in return for the first, which first comforted and licked before going off for the others.

It took all afternoon to de-ant the kittens. And when they were all free of the hungry bites of the safari-ants, my mother filled a cardboard box with grass and an old jersey, and placed the cat and her kittens inside it. Pencil carried the box to the water-tank shed, where ripening bananas and bats hung above, watching. My mother and I left a bowl of warm milk beside the cat that was licking and reassuring her kittens that all would be well.

My father could do little to hide the cracks that faltered their way across our lives. He could not fill the faults of our home, nor the fractures of the war that split the country apart.

The war marched determinedly on, crossing our farm hills as large bush fires in the night and retreating over the escarpment by morning, the last whispers of smoke dwindling in the dawn light, leaving the ground bared black in ash, a lipless grin of destruction. There was nothing my father could do to end the war, even for his children's sake; nor could he could fortify the cracks of winter, for when summer came with the heat and humidity and heavy storms, they would close up once more. The walls and cement blocks would again be locked within a tight and silent embrace.

I measured the passing seasons of my childhood against the yawning and sighing of cracks in our house and a war that drew us closer within its tight, restricted grip. I would follow the cycles of grass that grew from burnt stubble to a thick green, luring the animals out into the open spaces of the veldt. With the heat of summer, the grasses grew tall and dense and could hide an elephant.

The dry winters turned the grass into pale browns, and the women would return to the compound with long, bulky bundles upon their heads to thatch the huts. They moved slowly in a lingering file of figures; strange silhouettes against the hasty setting sun that looked as if they were carrying stiff corpses upon their stretched necks.

The grass would turn a warm, orange-red in the thick September dust until the dryness caught the flames of the intense, early summer heat, and fires would race and roar with hot breath, jumping the fire-breaks ploughed to keep the paddocked cattle safe. The fires blazed into high, fierce flames that danced their way, swift, untamed and riotous, reducing everything to deep, black ashes that smoked for days.

Yet often it was people who set the fires off, to trap animals or catch the mice that fled into their holes. They were easier to find when the grass was burnt and the land desiccated.

My parents did not like us riding out alone into the bush, even with Micka the horse-boy who tendered the horses and knew the bush better than any of us. My parents were especially anxious when the elephant grass was tall and thick.

My father would then come with us, to inspect the cattle hidden like bulky secrets, riding his old mare, his right hand always resting close to the gun strapped upon his belt. If the horses suddenly stopped, snorting, with ears pricked forward, as they nervously stamped the ground to Biddy's barking, my father would withdraw the gun, holding it cocked and ready, his eyes searching the grass for the slightest movement. We would wait, reining the horses in tightly to keep them still and quiet, until the dog returned and the horses were again calm. At my father's signal, we would press our heels tensely into the horses' flanks, cautiously moving on, hearts pounding with the rustle of the grass like an outlandish song that would play in our minds for the rest of the ride.

My mother never accepted my father's justifications in taking us out on those long rides through the thick bush. She did not understand our feelings for our horses, though, like us, she yearned for the quiet, open spaces which could set the soul free. With every glimpse of a fleeting antelope or the sighting of an ant-eater, porcupine or wildcat, we forgot about the war and the scars that marked us, and could pretend that life was boundless, untamed and peaceful.

Chapter 6

My father always returned home, unscathed, in the early evenings, though he knew that the situation was becoming worse and that he should not be out so late. Somehow he managed to avoid the landmines that blew other cars and tractors off the roads, as well as the ambushes that waited in ditches along the roads. We began to fear that his luck was running dry. My mother would scold him for coming home at night, after the curfew hour, but his excuses - about tractors, broken pumps or fences - were numerous because of the sanctions and the new farms he had just bought that lay some twenty kilometres away. My mother would always retort the same thing: these farms would be the death of us all.

Every morning my father strapped his pistol across his hips and strode off in silence into the dawn; quietly unlocking the kitchen door to let himself and Biddy out and the Cook in. His wake-up call to us would come later, in the heavy stamping of his boots on the red polished cement steps as he scattered his precious farm dust all over the kitchen floor. It would resonate in echoes that became louder as they jolted and bounced their way through the house of cracked walls and long, dark corridors, determinedly stamping our sleep away.

It was as if my father was strangely, unknowingly, mimicking the stampede of the war, as it came hammering and stomping, kicking our childhood into another direction. We learnt about the omniscient presence of a gun, what not to touch and how never to stand in front of the barrel, and how to run carrying a handgun pointing to the ground if we were ever under attack. Later we would learn how to load a gun, how to aim it high and empty its contents in a spew of ripping blasts that echoed deep into the suddenly silenced bush and

deeper into our minds. The noise has stayed ever since, returning often, determined to be remembered.

In the evenings we were drilled on how to hide if we came under attack, how to man the agric-alert radio, what the call sign was and how to report the attack, as well as which switch could trigger which mortar down in the garden. This all in case something should happen to our parents, leaving us alone with fear and death creeping closer. It was all to make the whole family feel safer, though it never did.

Our 'News' books from nursery school were filled with the echoes of childhood, trees and flowers against a sky of birds alongside scribbled war stories; drawings in multicoloured crayons of attacks, of people called terrorists and camouflaged parents not holding hands but rifles. I feared the nights without knowing or really understanding why.

And yet, somehow, it was a very normal childhood. As children, we did not know anything else.

One morning we came out to the bustle of something happening in the kitchen.

"Hurry up and eat your breakfast," my mother ordered. "When Daddy comes back we're going for a picnic."

We ate hurriedly, then put on the trousers that would keep the dry grass and twigs from scratching our legs and the small boots that would protect out feet from snake bites. We sat on the front steps, Biddy panting beside us, the picnic baskets filled, and we waited. The pale sky became a deeper blue as the heat rose with the morning. At mid-morning my mother sent Pencil out to retrieve the baskets and put them in the cool shade of the kitchen. He brought us a tray with glasses of juice and some biscuits, but we were too hot and annoyed to eat anything. Biddy had left us long ago to lie under the thick shade of the pomegranate bush. I envied her but I was too stubborn to move. I did not want to leave my sister alone in case she would be the first to spot the dust from our father's truck coming up the drive.

At midday my mother called us in for lunch but we refused to move. We had to be ready to pounce on my father as soon as he arrived in case he suddenly scuttled off to the office or to the workshop. My mother tried to move us into the shade, but we refused, so she had to put an umbrella out. It cooled only a little, as the heat baked the cement blocks around

us, causing the heat to shimmer like steam from a hot pie rising right into our faces. My sister ate her lunch, but I could not. The sun was making me sleepy and agitated.

Just as I was drifting off, my father arrived. He was sweating and annoyed. There was grease and oil all over him and his clothes; it looked like he was wearing black gloves that rose up beyond his elbows. As we ran towards him, we saw a large black patch on his brow, hidden under the rim of his hat, where he had tried to wipe the sweat away.

He had forgotten all about the promised picnic.

A tractor had broken down in the far field by the hills, and he had spent all morning trying to fix it. He had to weld the broken pieces together, for even if he drove all the way to town, they probably would not have the spare part. Sanctions imposed upon the country had stopped all imports. Some companies were attempting to copy the parts, but they were not always reliable. My father preferred to fix as much as he could himself. This always kept him on standby, and he often missed Sunday luncheons with friends as he had to stay behind to repair any damage.

Yet my father had promised us a picnic. Even though he was exhausted and had not even eaten breakfast, he scrubbed his arms with a tough, wiry brush and washing detergent that left his skin smooth and pink. He then packed us all in the truck, telling us that we were going to the hills. He asked Pencil to come along so that he could help carry the baskets, and me, whenever I became too tired. We sat on the back of the truck with Biddy hanging precariously out over the side, took off our hats and let the wind blow knots in our hair. We knew we would be screaming later when my mother tried to brush them out, but at that moment, it seemed worth the tears.

My father drove down to the workshop and collected some large spanners. He threw them on the back with us and we wondered what use they would be on our picnic. We left the main gravel road, turning right onto a track that headed for the baboon hills whose summits formed the boundary of the farm; the large granite rocks that jutted out become clearer as we neared. We passed through the patch of tall green grass that we called the horse-fly corner; if ever we rode through that area, our horses would buck and rear up, whinnying their disdain at the sudden bites that descended upon them like a black plague from nowhere. We smacked and swatted the flies off us, though my father drove too fast for us to feel under attack.

My father drove with his head out the window intently watching his maize crop standing proud and tall, the green wilting from the leaves in streaks of brown. I sat and stared at the other side, where the bush was thick and almost hidden by the tall, green elephant grass which soon would pale and dry with the end of summer. In the winter the women would cut it down for thatching and pack it into thick rolls that they carried on their heads, their bare feet walking the stony ground in the shade of their burdens. Now one could only see the few trees that hovered above the grass; their umbrella tops a thick, lush green.

Suddenly my father stopped. He got out of the car and took the spanners from between our legs before walking over to the bush and disappearing. We sat in the silence and heard his pushing through the grass grow fainter. The afternoon was quiet after the noise of the truck; the birds began singing and the crickets hummed from the grass and trees. We heard my mother sigh inside the truck. Pencil swatted at flies and Biddy began panting loudly, her tongue dribbling wet whenever she moved her head. We pushed her away so as not to get any of it on our bare arms. In the distance we heard muffled voices, a tinkle and then a hammering. We could tell that my mother did not like sitting out in the middle of the bush alone with her children: we saw her open the cubby hole and take her pistol out, placing it within the folds of her skirt. Then a tractor started and we heard it bump its way towards us. It appeared out of the bush in front of us, all mean and orange, my father standing on the side steps, holding onto the driver's shoulder with one hand, the other clutching the spanners under his arm. He lifted them triumphantly to us, in a proud wave, and then he dropped off and let the tractor move on; rattling behind it was the trailer full of chopped wood from the land he was busy clearing. He was smiling as he plonked the spanners down next to us with a heavy chink and clang. As my mother put her gun back in the cubby hole, we heard her say, "So *that's* why we were going to picnic in the hills?"

The track became rougher as it rose through bush, leaving the farm lands and cattle grazing paddocks behind us. When it got too rough to drive my father parked the truck in the shade of a cluster of old Masasa trees. The bark of the young saplings that grew between had been torn and stripped by the passing antelope. The largest of the trees had a large growth like a witch's wart on its side. It was shiny and smooth from the animals that grated and rubbed their skins against it, using it as a familiar scratching post. We walked over to it and picked

out the pieces of hair to see what animal species had been there. My father and Pencil discussed these until we moaned boredom and began moving off without them.

Wide spattered shadows fell from many trees upon the rocky dry ground. The grass was sparse and short. We found the path and began the climb, slipping every now and then in the gravelled steepness. My father leading the way wielding a long stick for the snakes and a gun for the terrorists. It was not long before I whined about my empty stomach. My mother wanted to climb higher but my father warned her about the time. It was already mid afternoon and we had to be home before dusk. My mother veered off alone and then called us: she had found a level spot with a large flat rock we could use as a table.

My mother and Pencil began unpacking the baskets, Pencil brushing the ants off the rock before laying the bright red and white chequered tablecloth out. My mother poured my father a gin and tonic, the ice and lemon bobbing between the bubbles that rose in the tall glass. He sat silently drinking, his head hatless for once, leaning against the trunk of a tree, his army rifle resting across his thighs as he stared out, admiring all that he owned. It had been mainly a bush farm when he arrived, but over the few years he had fenced the grazing pastures and filled them with cattle while he ploughed the virgin soil for his maize and cotton crops.

I hovered around my father, serving him dry tomato sandwiches on my mother's light blue, plastic picnic plates, and pieces of cold, pink tongue with a Danish creamed carrot and pea dressing. Then I sat down in the dust beside him. I leaned against him and looked at the view, trying to find the distant hills. They were blue and hazy through the shadows and shade that played through the trees. Pencil walked quietly away and sat by himself where we could not see him. I like to think that he was glad for this change of scene and enjoyed his own company. My mother told me to take him a plate of food and a Coke and I found him, lying flat on his back, asleep under a bush.

We had just begun to enjoy the ripe mangoes and remnants of my mother's Christmas cake - which she doused in the local, bitter brandy whenever it began to dry - when Biddy began barking. "I thought I heard something," my mother whispered hoarsely.

My father got up, saying he had to relieve himself anyway and moved off into the bush, leaving his rifle in the shade. He had not gone far, when he called for Pencil to come over,

quickly. My mother sat stiff, holding her plate in mid-air. The hum of the crickets seemed to rise with the tension. I got up to follow Pencil, but my mother ordered me to stay. We heard my father talking to the cook, "Look here, Pencil. Whose fire is this?"

"I don't know, Baas. But they have big boots."

Then we heard them returning, sticks crackling loudly under their urgent steps, my father holding his pistol as he looked around, anxiously.

"They've been having a fire, just here. It's just been put out. Get moving, now!"

He put the pistol in its holster and took up his rifle. My mother and Pencil threw everything into the baskets and we darted down the path, slipping and sliding in the dust and loose stones. I stopped halfway, wondering where Biddy was.

"Keep moving!" my father shouted.

I began to cry, "I'm not going without Biddy!"

He dropped the basket onto the ground, food and plates tumbled out, the gin bottle shattering, spilling strong smells. He picked me up and carried on moving swiftly down the hill, telling me to be quiet or they would hear my screaming, though we all knew that they could hear a hushed whisper and had probably been listening to every movement and word.

When we reached the truck, we saw that my father's spanners were gone. He packed us hurriedly into the front and told us to put our heads down upon my mother's lap. Pencil had to lie low in the back. Biddy had still not come as we drove off, the truck bouncing nervously along, while I whimpered into the coolness of my mother's skirt. My father was cursing himself.

We never went back into those hills. My father was ashamed at his irresponsibility - for taking us there when we had heard that the terrorists had been crossing the hills. Now we had seen the evidence up close, knowing that they had been just beside us all the while. The war that had been confined to the bush suddenly crept even closer.

The hills sat around us, always in view, though now we looked at them differently, imagining the terrorists laden with Communist guns and political hatred criss-crossing their way, overtaking our land because we could not fight so many of them with their stalking ways; trackers with ears that pricked to the slightest sound.

Chapter 7

We did not stop the picnics. Instead of walking the hills we rode off on horses and either stopped at the river for our lunch or at the Great Fig Tree, whose arms seemed to grow out from the bottom of the trunk before twisting and clinging around each other, leaving a large, hollow within its coolness. It became our wilderness tree-house, a meeting point where we could wait for my mother to arrive in the truck with food and cold drinks.

One morning we left the homestead just after dawn, the horses walking stiffly on sleepy legs, my father's horse, Gypsy, side-stepping to find her balance, her back sinking under my father's weight. My father, in blue Police Patrol trousers held up with his gun belt, sat high on his horse, scanning the bush for movements from cattle that had left the herd as well as for lurking, hiding figures. My sister, who always had to determine the paths we took, was already ahead. I was hunched, still half-asleep on my horse, Spankles, another of my sister's cast-offs. He was a fat, stubborn Welsh Mountain pony who had to be constantly reined in tightly or he would stop and snack on grass. Because of his very short legs we had to frequently lurch into a canter just to keep pace with the others. Fortunately, Spankles was madly in love with Gypsy and never strayed too far from her, so I could be left to day-dream, knowing that he would always keep track.

We were following a cattle trail through the grasslands that had grown tall and dry as summer lengthened and I stretched out my arms, gliding my hands along the fluffy tops of the grass, as the pony trotted along. It felt light and dream-like between my fingers and I closed my eyes, allowing the early morning sun to warm my face, as the pony's hooves

plodded within the still, long shadows and coolness. The grass guided the blindness of my day-dreaming and my outstretched arms balanced me tall in the saddle as the horse trailed in lazy laggard sighs behind the others, greedily pulling at tufts of drying greenness as if his bulging belly could never be full.

We rode all morning, my father stopping along the way to check the barbed-wire fencing of the paddocks, noting the places that needed repair. Whenever we met a cattle herder, the trousers of his faded green overall hanging in large, gaping holes, exposing dry, pale knees, my father would give him a verbal list of which fence needed mending, and he would nod and say, "Yes, Baas," after every sentence, before disappearing off into the tall grass.

We reached the fig tree by early mid-day and my father noted that the rains had not been good here: the grass was brown and very dry. He whistled long and high three times and then got off his horse. We unsaddled the horses and let them roll in the grass, drying the sweat that made dark, saddle-patches on their backs, before hitching them with the long rope my father carried hanging and coiled cowboy-style from his saddle.

We peered into the hollow of the tree, searching the interior for hidden creatures, especially the bottom branches where snakes and the webbed nests of bird spiders often lay, shaded from the midday heat. Then we sat down in the shade, waiting for my mother.

My mother, the Queen of Picnics, arrived majestically with Pencil by her side, as she no longer ventured into the bushveld of the farm alone. The pick-up truck was laden with tables and chairs and woven reed baskets brimming with food and cold drink. Gin and bottles of tonic for my father peeped through the tops of the folded tablecloth; large, green, garden grown lemons nestled bright against the red and white of the linen. My father unfolded a chair and sat down, waiting for his drink, while we unpacked all the baskets, every now and then shoving Spankles' nose out the way as he sniffed the baskets and the table looking for bread.

After lunch we lay around in the shade on the camp mattresses my mother had brought along, idly swatting the flies that swirled slowly around us. After a while I moved off with Pencil, my khaki green army bag slung over his shoulder as we went looking for beetles, butterflies and other bugs which we caught and put in cracked jam-jars. Pencil showed me a

fully grown scorpion that lived under a stone; I wanted him to pick it up for my collection, but he was too afraid, "Uh-uh, Miss Kyne. It is very dangerous thing; its bite is fire. It can burn the body for many days."

Later I found a chameleon but as I picked it up, Pencil yelled, telling me hysterically that it was a very bad thing. I knew that he was suspicious of them, but I loved the strange eyes that rolled around in their heads, looking both this way and that as they changed colour. I popped it into a large jar in any case, but then Pencil walked back to the others, telling my mother that he would not get into the car if he had to share the ride with a chameleon. So my mother made me let it go. I put it in a branch of the tree and watched it walk, swaying two-toed away.

The heat fell with the sun and the afternoon shadows cooled the air. It was time to leave. My mother drove off to find a track, and we followed after, finding a cattle trail that would lead us directly home. We watched the sun setting to our side before disappearing behind the mauve hills, flaming the skies in shafts of reds and oranges.

We arrived at the stables as dusk swallowed the land in a haze of red dust. Micka the horse-boy was waiting to take the horses. My sister stayed to help him, but I followed my father back out into the bush. He wanted to show me something. As we walked through the tall grass the rustling sound of our movements seemed louder, and with every few steps the crickets stopped chirruping, waiting until we had passed until they started up again.

My father stopped and pointed to something large and alive in front of us, in a clearing. It was a termite mound that rose several meters from the ground reaching the tops of the trees around it. Out from its side poured fat, brown bugs with long wings. They crawled out of their cool, mud darkness into the evening light, unfolded their wings and flew off. Soaring above, dipping and diving through the air were hundreds of swallows, swooping silently in a feeding frenzy. We were surprised not to find any fertilizer bags placed at the entrance of the mound, to trap the insects within, as the Africans loved the juicy taste of the flying ants. My father caught one, plucked off its wings and ate it, just to show off. I laughed at him, but did not want to try.

We sat down on a rock. My father took most of its warmth, but I squeezed myself close to him, leaning against his shoulder. I felt the last of day's heat move from the stone and into

me, and felt the warmth of my father seep into my side. It was a good feeling; safe and kind. But then my father broke the gentle spell and said, "There may not ever be another picnic, or long ride through this bush."

I did not understand. I looked up to him, but he was still watching the flying ants. "The war's getting worse. It's not safe anywhere anymore."

He picked up a stick and rolled it around in his large hands. "We're thinking of sending Lisa to boarding school in town; to Salisbury."

My heart stopped as I feared that he was going to say that I too, had to be sent away. But he did not. I was relieved and did not mind the thought of my sister being sent far away.

"I think we have to move," my father said slowly, almost whispering, "From here."

I shifted my legs, getting them ready to stand up and go, when he continued, "No, Kyne. From the farm."

I sat suddenly still. My body went slowly numb as his words swam into my head, and then sank; each one a large, heavy stone.

"We have to leave the farm," my father continued. His eyes left me and he watched the marks of the stick he poked the ground with. "Some South African chap wants to buy it. And we have to leave; move away from these hills. It's too dangerous."

"No, Daddy! We can't leave."

"Listen. I'm going to be called-up. I'll have to go and fight in the bush -"

"Why?" I whined, almost in tears; the thought of my father lost somewhere far away and us without a house was too much for me.

"They need more men. Even us older fathers. The war's getting worse. I can't leave Mummy here alone. On the farm, by herself."

"And me."

"Mmm," my father murmured, "and you."

I did not know then, that my parents had other plans, almost already in place, for me. "Where will we go?" I asked.

My father sighed. He threw his stick out into the darkening bush and we heard it whiz through the air and fall, bit by bit, through the grass. "Well, Mummy wants to go and live in town. So you and Lisa can go to school there, and be safe." He picked up another stick and began making trails in the dust that we could barely see because the dusk was dimming fast, before he concluded, "But I can't. I have the farms."

I could no longer hear the night sounds that had been growing louder around us. I had to shake my head to get my ears to start listening again.

"And I'm not going back to Denmark," he said flatly. "Never."

My head began to spin. It was in a complete jumble, especially with the new thoughts of the cold and gloomy holidays in Denmark that were always cut short because my father missed the farms and my mother tired of him complaining about the leftist politics of their homeland. "They need a bloody war!" he would fume over the newspapers read in my grandmother's always wet and green garden, "That will sort them out. Make these long-haired, moaning idiots into men."

But now he was going to move us away because of a war.

"We have to stay together, as a family," he continued. "I can't drive in and out of town every day to the farms. It would be the weekends as well. Farmers don't have weekends off. Your mother knows that. She would never see me."

My father threw the stick away and immediately began searching for another. When he realised how dark it was getting, he pulled his cigar case from his pocket. He unwrapped the cigar from its plastic, and pulled off the green paper band which he handed to me, without thinking. I put it onto my finger, like a ring; it was something we always did. He struck a match, the sound and flare of sulphur blazing the darkness so that I could see his clear, pale blue eyes. He was not watching the cigar, but me. He put the cigar to his lips then drew on it, sending the thick, strong smoke into wild clouds that sailed upwards, to hang, swaying in the still air.

"I think we should move to the other farms, near Glendale," he said as he cleared his throat. "They're smaller, safer. No hills."

"No Terrs?"

"No. Not that many."

He dragged on his cigar, and then sent the smoke billowing heavenwards again. "We'll build a new house -"

"But I want this one!"

He laughed, "But Mummy doesn't."

"My tree house?"

"I'll build you another one. Even better."

A strange list of things began appearing in my head; everything that we would leave behind – not just the places I had always known, but the animals, the people, my home. It was as if my father knew what I was thinking as he said, in a calm voice, as if trying to reassure me that all would be well, even better than before, "They'll all come with us. I promise."

I sighed. It was all too much. Tears began to brim in my eyes and the world darkened and became distorted. I felt everything familiar seeping out and flying away, as if I was the termite mound. I would be left, lost and empty, with nothing.

My father heard me sniff. He moved the cigar into his other hand, and put his arm around me, pulling me close. "And you know what?" he said as he gently moved his hand up and down my arm, rubbing a comfort that only made the tears fall. "I was even thinking of making the game park at the other farm, Protea, really big, and filling it with lots of animals."

"Like what?"

"Well, we have sable and impala, but what about some ostriches and zebra?"

"Ok," I said, liking the idea of so many animals close by. "I'll think about it."

But my father had not been waiting for my permission. This had not been a discussion; but a way of speaking out loud, getting the hurt off his chest, even if he then, without knowing, put it onto mine.

I could not imagine ever having to leave the farm because I could not understand the consequences or the reality of the war. We sat in the darkening air, the dusk growing thicker

around us, feeling the past afternoon's heat rise into the long, deep shadows as the coolness of night came about us and tickled our dusty, bare arms. We watched the ants, oblivious to the danger above them as they ventured out, testing their new wings, flying into a fresh freedom of air that only lasted a few seconds before the birds swooped.

Then my father turned to me, and explained why, even though he feared for the safety of his family, he could never leave this country and return to Denmark. "Once a piece of African dust gets into your soul," he almost whispered, "you are captured, and will never more be free from this land."

Chapter 8

My father never understood how much my sister could dig into my soul. She was three years older and determinedly bossy. She made an imaginary line in our bedroom that she moved closer and closer towards my bed, saying that because she was older she needed more space. My pets had to be kept in the scullery and even my jars of bugs were removed from the window shelf.

I made a quiet agreement with Pencil: I promised not to make a mess if my jars could be kept on the kitchen windowsills.

The games I played with Lisa in the shade of the Jacaranda trees were always under her command. I had to be the one to wash and curl her hair when we played "Hairdressers". She even made me steal my mother's nail varnish when I had to paint her toes red. When we played "Hospital" I was the dumb patient who got the injections from the clever doctor dressed in my mother's white, town jacket, my arms and bottom poked with my mother's sewing needles. Lisa would always be the school teacher and I the dreadful, lazy pupil. I would spend most of the hours in the far corner she sent me to so that she could read her Nancy Drew novels in peace.

When the morning came for her to leave for boarding school, I was ecstatic.

Before I awoke, Lisa got up early and put on the pressed blue uniform that had lain ready on her chair for days. She brushed her thick, blonde hair noisily, sighing loudly when she could not get the plaits exactly even. The blue bows were tied with utmost precision around the elastic-bands before she nodded with satisfaction to her image in the

mirror. Then she looked down at me still in bed and with a "Humph" went out the room. She went down to the stables to say goodbye to the horses, and then to all the cats that stood meowing outside the kitchen door, waiting for their porridge and milk. I heard her showing off her new uniform to the gardeners. I thought she was awful and told her so, though somewhere within, I was jealous of all the attention she was getting. It was her big day, and we all had to know about it.

I sat sulking at the breakfast table as my mother and Lisa were going through the last minute list of all the things they had packed. My mother was wearing the short, smart dress that rode green and wild above her knees, and her blonde hair swirled in a large curl above her neck. I thought she looked like a queen. My father was late.

My mother, annoyed at my father's delay, took it out on me, sending me to my room to get ready when she knew that I preferred getting into my dreadful town clothes at the last minute. But I was glad to leave the table and the sound of my sister talking to my mother like she was suddenly all grown-up.

My socks itched. They were white nylons that sat high, just beneath my knees with a tight, elastic frill that scratched. I would force them down to sit slack and shapeless by my ankles, but as I walked they would wiggle their way into my shoes and their crinkled bagginess sit like small stones beneath my soles, sweating a sickly smell. They, like most of my clothes, were hand-me-downs from my sister, bleached an almost pale yellow to erase the stain of red farm dust and make them ready for the city. I wanted to stay home and be barefoot. I scuffed my shiny, lacquered white shoes, also once my sister's, in the dust, and smiled at the dirt that coloured the scratched pale leather, tainting them a dusty red. I hoped then, that my mother would throw them into the large, cardboard box that, when full, would be inspected by eager women buyers from the compound, their cleavages full of dirty, rolled bank notes from their week of cotton-picking. I wished that another child would like these shoes; maybe a child whose mother came on the Monday mornings after the end of the month's pay day.

We did not know these women who came, tall and different with a mischievous glint in their tired, red eyes and who wore shoes and carried handbags filled with money. They would stand and giggle in front of the boxes, holding up the clothes to each other, using the others' judgement as a mirror.

My mother was always pestering my father to stop paying the men's wages on a Friday, knowing there would be nothing left for the families soon after, the money having been spent during the weekends on beer and women. Every pay-day we would hear from the compound the loud raucousness of the beer-hall shouts and dancing, drums pounding their drunken beat until sunrise, gradually winding down to the final slow, soft throb of sleep. But my father said that they were grown men and could do what they wanted with their pay. So my mother began a money-lending system.

The women could come and borrow from her and she would write the amount next to their names and the names of their husbands in a little, blue school ledger. The women would take my mother's green pencil, and with unsure fingers sign against their names a wobbly, nervous X. At the end of each month my mother sent the book down to the office and the money was deducted from their husbands' pay. Not only did she ensure that the children were being fed and clothed properly by their fathers, she also become great friends with all the women. They would stroll up to the back gate asking to borrow money and in return tell my mother the scandal of the compound; whispered stories of who was having an affair with whom, and who was buying a new wife and for what price. On such days, when the women followed my mother into the garden to the guest-cottage to borrow money or look in the boxes of clothes, their shrill talk rising in excitement and tales, the gardeners and cook would creep around and stand in the shadows behind the walls, listening.

Now that the women had a say in their husbands' pay, they made sure that there was not enough left over for the wild women who came on pay day, sauntering in smart shoes into the compound and into their husband's beds. The men were never angry with my mother. They were actually pleased that she helped, for they were always sorry when in their drunken stupor they left their family hungry and poor for the rest of the month. Some men tried to get my mother to lend them money. Always the same faces came every Friday afternoon, with long tales, of cash needed for the clinic because they were ill, or of a dying grandmother somewhere far away. My mother would send them and their stories to my father, knowing they would rather go home and stay sober instead.

My father told my mother that if he were the money-lender, he would charge for his services, and with all the transactions made, he would not have to farm any more. He would become a banker instead, wear fancy suits and sit in a cool office where a fan would whirr away the problems of rains and drought.

My mother was putting on lipstick when she saw the sight of my shoes. She did not let me take them off and throw them in the old-clothes box as I had hoped. Instead she lifted up the back of my stiff, starched dress with its awful, firm frock of frills and spanked me with the dreadfully firm palm of her hand. Then she ordered me to clean my shoes. I thought of asking Mycat the gardener, who was busy polishing the lights of the car, removing the last remains of the hard, dried bugs that had to be pried off with a fingernail, but I sulked off and asked Pencil to do it instead.

He was bent over on his hands and knees polishing the red cement floor in the scullery, the heels of his bare feet pointing heavenwards, the cracks from his walk from Malawi to our house ran like small, dry riverbeds from his thin, dark ankles to the strange paleness of his soles.

He smiled as he gently wiped my shoes with same round movements as he always used when polishing or cleaning. I stood, looking down at the top of the white hat that sat like a starched sugar bowl upon his large head. My mother found us in this position and I had to dodge her outstretched palm. Yet I misunderstood her anger. It was not because I had asked Pencil to clean my shoes. It was the scene she saw as she walked through to the scullery: me standing looking down at a servant who was kneeling in front of me, wiping my little white shoes clean.

I sulked off again, Biddy slinking sad by my heels, and decided to hide from my mother. Her agitation was growing wilder by the quarter-hours that ticked by. My father was once again late in coming home from the fields. She had wanted a photo shoot of us all dressed up on this special day.

Biddy and I hid in the round, dark tool shed by the vegetable garden, where we hung the green banana bunches to ripen. The roof of the shed was a large water tank that was home to hundreds of black bats. They dangled from it, dribbling and dripping along with its leaks, tainting the darkness with a bitter-sweet smell.

I must have dozed off. I awoke to my father's call and saw his silhouette, large and filling against the bright, summer sky, all dressed up in his going-to-town outfit. In summer it was always a beige safari suit with a straight, jacket-like short-sleeved shirt with matching large shorts to the knees, beige woollen socks up to the knees and over-polished brown leather lace-ups from London that clunked with a soft squeak when he walked on the glossy, stone floors of the Standard Bank. My father's going-to-town outfit was not much different to his farm clothes, except for the shoes and that the suit matched and had no grease stains on it. My sister and I would giggle at my father whenever he put on his swimming trunks. He had a deep tan on his face and neck and from his hands to just above the elbows. Each kneecap was mahogany brown. Everywhere else was pale white from his constantly wearing the same outfits.

I followed the smell of my father's aftershave. It made me think of dank fir-forests in Denmark. I saw my mother and sister already in the car, looks of resentment from the long wait etched into their faces. They glared at me, and then my mother shook her head in despair as her eyes fell upon my dress. I had been lying on my side in the round shed, in the thick dust and bat droppings. The little grey and black pellets were not easy for her to brush off, and I was sure that my mother was smacking me more than she was trying to wipe the grime off my dress.

As we drove off, I glanced behind me, as I always did, for one last look at our home in case we never returned, and there, as always, was Pencil, standing unnoticed, waving farewell.

The day had started badly and my mother was angry all the way to town until she had tea at Sander's coffee terrace where ladies would model the store's latest fashions between the tables. Then she forgot all about the farm, the dust, the bats and even my shoes and I was allowed a chocolate éclair that gushed over-sweet, curdling cream over my dress. Lisa sat beside me like a rigid Barbie-doll queen. This was a special day. It was hers. She was starting boarding school that afternoon, and was wearing her brand new school uniform. She insisted on wearing the thick, blue blazer with the large, gold emblem on the front pocket and the beige hat, even though it was the middle of summer and we were inside. I mentioned this to my mother, who always made us take our hats off

when we came indoors. My mother and sister smiled down at me. It was that typical, most annoying smile that said, "Shame, you just don't understand."

This time Lisa seemed to sneer. Now she was a big girl and could do whatever she wished. Her eye-lashes fluttered as she rolled her eyes at me. Stiff and erect, her body turned slightly as she spoke in a low, adult voice to my mother, commenting on the dresses that whispered past us, making me feel alone in my little hand-me-down world.

I sat quietly by myself, licking the cream from my hands until they felt raw, hoping that my mother would notice and offer another one. The day may have started badly, but I had eaten a messy chocolate éclair and my sister was soon to be left at boarding school. Utter bliss leaked from my stomach into my heart.

I was not jealous when I saw the school, though my sister tried her utmost to impress me, throwing her arms in the air as if she was already house mistress. Inside her, though, she was afraid. I could see it in her eyes, and have often wondered if my parents did too.

As we drove off, my sister stood, all of a sudden a small person beside the large front door, and though she was waving, her smile wobbled and broke. I saw it all as I was kneeling on the back seat, staring out of the rear window as I waved wildly to comfort myself more than my sister. I told my father that maybe we should stay a little longer with her but he said that it was nearly curfew time, and we had to rush if we were to meet the convoy of army lorries that would escort us safely home.

The road back seemed long and gloomy. A strange feeling of isolation welled up within me, and would follow me throughout my life. My own journey with its strange, dark road to lonesomeness had begun.

That evening, when we arrived home, and the bright, bare lights glared upon the white-washed garage wall, I tried to recapture the jubilant feeling that had danced around within me all day when I had realised that my sister was going to be away at boarding school. But it had gone, blown out the car windows into the cooling, dusk air. I imagined it being found, hanging in a Masasa tree at Mazoe dam, by a vervet monkey who would wear it as a smirk across its face and never give it back.

When I opened the car door I was met with the warm welcome I always longed for: the wag of Biddy's tail and Pencil's soft smile and greeting. He was standing there, dark

and tall in his Malawian pride and shy manners, lifting his right hand to his forehead and then bringing his hands together in welcome. He patiently waited for orders of what to carry in from the car when I rushed out and hugged him, burying my head deep into the starched stiffness of his uniform. It smelt of a hot, metal iron and red, Lifebuoy soap. And, within the deep, accumulated strangeness of the day, I took his long, slim, dark brown bare arm and kissed it.

My mother saw my gesture, gasped and then promptly placed some bags in Pencil's arms, telling him to take them inside. Then she pulled me aside and scolded me, telling me that I was not to do that.

"Why not?" I asked. "I kiss you hallo."

"Well," my mother began, trying to find the right words that would help her explain. She opened the boot of the car and fumbled around amongst the packets and boxes of shopping. "Because Pencil is a servant."

"So?"

"One does not kiss one's servants," she replied flatly, attempting to dismiss the subject by turning away and looking for a particular bag. I knew there was more so I stood my ground. Pencil had returned from the house and stood hovering beside us. My mother quickly filled up his outstretched, empty hands, and then added more when she realised that I was not yet done. As Pencil moved off towards the house, sway-walking like a drunk under all the boxes and bags of shopping, my mother leant down towards me. I knew then it was serious.

"Pencil's also a man," she said, rather firmly.

I shrugged.

"And one doesn't kiss men."

I knew that there was more. I waited, placing my hands upon my hips, looking her straight in the eye. She moved even closer towards me. I could smell the afternoon tea sandwiches from Meikles still fresh on her breath as she whispered, "He's an African."

The air around me seemed to darken into a black silence and it was suddenly bitterly cold. I shivered. My mother had moved back away from me and was unpacking the boot, her frame lifting and falling with her movements that made strange creature-shadows across the garage wall. I could feel the words of her sentence slowly sinking into

me, like a heavy headache descending from the top of my head. I thought I would choke. Then Pencil was back, smiling down at me. His face seemed lost against the deep, dark African night sky and I had to turn and walk away.

I went into my father's office. He was sitting at his desk, sifting through bills while drinking a brandy and eating the orange that Pencil peeled for him every evening. He often told us that this was his favourite African luxury: a peeled orange, freshly picked from the garden, served at dusk.

I did not really know how to explain what had been said to me, so I only asked him why it was that Africans were different.

"They just are," was all he said, without looking up from the papers.

It was my first evening alone in our bedroom. My sister had left. Instead of the small, gaping hole that had opened when I waved her good-bye, there came a large, widening wound that would deepen and fester for the rest of my childhood. For I would never really understand the importance lain upon us all of the difference between races.

That night I lay awake listening as the sounds of the night crept in though the large cracks in the walls from the outside. The owl sounded louder as did the knocking of the Christmas beetles that banged into the security light above the window, each knock like a new thought that wanted to break in or out of me.

To me, Pencil was not just a servant who worked in the kitchen and cooked me pancakes. He was someone I had called Peggy when my first, mispronounced words came. He was my friend; maybe my only friend because I had no one else nearby. Pencil understood me. He listened to me, and told me stories. He brought me the baby animals that I stroked and loved and we caught creepy-crawlies together that were kept in labelled match-boxes in neat rows upon the windowsills of my bedroom and the kitchen. He was also the audience that watched me performing as Red Cat Woman, when I darted around in my red nylon bathing suit with the red woollen stockings from a Danish winter holiday, my mother's red bath towel knotted tight around my throat. Pencil would stand in the kitchen window, peeling vegetables and listening as I swung, screeching, around the electricity pole outside, before I went into a musical song and dance show that I had

seen on T.V. He never made rude comments like my sister. He only smiled and let me continue.

I knew he was a servant. I knew he was a man. I was not a stupid nearly-five year old. I also knew he was an African, but I did not understand why that was so important that it warranted such whispered words from my mother.

Chapter 9

My mother went to town every Wednesday. She would have a quick breakfast, all dressed up in her smart clothes and heels, and then she and Pencil would pack the car with all the things she needed: her unfinished paintings, brushes and oils as well as a basket of goodies for my sister at boarding school. These sometimes included a letter from me telling her that I had not touched her things and that Biddy, the horses, and all the cats were fine.

Then she would remove her heels and put on her driving shoes and drive me to Glendale school, reaffirming all the way that she had put a big note on my father's steering wheel so that he would not forget to collect me for lunch. He often did. On those days Pencil refused to serve him lunch until he had returned with me.

"You must not be cross with the Baas," he would tell me as I sulked inside, throwing my suitcase down on the floor in a huff, though I was getting used to it and really wanted to hug Biddy. "Baas is very, very busy with the new farms," he would continue as he served me lunch, "very, very busy."

Then my father began asking Mrs. Brown, the teacher who lived on a farm nearby, to drive me home instead. I was teased by the other children as I scuffed my way over to her car, but I did not mind. It was better than waiting and being forgotten. It also meant that Pencil and I were often alone and rather than sit alone in the empty dining room I would eat my lunches in the kitchen. We would talk for hours about everything and nothing and more.

In town my mother did the weekly shopping, had her hair done, met some friends for lunch and in the afternoon she went to her painting class. She made a studio in the guest cottage where she would pass the hours and forget about everyone's lunch, and my father would be angered at the triviality of such a hobby. He disliked her going to an art class, imagining that the other painters were weird men with coloured hair-dos or eccentric women in flowing flowered dresses. But mostly they were other farm wives, just like my mother, who all shared a soft talent and a need to escape.

While my mother was lost within her art world, I had a nanny who looked after me. I had a few; they came and went as my mother did not think that they were so important as to keep them if something went only slightly wrong. They would walk beside me around the garden so that I did not fall into a hole or get bitten by a snake, but often, I would be the one who would spot the danger before they did. If it was a snake, they would usually run away, screaming.

When my sister was only five, she had been walking with a nanny in the garden, near the sand pit. My mother was reading a book on the porch where she could still keep an eye on things, for she never trusted anyone with her children but herself. I was napping inside the house. My mother had suddenly heard a shriek and looked up to see the nanny sprinting away, screaming all the way to the kitchen. She saw my sister standing still, alone, by the sand pit. It all happened in the small spark of a minute, but by the time my mother had run to my sister's side, she was crying and rubbing her eyes. My mother saw the reared head of a spitting cobra, swaying, just to the side of my sister. It had been spitting at her, continuously.

My mother swooped her away and rushed to the house where she washed her eyes out in cold milk. Before taking my sister to a nearby farmer who had once been a doctor she told the nanny to go. There was not much to be done for Lisa except keep her in a dark room for four days. She had to wear glasses from an early age.

My mother's trust in other people looking after her children did not improve with time. We were never fed or bathed by anyone else. Whenever I was escorted around the garden my mother sat on the terrace, one eye on her book and the other upon the nanny. I thought it ridiculous considering I would play everywhere when she was busy elsewhere. But it gave her peace of mind while she still felt in control.

My mother would return from her Wednesdays in the world with a wild collection of stories. It was mostly war gossip: who had been attacked, who had lost a son, who had lost a leg, who had been blown up in a landmine. But she also began coming back with strange stories about hitch-hikers. My mother and her art friends would compare notes about the women they had been giving lifts to. They all seemed to be strangely large, strong women who wore big boots under their dresses and had hairy legs. They all thought it odd, but none wanted to acknowledge that they may be giving lifts to terrorists until one day a tall woman got into my mother's car. Only once she was sitting comfortably in the back, did my mother notice that she had a stubble beard. She never gave anyone a lift again. She could not believe she had been helping transport terrorists to and fro, their heavy handbags probably filled with bombs that were left in the department stores on sale days.

Then one Wednesday she came home and fired the nanny. She gave no excuse. She just drove up the gravel drive and parked in a hurry of dust and sand. Then she strode into the kitchen where the nanny was standing, leaning against the table, chatting to Pencil and asked her to come outside. Pencil and I heard her say, "I'm sorry, but there is no work for you here any more. We don't need you. You must go. Now."

The nanny did not ask why; she did not utter a word. She just shrugged her shoulders as if believing that white women *are* peculiar. She went and undressed in the changing room by the laundry rooms and came back with her uniform, the blue and white dress and apron folded neatly like a gift which she left on the table by the swing door. She turned and nodded to us, then went out. We watched her walk away towards the back gate, then looked at each other, wondering. We carried on with that look until my mother buckled and sent me out of the kitchen. She was watching me closely, so I had to go outside, pretending to move off and play in the pale blue and white wooden Wendy house. Instead I snuck around and sat, small and silent, under the open window. "Oh Pencil," my mother said, her voice so fragile it sounded as if it could crack into tiny pieces. She cleared her throat loudly. "You know that family that live by Bindura, near the back hills? They have a farm with lots of tobacco? The one with the oldest son who was killed, very young, while in the army?"

I tried to imagine Pencil standing in front of my mother, holding a bowl of something, nodding. I knew who she was talking about.

"Well, Pencil – oh it is such a terrible story! The nanny who was looking after the other three children was being trained by the terrorists – to come in and shoot the whole family at the breakfast table!"

I heard Pencil gasp. I could see him, in my mind, shaking his head as he muttered, "Oh Medem, Medem, Medem ..."

"Can you imagine, Pencil? The nanny! The one person you trust with your children!"

"But what happened, Medem?" Pencil asked, his voice low as if it was falling away to the ground, anticipating a tragic reply.

"Well, they were lucky. So very lucky. The Madam woke up remembering that it was dentist day and got everyone up and ready before the maid arrived for work, because she was late – she was going to come in that morning and gun them all down while they sat eating their cornflakes. They were in the car, driving away when she arrived with an AK-47. The cook saw it and ran off to tell the manager."

My mind felt like an old fan, whirring hard through the air of words that hung heavy around me. But they did not go away. The air was thick and heavy and hot.

I wanted to know where she was now, this nanny with the wild machine gun. Had she been caught? Or was she hiding, waiting for another opportunity?

I wanted Pencil to ask these questions of my mother but the air in the kitchen was still. Then I heard my father stamping off the dust from his boots by the door before he removed them. I heard my mother's town shoes clap-tap the cement floor as she walked quickly away to tell him her story.

I stood up, wobbling on tip-toes to reach the kitchen window and whispered,

"Pencil? Pencil!"

I was still unsure of the situation. But Pencil knew I had been listening. He shook his head and turned away. I ran around and came into the kitchen, pulling on his apron so that he had to look at me. "Do you think our nanny was going to do the same?"

"No, no, Miss Kyne" Pencil whispered back, rather hoarsely. "She is a good person."

"Then why's she gone?" I insisted.

Pencil shrugged his thin shoulders, before he answered slowly, "Medem is afraid."

But I had many questions bubbling up inside me.

"How'd she get trained? Where'd they hide the guns? How come no one knew?"

Pencil shook his head. He did not want to talk about it. As if it was personal. I asked him again, but all he said was, "I don't know, Miss Kyne."

He turned to the counter and began peeling the new potatoes Sixpence had brought in earlier. I followed and stood right beside him. I could smell the stiffness of his starched apron.

"It happens, Miss Kyne."

"What?"

"They come. They force us, even if we do not want trouble."

I did not understand what he was talking about, and was about to ask for an explanation when we noticed my father was standing by the door.

"Come here," he ordered me.

He took me by the hand and led me outside to the patio, where tea stood on the Portuguese tiled table of golden-yellows and bright blues in swirling patterns, waiting to be served. My father sat down and lifted me onto his lap.

"Why, Daddy?"

"Because there's a war. Not everyone's on our side."

"Why, Daddy?"

"Because they think differently; some people think that *they* are right."

"But they're not?"

"No," he said, rather slowly, as if he needed the words to sink into his own self, return, and be heard again; believed. "No," he continued, reaffirming himself, "They're not right."

He waited for another question, but I was silent. I was afraid.

"You mustn't worry. I will never let anything like that happen here -"

Then I broke in, demanding, "If they come here, and tell us that they want to shoot us, will you stop them, Daddy?"

"Of course," and then he held me tight as he whispered, "I'll make sure they shoot only me."

The afternoon world went quiet about us. I could hear my father's heart, beating firm and steady against my cheek. Then he released his grip slightly and said, "But they'll never get this far. I'll keep them out. That's why Mummy doesn't want anyone here that we don't know well."

"But Pencil says that she's ok."

"Maybe." Then he quickly added, "Of course she is. Otherwise she wouldn't have been here at all. But you don't need her anymore. Anyway, you always play where you like. But, from now on, you mustn't leave the garden. If you go riding, you ride close to the house, and only with me, or Micka. Never alone. Understand?"

I nodded. It felt like the end of my childhood. A jail sentence. But I did not know the worst was still to come. I had no idea that my parents were secretly organising for me to start boarding school early.

I sat with Biddy under the pomegranate bush, watching the sky turn a deep red with all the winter dust in the air, and felt glad, for many reasons, that the nanny was gone. But I did not feel as free as I had hoped. I felt suddenly grown up, but it was not a nice feeling; not like the feeling that comes, sweet and warm, when someone says that you have done well. It was a feeling that pulled and pushed and I was reminded of Dr. Doolittle's pushmi-pullyu: the llama with two heads, each one wanting to go in a different direction. I felt older now, since I no longer needed a nanny. But she had been told to go because my mother was suddenly scared of her. I was not free- I could not leave the garden or ride alone, far into the farm. I had not been doing this for a while, someone had always been with me, but now it had been said. My father had firmly laid down the rules, and since they had been spoken, it felt as if my world had closed in on me.

Later that night, Amon the Boss-boy came to the kitchen door. The story had already spread its wings. I heard my father talking with Amon and Pencil for a long time, in the far shadows of the scullery. I did not hear their talk. I did not want to. It was the same talk they often had. About how near the terrorists were; how close they actually came to the farm compounds and to the Africans who worked on the farms. How these

people were being forced to listen, take sides, turn against the white farmers or be tortured.

My father, Amon and Pencil would stand in the shadows of the kitchen door in the late evening, their voices rising up and falling further, like a sad, soft song that knows no pleasure or ending.

Amon and Pencil would explain how scared they really were. It could be them next time, their baby taken away and bayoneted. It could be their wives' lips cut off to prevent them from telling the police who had been in the compound and what had been said. Those who scared them were African men like themselves. They even spoke the same language, but although they called themselves "comrades" as they spoke of a new, free world where all Africans would get back their land. But, to most of the farm workers they were strangers who came and ate their food, gorging on their hard earned mealie-meal, using their beds, abusing their wives, slaughtering their goats and chickens as they left, just to make sure that no one would forget.

Sometimes they would burn an entire compound to the ground. Sometimes they locked the children in a hut, leaving the place as the flames licked and caught and burnt, the mothers screaming for their shackled husbands to save their children.

Then the police and military intelligence would come to interrogate, threatening them if they did not tell.

Chapter 10

My mother came home from Police Reserve duty one afternoon. She did not wear the normal, blue uniform dress that all the other women used. She had taken a pair of my father's baggy, camouflaged pants and asked her dressmaker in town to sew them into a smart skirt that she wore with a beige or olive green blouse. The other women at the Police station were furious, and complained so much that the Member-in-Charge called my mother into his office and ordered my mother not to wear it again.

My mother stormed into the control room where my father and his good friend Alec were sitting having tea and told them.

"Bah!" said Alec. "Just ignore those women and forget about the Member-in-Charge. He's just jealous because his wife's got bad legs."

My mother then wore it to every duty, retorting, "Who cares anyway! The Police Reserve is only for us farmers' wives and men too old to fight in the bush!"

After the war, when we had to get rid of anything belonging to the Rhodesian forces, my mother refused to hand in or burn her skirt, so she hid it and then took it over to Denmark where it hung in my grandmother's guest cupboard until she came across it, many years later. I asked her if I could have it. She did not really want to part with it though she had forgotten its whereabouts for so long.

"Promise me you'll look after it, Kyne?"

"I will, Mummy, really. It's the one thing I really want from you; it's the thing I remember most about you from the war."

I wore the skirt many times to dinner in Paris with a large, leather belt strapped tight across the waist. It made the most interesting dinner party conversations, a young student from Africa who wore her mother's military skirt made during war when she was a child.

As the war worsened, even the older farmers were called up to do their duty in the bush, taking them away from their families and farms. One day my mother and Pencil brought several small boxes out from the car; "Rat packs!" I squealed, delighted.

They were the military ration food boxes that were handed to all who had to go out into the bush to fight. They held all the necessary food for a week away. Lisa and I asked Pencil to open the boxes with a knife and then we spread everything out on the kitchen floor. We ate the pink, green or yellow glucose sweets first, then the chocolate and then the bubblegum.

"What about Daddy?" my mother asked as she came in.

"You say he's too fat," Lisa quipped.

"Well he loves his sweet things and he needs them out there, more than you do. Imagine how he'll feel when the other men are munching chocolate and he doesn't have any?"

We felt rather guilty and looked at each other, wondering what we should do. But then my mother bent down and collected the tea bags, coffee bags and small sugars for her picnic basket.

She looked at us and said, "Daddy hates this tea."

I wondered why she then kept it for our picnics.

"Daddy needs coffee to keep awake in case the Terrs come," Lisa scolded back.

My mother smiled and left. We asked Pencil to open another box and not to tell the Madam. It was only later, as I sat alone trying to blow weak bubbles with the last of the chewing gum that I realised why the rat-packs had come to our house: my father was going to fight in the bush.

The evening before my father had to leave, my mother had his camouflaged uniform laid out ready on the chair in their bedroom. His boots stood on the floor

gleaming: Pencil had polished them all afternoon. He had asked me as I sat beside him on the warm kitchen steps stroking a cat, "Why these boots must shine so much?"

"Because," I replied.

"Alright."

The sun was hot and I thought of my father sweating in the bush in all the heavy stuff he had to wear, carrying the knapsack that always was heavier than most because my mother had filled it with his favourite chocolates, liquorice from Denmark, the imported tea that she found hidden at the back of the Greek supermarket and paid too much for, some cigars and a photo of his three girls. I had seen that she had put a new picture of us in his side pocket; the one where I was gawking a smile because the photographer told me to and the gaps of missing teeth I had tried to hide were captured. I did not want my father out in the bush, looking at this photograph and remembering me with a dumb smile and no teeth, so I went and exchanged it for another. I made a drawing of a house and three stick-people whose arms and legs stuck out at right-angles under which I carefully printed our names in the technicolour magic markers my grandmother had just brought me from Denmark. The others at school had gasped when they had seen them; no one had such things, one could not buy anything so great anywhere, not even in the Greek supermarkets in town.

Pencil ruined my thoughts as he asked again, "But why all this shine-shine when tomorrow they will have many dirt and dust on them?"

"Because."

This time he did not agree. "You know those people do not care if the Baas or another Baas is wearing boots smart shined."

"Who? What people?" I asked.

"The tellolist, Miss Kyne."

"Terrorists," I corrected him.

"Yah. They do not see Baas's boots that Pencil must shine-shine all afternoon. And they eat too much polish. Eeish!"

"Yar, maybe. But that's the law. I heard of a young guy from Glendale who had his face slapped the first day he arrived for training because his belt was skew."

"Ehh? That's no good. Sometime you white people make vely funny law."

"Very," I corrected.

"Ehh?"

"Very, not 'vely'."

"Yah," and then he continued polishing the boots so hard I thought that he would polish a hole right through the leather.

Lisa and I wanted to lie in my parent's bed that night, but my father tried to explain to us that it was his last night at home with our mother and in a bed. He would not be getting a proper or comfortable rest for a whole week.

"But it's your last night with us, too!" I whined, "I promise I won't wriggle."

He held us close, made us say the Danish prayer that we babbled out, line after learnt line, never knowing what it was all about. We said it because they asked us to.

"I wish you girls were at boarding school and not here at home on holiday," he whispered. "It's bad enough I have to leave your mother alone here on the farm. Now I have to worry about all three of my girls." Then he left the room, switching off the light. He stopped for a moment to wave, heavy and awkward, from the door before he walked away down the passage.

Lisa would often go on and on about how she hoped that God would keep Daddy safe and that God should let him shoot all the Terrs, especially before they could shoot him, and I always ended up sobbing myself to sleep.

That night, she did not say anything. I waited for her voice, and was almost saddened when no jabber came from her.

"Lisa?"

"Goodnight," she said irritably.

"Are you cross?"

She did not reply.

"Why?"

"Go to sleep."

"I can't. I want Daddy."

She did not add anything.

"I want to cry."

"You always do."

"Please tell me a prayer for Daddy?"

"No, you'll just cry."

"Well, I'll cry then even if you don't." I turned my back to her and tried to cry, but like her, I was silent.

Another kind of fear, a new and weird type, had drifted and settled within us like a stray, lost dog that comes to sleep on the mat outside the door and ends up creeping, unwanted, to sleep close under the bed.

The Christmas beetles were bashing into the security lights outside our bedroom. I could hear their loud, droning hums and the deep-throated buzzing of their whirring wings and then the smashing of their hard bodies against the metal. I fell asleep thinking that sometimes the crashes of the large ones sounded like distant gunshots. Like a heavy contact was going on in the darkness of the hills.

The next morning I awoke to the sound of Mycat harshly sweeping the terrace outside. He was brushing away the many dead and exhausted beetles that had lain struggling on their backs all night. I ran as fast as I could in my still sleepy daze into my parent's room, just in case. But my mother was alone in their bed. My father had left before light.

I slid gently into the bed and snuggled up against my mother's back. She moved her leg back and laid it, heavy yet reassuring, over my mine. I nuzzled my face into her soft strong back. It smelt of her dreams and security. Then I put my nose to the pillow and imagined that my father was still there.

This was how Lisa and I would spend the nights until my father returned. It comforted my mother to have us close, made her feel less alone in the bed they had shared for so long, and made us feel safe as she could lock every door throughout the house. She would ask us to say the prayer before she loaded the FN and placed it under the bed. She then removed her pistol from its hiding place and set the full cartridge pack on her bedside table and the gun under her pillow.

She would lie down between us and whisper, "Goodnight my girls," as she switched off the light to the darkness that we feared would intrude upon our dreams.

My mother's tension and our nervousness made sleep come and go like a spring breeze that we wanted to blow away into warm, sluggish summer heat. The worst nights

were when there was a full moon. I would lie awake, hearing my mother or Lisa, their restless sleep punctuated with the odd cry and gasps, and stare out of the narrow top of the window that was not covered by the sandboxes. I could see the full moon through that restricted frame and find the picture of the fat, grey rabbit that lay slightly to the left of the moon, its ears pointing high as if listening for danger, facing the hills as if it wanted to hop free, back into the bush and hide. The night when the moon was most full, like a bubble spent to bursting, there was a pale, grey glow around it, a silky cloud, an aura that made it seem all powerful; which it was.

A full moon meant that people could see through the night. They could follow animal or livestock tracks through the tall grass, forking into paths that led to the farm compounds or into silent, luminous roads that directed them to our homes.

We were terrified of the full moon that changed the darkness into clear, starless nights, allowing the people to move swiftly and with ease. We knew they were out there, somewhere, walking and stalking.

When my father returned, my mother would look more haggard than he did. She barely slept those nights alone with her small daughters on a desolate farm surrounded by hills that were moving in secret. My father too had feared more for our safety than his own, but the first two days he slept a lot between driving around the farms. It was not just the fatigue and strain of the bush, which the enemy knew better than the white men and the educated blacks that were forced into service; it was the pain in his hip that came with such torture it made him angry and trembling.

"Something's wrong," he would tell my mother, "All that jolting around in those damn hard military trucks, this hip just gives up after a while."

Yet nothing more was said or done about it. We could not imagine that one day it would bring a strong, grown man down. We were all so relieved that my father was safe - that we all were safe, and that he was back home.

Chapter 11

The rains had not come. The world lay in a quiet, shrivelled state, as if it was too dry and tired to find the hope to be tickled by the small breezes that we only imagined. My father's fields of maize that should have been green and ready to flower, resembled tall onion plants. The leaves were thin and withered, their yellowness drooping to the hard and cracked ground. Even the thick, red dust seemed grey and dead.

In the mornings we would see my father standing with Pencil and the gardeners asking them about the rains. They would look up to the skies, so clear and blue one could see the moon moving, and then shake their heads.

"No, Baas," Pencil would say, slowly and gently, as if he did not want to hurt him, "she will not rain today."

In the afternoons and early evenings, my father would stand with Amon the Boss-boy, asking the same question. He too would shake his head, saying sadly, "Sorry, Baas," as if it were his fault.

One evening, as the stillness of the night crept in through the fractured walls of our home at Dimwe, my father was carrying me asleep from my mother's bed to my own, along the dark corridor that groaned with his tread. A sudden crack ripped the deep night silence and left him standing motionless. Then he hastily returned me to my mother's bed, just as she was comfortably wriggling her body deeper into the mattress, readying herself for sleep. He whispered, hoarse and anxious, "Did you hear the gunfire? It's too close!"

He hurried to collect my sister from our room, hiding her under the covers of his bed. My grand-mother was staying with us from Denmark and was in the guest cottage by the Jacaranda wood. They did not want to alarm her, but were worried about her safety. She was closer to the security fence than we, and the cottage was an obvious target. Nothing was hidden; the bush was always whispering, telling tales and secrets.

They switched off the bedroom lights and sat waiting for a sign - another spurt of gunfire or the shelling of an imminent attack on our home. The darkness was deep; it filled every crack, every breath of air, every trace of sight. The chorus of chirruping crickets sounded loud in the stillness of dread, as if they were marching through the walls, intruding on our terror.

Suddenly there was the deafening sound of an explosion, and bright, flaring lights. It felt as if it was right upon us. My sister and I sat up in alarm, screaming. My father had already pulled out the automatic Uzi that lay sleek and cold between the widening gap of their mattresses. My mother frantically tried to get us under the beds. Then the noise stopped, abruptly, and through our wheezing, terrified breathing we heard a soft rumbling that faded into the distance. A silence followed. It hung heavy and pitiful.

And then the rains came.

They gave no warning. They were not gradual as storms are when they come with the winds, for there was no wind; just the sudden pelting of the rain that hammered upon the corrugated iron roof. The din rose around us, seeping into us, shaking us, filling us until we hurt.

My mother switched on her bedside lamp before collapsing upon the bed as if in prayer, her head buried deep between her arms. Her legs buckled under her, forcing her to sink slowly to the polished teak floor. My father sat stiff and large, drawing in long gasps of air, deep and rutted, to steady his breathing, slowly shaking his head until relief filled his face with a different colour. Then he smiled.

Thunder cracked again and shook the house once more, lightning lit up the outside like flares. Then the bedroom light popped and we were left in. An extreme storm was upon us. My father feared for the house while my mother thought about the tall trees in her garden. The rain fell too heavy for talk so I nestled into the lingering warmth of my mother's bed as I held on to my father. But he got up and moved away, rummaging under

the bed between the rifles that lay hiding there every night, silent and waiting, anticipating the war entering our home. He switched on the large torch and we blinked at the sudden, bright glare. Then we followed his shadow as it trailed the beam of light out of the room and down the passage, disappearing round the corner.

We did not know that he was putting on his wide-brimmed farm hat and boots, then his thick, rubber raincoat and taking my mother's red umbrella under his arm. He walked through the rain, thick and dark and heavy, feeling his way through the garden until he reached the cottage.

We watched through the windows and saw them return, strange shadowed beasts that lumbered through the dense downpour, their silhouettes suddenly coming alive as every lightning blaze made them pull each other close, hiding as one from the flare that splintered, almost simultaneously, with the thunder that shuddered and throbbed, hurting our ears. Each time my father's figure was perfectly outlined, large and strong as his clothes clung to him like a second skin. My grandmother resembled a shiny, shaking mushroom as she hobbled hidden within my father's large raincoat and hat, the umbrella open just above her.

My sister and I felt our way down the passage and went to wait for them by the door. Then my mother appeared like an angel, holding a candelabrum in front of her, her long, pale dressing gown untied over her night dress and trailing behind her, her shadow following at a distance, as if unsure. Then lightning flashed the scene away and lit up the two odd figures that suddenly stood beside us. The rain was boisterous and forceful, so very much alive, it splashed its way into the house, spraying us with cold before my father slammed the door shut. My father and grandmother stood before us making puddles that flowed out along the concrete passage, glistening and shimmering in the flickering candle light.

My grandmother thought the whole scene rather amusing. She was not the least afraid. She did not understand our war. She had lived in an occupied country under the Nazis, though all she would mention was the tedious rations of butter that kept her from baking. She crawled out from her mushroom outfit, dropping it all to the floor as she laughed and asked for a drink and a game of cards.

We sat up throughout the night as sleep was impossible through the din while my father played cards with my grandmother by candles that flickered and flinched with their every move. We snuggled with my mother on the scratchy, green sofa and drank cocoa, the steady rhythm of the rain lulling us away from our surreal world.

Dawn's light came sneaking and shifted the storm so that only a continuous sheet of rain fell, and through the creeping light we saw the destruction of the garden. The trees were all bare, leafless; some even without branches. The flower beds were flat and lost, drowned beneath the silver sea of water that stretched across the lawn. We had needed rain, but my father poured himself another drink as he thought of his maize fields, imagining the thin stalks lying about like the dead after a battle.

My father left the truck stuck in the mud of the driveway and walked off into the rain. It swallowed him whole after a few steps. I could see a slight shadow of him that faded through the downpour, as if he had only ever been an illusion.

He did not return for lunch, and the rain kept pouring down. I sat on the cracking, blue plastic kitchen counter watching Pencil making pancakes. He whisked the batter until the whirring of metal upon porcelain became as monotonous as the rain upon the corrugated-iron roof. But then the sizzling in the large, iron pan brought me out of the dreary stupor and I began to count how many flips were successful and how many were flops. I taunted him, saying that I would tell on him for being a bad pancake maker if he did not let me have the flops; these received a large dollop of thick, clotted cream that had to be cut with a blunt knife and then a heavy sprinkling of sugar that poured like the rain outside. I lay afterwards in Biddy's basket that always smelled of stale Pulvex flea powder, the cane stretching and squeaking with us both curled tightly within. My head rested peacefully on her chest, her soft, red fur tickling my cheeks as her steady breathing lulled me into a sleep, which shook slightly with the distant sound of a single shot, but it sounded muffled and dream-like, so we ignored it.

I awoke to Biddy's twitching and realised that the rain had suddenly gone; the sun was shining hot and hard, causing the cool wetness to rise like steam from the shimmering lawn. I ran outside and walked into a wall of humidity. I was staring around me at the garden, stripped and exposed, when I saw my father coming up the drive. I could tell from his walk that he was angry. I waved to him, but he only nodded and

carried on marching up to the door. I sat on the once-red swing-bench, so sun-eaten that it had turned a pale pink. It was still wet from the rains and I felt the warm water soak into my shorts. I was watching my father, waiting to see how hard his mood was, if he took off his boots or not.

He stopped at the door, stamped his feet twice and then held on to the wall as he lifted each foot up, straddling the ankle across the other knee as he undid the muddied laces. He was obviously not angry enough or he would have marched right in, so I dared get off the swing and follow him from the bright light into the suddenly dark house and into the office. Without looking at my mother he picked up the red agric-alert handle and flicked some buttons before speaking into receiver, giving our farm code of "one, two, Dimwe Estates". He was saying something about a shot from him and some burnt cattle. He turned around and told my mother that some cattle had been struck dead by lightning and then he walked out of the house.

I caught up with him as he was retying his laces and asked if I could come along. He shook his head, but I followed him anyway and was glad when he got into the car because I was barefoot. He did not tell me to get out when I slipped in beside him on the hot and sticky fake leather seat. He revved the truck out of the mud, and then we lurched forward and spun out of the gates.

We slipped and slid along the roads until we came to cattle gates that hung over the grids; flimsy barricades of barbed wire strung across thin wooden poles that hung suspended and bouncing. I jumped out to open them, my feet squishing deep into thick mud that felt warm and cosy and sprouted up between my toes. Sometimes the wire hooks that held the gates would be too high or too tight and my father had to get out and lift them off for me, but this time he stayed in the car with a grim look on his face. I stood alone, struggling with the high, stiff hoop of wire until I managed to raise it off before dragging the gate across the muddy road. "Leave it open!" he ordered as he drove through, "We'll be back soon."

I was relieved.

We crossed the large grazing paddock, the tall elephant grass shimmering with the heavy wetness of the rain that still clung to every stalk. The truck slid softly as the dense grass was pushed down under the wheels and made a thick blanket upon the mud, leaving

behind us a road of brown lines on the flattened grass behind us. Once in a while we would hit an ant-hill and I would bounce as my father cursed, but he did not stop to check under the car as he usually did. The only words he spoke was when he told me to roll up my window as the grass seeds were flying in, then he turned on the air-vents causing all the grass seeds that had been sitting trapped under the bonnet to be sucked up and blown into our faces. I started sneezing and could not stop. I thought it was funny, but my father only smiled a slight twitch. He was anxious.

At the far end of the paddock, we turned left and came across the large, deep tracks of a tractor and trailer. We followed these along the boundary fence until we saw the tractor parked by a strange looking, black tree where a group of men were standing, waiting.

I saw Amon the Boss-boy, my father's plump and trusted foreman, but he was not beaming his usual, cheery gap-toothed smile. Standing beside him was Peter, who always seemed to be close at hand to my father. He and his brother Moffat had been the first people my father had employed when he came to farm in this country. They were from Malawi, like the many others who worked the fields. They came to dig and weed the rich, red soil, bringing with them their families and language, and their dances that stamped the dust and shrilled the air on the weekends. They took the I.D. numbers the government forced them to have but they did not care for politics. The talk of independence or war was not their concern; they only wanted to work in peace.

My father drove up as close as he could and then I saw the ugly bloated, black bodies. I was staring hard at the creepy sight, until I heard a door slam and realised that my father had left. I had to run to keep pace with him, following right behind in his tracks so that the grass he treaded and pushed away did not have time rise back up between us. The men had stamped the grass flat into a clearing, and in it lay the remains of the cattle.

Five breeding cows had been shielding from the rains under the fat, tangled fig-tree when the lightning had struck. They had been electrocuted. Three were burnt entirely; there was only a strange shaped heap of charred remains, like the remnants of a log fire that has been left to blaze throughout the night. Another had been further away, and was only slightly burnt, reminding me of the fat left behind on a barbecue; its horns still smelling of burning hair, its legs contorted and half hidden beneath its weight. The last of

them lay as if asleep; its stomach seemed to keep rising with the heat. I walked over to it and only then did I see the round, dark spot in the centre of its forehead, like a Hindu marriage mark. There was no trickling, red blood, but I understood that this was what had brought my father back home to the Agric-Alert. He had to inform the community that the gunshot was from him, not a terrorist.

I looked over at him, sickened by the sight of the dead animals. He shrugged his shoulders and then said, "I had to. It was still alive. It was suffering."

The men moved forward and began to cut it up, slicing through the dark meat while my father joked that this meat did not need much cooking. Amon delegated the men, while Peter stood beside us, sharpening knives, the scratching-slicing sounds rising eerily to hover above us while the animal became smaller and less significant with each chunk that was lifted off and thrown into yellow, inside-out fertilizer bags.

The men were laughing, smiling and almost singing, happy there would be meat tonight. They could almost taste it cooked with vegetables and mixed with sadza. They worked fast and steadily. There was a darkness that threatened to close in on us, and they were worried about water on the meat. When someone accidentally cut the guts and a large fart broke the sounds of slicing flesh, I moved before the smell could slap me, nauseating and shocking, though my eyes remained too long on the green that oozed out and trickled like a little algae river down the dark side. I stood on the back of the truck and stared at the ruin of the fig-tree, the remnants of its muddled branches looking wounded and raw, hollow yawns gaping like mouths in pain.

My father's words played in my mind, and I thought of the cow, lying all night in the storm, unable to get up, the rain washing it, incessantly cleansing, readying her for slaughter. I wondered if she knew that she would die.

I thought of my rabbit; I had taken it into my bedroom but it had hopped out the door just as my sister's cat had come down the corridor. It scuttled off down the passage, slipping across the polished wooden floors, but the cat was better adapted to the smoothness of the house and caught it under my parent's bed. A shriek had echoed through the still house. I saw its eyes bulge large and red in terror as the cat sat crouched on top, its mouth tight on the neck, squeezing, piercing. My mother had heard my screams, but it was too late when she arrived. The rabbit lay writhing, while the cat sat

smug beside it, watching. My parents had put it in a box in their bath, and advised me to leave it alone so that it could get better, but the next day it lay dead. My sister told me later that my father had hit its head with a hammer. When I confronted my mother, she told me that it had been the best for the rabbit. It was suffering. But all I could see were the bulging red eyes, the grinning cat, and then my father hammering its head. Surely suffering was better than being dead?

Darkness was approaching fast, shafts of late afternoon light slanted through it and we could see the odd lightning flash its warning. There was going to be another storm. My father wanted to get me home. He told the men to leave the other carcass for another day. They began to load the truck with the meat; they did not want to leave anything behind. But my father made them. He told them that it looked like a dangerous storm; we had to hurry. The tractor began to bump its way, but we knew that it would not make it home in time. My father warned the driver not to seek shelter under a tree, and the other men laughed. They jumped onto the truck, bare feet squeezing between the mounds of meat as they sat on the thin rim of the truck's sides. As we drove off I gave a little, shy wave of farewell to the ugly, bony remains of what was once a cow.

We returned to the workshop. The men unloaded the meat onto the ripped, brown cotton-bailing sacks that lay on the grease-stained concrete between the tractors. The other workers, their eager eyes watching the meat, awaited their share. They stood huddled just out of the rain that had begun a drumming din on the tin roof above. Their excited anticipation swirled around us, causing the air to buzz with a vibrating fervour, keeping away the gloomy mood that kept trying to penetrate as the storm grew more violent.

Lightning was ripping up the sinister sky, but suddenly a strange darkness swooped in like a big, black hawk as I noticed a small head that peered out of a ripped, yellow fertilizer bag. I pulled at my father's hand and pointed as he tried to turn me away, but it was too late. I had seen it: the endearing, dark face; the fuzzy, curled fur of the forehead, and the little hoof that dangled beneath. Then the men were all pointing and talking about it, excited and greedy for the cash that unborn calves render when sold to the witchdoctors.

My father told Amon to sort out the meat between the people and said that they did not have to bother with hosing down the truck. There had not been much blood. The dry, dark clots that lay about, wobbling like the English jelly our neighbour made, would be washed away by the rain as we drove home. I kept seeing the little head in front of us, peering through the rain. I tried to look the other way, but its glazed, dull eyes were determined to follow me about.

At home I trailed after my father to the bathroom, where he washed his hands and dried his wet hair with a faded blue hand-towel. He offered it to me but I let my clinging hair drip down my face. It helped me feel sad. Then I followed him to the dining room and sat down on my seat, wringing my ankles around the bottom legs of the chair. Pencil came scuttling in with the plates of food that had been kept warm and drying in the deep, bottom drawer of the Aga.

"Still no electricity, Baas," he told my father as he placed the warm plate down in front of him.

"I know. It will be some days, Pencil," my father replied as he picked up his knife and fork. "A big tree has fallen over our lines. Don't think the electricity people can get to us. The river's washed away the bridge."

My mother stood quietly in the open double doorway, unsure about entering the room that felt crowded with our mood.

My father told her of the dead cattle and of the unborn calf that I had just seen. Her eyes moved slowly and sadly over to me, but I looked away. Just as my father had begun to eat, Pencil came back and told him that there was someone at the back door. There had been an accident at the compound. My father looked up at Pencil, for he could tell from the lines drawn across our cook's face if something was serious or if it could wait. Pencil was ashen; the colour of the remains of the burnt cow corpses.

My father left his food to finally grow cold. He went briskly to the kitchen door, and I softly treaded after. Moffat, Peter's brother, was standing there in the rain. My father asked him to come in, but he just shook his head. My father then told him to enter as he did not want to get wet again. Moffat reluctantly obeyed, standing in the doorway, ashamed of the water that trickled off him and collected on the red polished cement floor.

He looked at me, then away, staring deep into the crack in the floor as if searching for words within.

Moffat always stammered his sentences, so my father asked me to leave the scullery to give him some space without an extra pair of gawking eyes. I turned sulkily away and stood behind the large fridge that every once in a while would shiver and shake and go silent before restarting its bee-like drone. It seemed even worse now that it tried to run on the remnants of our faulty generator.

I could not hear what Moffat was saying; he was stammering so badly it seemed as if he was mimicking the once shaking fridge. Then I heard my father voice rise, "Good God!" and then he walked past me. The dismal, forbidding look upon his face warned me to keep away. I peeped around the fridge to look at Moffat, but he had disappeared. Then I heard the rain muffled sounds of the truck starting and my mother came up to me demanding, "And now what?"

I shrugged my shoulders. Pencil passed her like a quiet shadow, with the tray of my father's food.

"Throw it away, Pencil," she commanded, but I knew that he would not. He would wrap it in newspaper and take it home with him. My mother followed him into the kitchen, and I moved closer to listen, but Pencil was talking in a low, sad tone, and all I could pick up was, "Ah Medem, shame, it is bad. Very, very bad."

My mother went to the office to call an ambulance, but the telephone lines were also still down. Pencil stood beside her, wringing his hands. Then my mother called my sister in, and told us. A woman had been walking that afternoon from the tap in the compound to her hut. She had been carrying a large, metal bucket of water upon her head when the storm came. She had been struck by lightning. There was not much left of her.

My mother walked throughout the darkening house with Pencil, lighting candles like a vigil for the woman taken by the storm, burnt by the lightning. I followed her around for want of company. I knew she was nervous. It was dark and my father had still not returned. When she saw the fear in me, she knelt down beside me and said softly as she held me, "It'll be alright. They don't like the wet weather. The storms will keep them away."

She was right. There would be no guerrilla fires that night; only the solemn drumming that crept through the sound of the rain. We heard, from far away, the women wail their funeral song while the drums throbbed deeper and dismal and it was to this that I fell asleep, on the sofa, waiting for my father.

Chapter 12

The darkness of the night followed us into each dawn like a bad dream from which we could not awake. It was not only the depressing sand-boxes covering the windows that made the bright mornings seem overcast and constricted. My mother still refused to let my kitten stay in our room during the night, and Pencil had changed its name to Mycat-the-cat. I did not argue with him, as he now allowed it to follow me about the house, even into the kitchen, whenever I came in to beg for my one of my mother's locked away biscuits or a chat.

The house was no longer a place of space and light with views that pulled the eye outside. Every room seemed shut off, no longer part of a home that felt safe and free.

The kitchen was the only friendly, bright room left, as my father did not think it necessary to put up sand-boxes there. The veranda, with its long, open space, still had gauze instead of windows, so it was always airy; a place where one liked to sit and look out upon the garden when the days were too hot to be outside. My mother wanted more security there, but my father insisted that it was safe enough. If we sat in the lounge at night, the glass walls that partitioned the veranda could be locked and were far enough from the outside; if a grenade were thrown from the end of the garden, it would probably not reach the lounge.

My mother disagreed. But my father did not want the whole house bolted up into darkness. My mother asked Pencil to draw the thick, red curtains of the lounge every day

at dusk, hoping that they would stop any shattering of glass from reaching us, or her furniture.

One evening, after we had said goodnight to Pencil and the houseboy, we sat within the locked-up obscurity which my mother tried to hide by lighting candles and switching on every lamp in the lounge. Suddenly my father sat stiff and upright in his green, Danish-designed armchair. He had just turned on the T.V. The reality of war stalked into my childhood that evening on the 7.45 news.

My father sent my sister and me out of the room as soon as he heard the headlines. He did not want us seeing the pictures. Dismissed from the world of the unknown, we felt frightened, but also intrigued, and excited. The death numbers and names of our forces killed in action were nothing new, nor of interest to two small girls who had heard it every evening before. They were just numbers, part of a list. They would be compared in our little minds to the number tallied with terrorists killed.

"Goody!" we would squeal whenever we heard that there were more terrorists shot and wounded than our own. "We will win, won't we?"

My parents never replied. My mother was probably relieved that she did not have a son to go off to fight at a tender age, and lose a limb or a friend.

As the seasons became years, the numbers of young men, both black and white, who were shot, maimed and killed in the Rhodesian army rose with the steady smoke of uncontrolled fire. Yet the numbers of terrorists killed also increased. We never knew if there were so many more blacks joining the other side, or if the white government was simply inventing the numbers to uplift the deadening, despairing news of the troops being lost in a war that was, from first attack, already lost.

We did not go to our bedroom as my father had asked to when he sent us out of the lounge. Instead we stood, silent as anxious spirits wavering in another world, just beyond the door. We pressed our ears hard against the cool crack between the wood, listening to that which was forbidden. We heard the murmur of a female's voice, whispering in a deathly, muted quiet, about an infant child. We heard no more, but knew that something dreadful had happened.

My mother would not read to us that night, but held us close, tight in her embrace. My father was not a religious man, but that evening he came into our room, and stood in

the open doorway, and spoke our prayer out loud with us. His ending, though, was different. The prayer, brought to us across the widening seas and lost lands of my parents' Danish childhood, ended in "save us this day". That evening it was concluded by my father's hushed, yet deafening words: "Please save my wife and my two small girls."

I can no longer recite that prayer; I cannot say any prayer at all. But if I hear it, I remember my father standing in the shadows of the open doorway, the light of the corridor half hidden behind him, asking someone out there to save his family. Not him, only his wife and their two little girls.

The next day I saw my mother showing the newspaper to Pencil. He stood by the large, beige Aga, shaking his head, wringing the pale, over-laundered dishcloth into tight twists around his wrists.

"Oh, Medem," he said, softly, "It is only a baby."

My mother did not show him the article to highlight the brutality of the enemy. She knew that war, no matter on whose side one fought, was brutal. Nor did she show it to him to keep him on our side, for this war had no sides. There was no definition of right or wrong for any particular group. The whites wanted their farms and an unchanged world where freedom lay in the power of politics. The blacks wanted their freedom too. But for many, it was to cost them the lives of their sons who either joined the Rhodesian army because it paid a salary, or joined the guerrilla fighters who spoke to them of liberation and sparked the poetic charge within the minds of the dreamers and soft souls of the hopeful. And then there were those who did not understand anything at all and thought that by living far away from it all the war would never come to them. But it did. It stalked and tracked them down. No one was to be left free or unscathed.

My mother showed Pencil the article because she liked him. They worked well together; they were partners in the kitchen, though her strange recipes from far away were often the cause of Pencil's cursing and my mother's dilemma when sanctions kept all imported ingredients off the shops' shelves. Pencil was also one of the few to understand her strong foreign accent, and he appreciated her strict politeness and her respect for his mismatched culture. Pencil was a foreigner like herself, though his homeland lay closer, in Malawi. He was intrigued by the tales of her birthplace, a country

of ice for half the year, and he never ceased to ask her why anyone would want to live there - for how could any person survive six months in a freezer?

My mother showed Pencil the story because she wanted to share the horror of it with someone. He then asked her if he could show the paper to the houseboy, so she left it on the table in the scullery entrance, under which Biddy had her basket. She walked out the swing-door that sighed a long, weak squeak then a slam. She did not notice me. I walked over to the table and saw a picture of a baby. I could not read properly then, especially when the small letters lay flat and blurred, far from me. I ran and called Lisa, and together we read the story.

We did not know that we were opening Pandora's Box, and that the words which escaped into the deepening shadows as we unfolded the paper, were to change our lives.

Her name was Natasha; she was eleven months old. Her parents had left her in the care of the nanny while they had gone to the neighbours. The terrorists had come to the farmhouse, surprising the nanny who then fled. There was nothing for them to do there. No one seemed to be there, until they found little Natasha sleeping in her cot. They played football with her, out on the lawn. Her blood was sprayed on the dull, dry, winter grass, and splashed on the whitewashed walls. She was left, a mangled mess, for her parents to find.

Lisa and I were silent for the remainder of the day. I sat up in my Jacaranda tree-house and thought. I did not know the baby. But I had seen her picture, heard her name. She had become a part of me, through the tragic telling of her death.

Death was suddenly, in one short afternoon, something else. It was not the numbered statistics that were read every evening by a woman on TV. It was not the losing of a kitten to a jackal's hunger, nor the thud of a bird on the windscreen. It was not the heavy fall of a cow shot through the head by my mother as it lumbered towards her, then cut open and into pieces on torn, yellow plastic fertiliser bags under a thorn tree for the labourers' ration meat.

Death was different now.

I realised then, that we would never be safe; not even in the arms of our parents. I knew, in those motionless moments as I sat and viewed the garden glowing in the deep, orange afternoon, that death could come, even to a child.

Chapter 13

Micka was tall and skinny and had a terrible limp from an encounter with a buffalo when he was a teenager. In the afternoons, he would falter off, one step shorter than the other, to collect the horses. I would sometimes have to wait on the steps to the tack room for ages until he led the horses home. I asked him once if he had stopped to rest his leg and then fallen asleep because he had taken so long to return.

"Tomorrow Miss Kyne," he had said, "you come with me, and then I show you."

I obeyed what sounded like an order, and the following day we went to collect the horses. We found them after a short stroll.

"Next time, Miss Kyne, then you see."

The next day it took us even less time. The horses were waiting by the fence behind the stables, eating and farting with the pleasures that fell fermenting from the guava tree.

"Next time, Miss Kyne," he promised again, "then you shall see."

It became many next times, and still I did not see whatever it was that Micka wanted me to see when he went off for hours to collect the horses. I told him that it obviously only happened when he went off alone, and therefore, he was probably taking a nap.

One day he came back after a long hour away, and called to me,

"Come Little Miss. Now you shall see."

"Where are the horses?" I asked.

"You shall see," was all he replied.

We strode and tramped the winding paths, the high, stiff grass hiding the world from my view. Blackjack seeds jumped off their stalks, biting their hooks through my socks. Micka was carrying the horses' halters over his shoulder, and the ropes swung in a strange rhythm to his gangly, irregular gait. I was tired, and we had to pause so that I could rest and tediously pick out the clawing the Blackjacks.

"Where are the horses?" I would whine, every time I needed to stop.

"You shall see."

Eventually we spotted them, right down at the far end of the cattle paddock. The horses had discovered that by jumping over the small cattle grid they could walk and dine for miles, probably hoping that no one would come and collect them for an afternoon ride. They stood happily in the tall, dry elephant grass, swishing their tails to the sound of the flies, white egrets lolling a ride with the hope of a tick-meal upon their backs. I took the tickbirds' place, and rode bareback all the way home, Micka leading the way.

He never said, "You see?" like I would have done. He was silent. Words were not necessary. He had proven his point, and his worthiness. Yet every afternoon when he limped off to get the horses, I felt sorry for him. I thought how arduous it must be for him to walk all that way and back again, just because I wanted a ride. I thought of the difficulty in winning the trust of another. I was sorry for never believing him.

I told him that one day, many years later, when we had moved to another farm because the terrorist attacks on Dimwe had become too frequent. We were sitting on the rocks in a piece of bush I called my secret paradise, because in winter it was dry and quiet, and the red and orange rocks felt soft and warm. In summer, rain filled the cracks with small pools in which tadpoles wriggled contentedly, and short, thick grass with tiny, pale flowers grew in soil filled fissures while bumble-bees droned lazily from one to the other, resting their heavy weight upon the fragility of the flowers that would bend until breaking point. The rocks were where we and the horses rested. They were not far from the house, for on that farm, nothing was far away. It was purely an agricultural farm, and there was very little thick bush and no blue hills to climb. I did not like it much, as memories of Dimwe never wanted to fade into the past.

Micka and I would tie the horses to a tree, where they stood and stamped in the shade, as we sat and played games. The rocks were soft, and with a small stone, one could scratch marks into them. I taught Micka how to play Noughts-and-Crosses and Join-the-Dots, and to make squares in which to put the winner's initials. At the end of the games, we would count up all the initials and see who had the most points. Micka taught me to play a Shona game that would not leave marks on the rocks, for one used a certain number of stones, which one moved about. I preferred playing my games, for I knew them well and therefore had a better chance of winning. He never complained though. It was sometimes strange having a playmate so much older than I, who was told what to play, and who never contested.

I asked him what it was like to be told where we should ride the horses or what games to play. He merely shrugged. Then I reminded him of the story of collecting the horses at the far end of the old farm. He smiled, he had not forgotten. I told him that I was sorry. He said that he knew that, but that he was glad I had let him prove why it had taken so long to collect the horses, and that I had never told my father that I thought he had been sleeping.

"Why didn't you just tell me that the horses were far away, and that it took you so long to collect them?"

He shrugged and then replied, "European people don't believe us Africans."

"I believed you," I quickly returned.

"Only when I showed you, and Little Miss became tired."

I let the rocks slowly swallow me in the inflating silence. It was a strange silence that had crept out from the rocky paradise, and sat, unwanted, between us. Micka knew that I would not reply. I did not have to, for I knew exactly what he meant.

With his strong, finely fingered hands which would always slice and feel the air, as if dismissing or searching for some form of freedom, he pushed the sleeves of his wilting green overall up until they sat, bunched and tight, above his elbows, the torn, over-washed paleness of his shirt peeking through as if for attention. Then he stuck one elbow out, towards me, as if to shove the silence with a knock in the ribs. Nothing came of it at that moment, so he sat his hand upon his hip. He lifted his head higher as if searching the slow breeze for something that was not airborne, but which probably crawled and scuttled

away in the heated dust. His raised head allowed a shadow to fall across his outstretched arm; only his metal bracelet of twisted telephone wires was left glinting in the light, like a spell, ready to be cast or broken. The silence would not leave us alone. It stayed, unwelcome.

We had never had a silence such as this before. I sat quietly, deep in one of my thinking moods, staring at the fading lines of past games imprinted into the rocks, as a remembrance of times played and passed.

I looked over to him, and saw him flicking tiny pebbles with a twig. I think he was avoiding contact, as the awkwardness grew between us, bulging like a fattening beast, ready for the slaughter. I saw suddenly not a person who tended the horses or who rode out with me both for company and protection, but a grown man with the job of looking after horses and a child. An adult who had to succumb nearly every day to an hour of games on warm, red rocks. "Do you like playing the games, Micka?" I asked him, the sound of my voice cracking open the harsh hush. I feared his answer.

He smiled, "Yes, Miss. I like."

I made him promise that it was the truth.

He turned away from me and stared out to the view, where the mountains were becoming purple with the distant heat. I knew that he wanted to say, "You see, you don't believe me," but I also knew that he would never make himself seem justified over me. Silence crept in again, like a shadow wishing to fall across us and darken us, but a rain cloud came and hid the sun and silence became a secret.

It was there, on the rocks, in the heavy morning heat, that I learnt something about my race; my peculiar, inexplicable foreign culture, because I had dared question it. I asked him what it was he did. He looked at me quizzically.

"Who are you? What is your job?" my voice rising like an over-excited, nervous bird.

"I am Micka the horse-boy."

"But you are a man, Micka. So you should be Micka the horseman."

He laughed and then told me, "But that is not the name, Miss."

I asked him if it bothered him, being called a boy, when he was really a grown man.

"It is the name, Miss. The European people called it so, so we called it the same."

And then the cloud disappeared entirely, and silence came heavier than before, and shadowed the lonely ride home.

I wished that I was once again a young child who would only question with indifference. We approached the newly renovated, large, white Spanish-style house with the old, brick horse-stables at the back. I wanted to go home, back to Dimwe. Back to the place we had been forced to leave because of the increasing number of guerrillas trooping across our land, following the cattle paths through the bush, waiting to ambush and attack as they planted landmines deep into our gravel roads for our vehicles to discover.

I wanted to return to our picnics in the hills and the endless horse rides that would take the whole day without ever reaching our boundary, never-ending journeys that took us nowhere but everywhere, pulling my happy heart, like a quivering kite in the winds that rose and swelled and smiled with the promise of rain.

Chapter 14

One afternoon Pencil told my mother that there was someone at the gate who was looking for a job.

"As what?" she asked him as she carried on reading her book.

"A houseboy, Medem."

"Oh. Thank you."

She carried on reading.

The previous manservant had left while my parents had been away, taking with him all of my father's socks and his best, dark suit, the one he wore to important dinners or funerals. My mother cursed when she came home and found him gone; she just shook her head at the stolen clothes, but was furious because she had just trained him into polishing the floors and the silver in the way that she liked them done.

A little while later I followed my mother down the drive, listening to her comments about the beauty of the immense bougainvillaea bushes that lined the long, sandy drive with their colours. We saw him sitting on the on the large stone that waiting people used as a rest. When he saw us he stood up.

"It looks like the Chief," my mother said.

"D'you know him?" I asked.

"Not really; but no African dresses that smartly."

The man was wearing an ironed beige safari suit and a felt hat. As we neared, we noticed his good shoes, still shiny from being polished as if he was a gentleman who

never walked on dusty farm roads. He took off his hat and smiled. "Good afternoon, Medem."

My mother greeted him as she looked him up and down. "You're very smart."

"Thank you, Medem."

"So, what do you want?"

The man told her that he had heard that she needed a houseboy.

"Bush news travels fast. Where're you from?"

"Chiweshe."

"Do you have your stoupa? And references?"

He pulled out of his breast pocket a very brown, folded and creased paper that my mother had difficulty reading. Then he handed her a letter, written by hand in English.

"Well, it seems alright. What's your name?" she asked, though she had just read his papers.

"Shonga, Medem. My name is Shonga."

"Alright then Shonga. Let's try you out. But I won't promise you anything; we have to see how we work together."

"Yes, Medem."

"So when can you start? I need someone chop-chop."

"Now-now, Medem"

"But you have no things with you. You have to go back and get them."

"Ah, never mind, Medem. I can go home to get it another time. Chiweshe is too far."

He obviously did not want someone else coming along and being offered the job.

"Well, I'll tell Pencil to show you your house in the compound and to lend you some food. I'll see you tomorrow morning then."

"Thank you, thank you, Medem." He was all smiles.

"My name's Miss Kyne," I chirped in. "I live here, but I go to school in town."

"Very good, thank you Miss Kyne."

Then I trotted after my mother up the drive.

"So you like him, Mummy?"

"Well you obviously did." She paused. "I don't know. I'll have to ask around if anyone knows him, before tomorrow. I'm a bit concerned about how smart he is."

My mother told Pencil to find out if anyone knew of this man Shonga from Chiweshe; but no one really did. Someone said that they thought that they knew his wife's cousin's husband, but my mother said that that was like trying to find the ring she had lost last holiday at the beach in Beira. She told my father about this "too-smart chap from Chiweshe", and that she was uncertain because of his dress.

"Well, as long he's only too smart in his dress and not his manners, then it's alright," my father replied. "Give him a go. You'll know after a few hours."

The next morning I came into the kitchen to find Pencil telling Shonga about how this house was a very special one. I wondered why they were speaking English. Shonga noticed me first and smiled as he said, "Morning, Miss Kyne."

I could see that Pencil was annoyed. I laughed and teased,

"The new boy's quicker than you, Pencil!"

Shonga was sharp. "The sharpest knife we've had in any kitchen drawer," my father said. He got on well with Shonga because he only had to say things once to him. Soon my mother was asking Shonga to do a lot more than just the housework. He polished her brass and silver as if he had done nothing else his entire life and the rooms were always neat and clean and the ironing done quickly, in high, neatly stacked piles that he carried, swaying through the house as he tried to peer over the top where he had placed my mother's 'very special clothes' so that they would not get creased.

It was not long before Pencil began ordering him rudely around and ignoring him when he had done a job well. Sometimes we heard them arguing in the kitchen.

The holidays were over and we were returning to boarding school. Shonga carried the suitcases, bags, toys and large, tins full of home-made biscuits for Uncle Albert to the car where Pencil stood with my mother, helping her pack. I stood in the cool of the garage, hugging Mycat close to my chest. My other hand fondled Biddy's ears, my fingers trying to pick out the lost grass seeds. I was watching the car-packing scene with great interest. Whenever Shonga came to the car, Pencil would stop what he was doing and begin ordering Shonga to lift the suitcases into the boot, telling him where to put them, exactly.

"You *can* help him, Pencil," my mother said quietly so that Shonga would not really hear, but Pencil looked at her and shook his head, saying, "Medem, he must learn these things; because otherwise he is not becoming a good houseboy."

When everything was packed, my mother asked Pencil to go and tell my father that we were ready to leave.

"And I just have to say goodbye to the horses," I said. I ran off, clutching Mycat closer to me so she would be comfortable with my scampering through the garden.

"You've already done that twice!" my mother called after me.

At the stables, Micka was still waiting with the horses. He knew that I would come back again. I hugged all the horses, and stayed lingering, hanging on the neck of Spankles who was more interested in trying to get hold of the grass on the other side of the fence.

I heard the car hoot twice, then again; my father was impatient.

"Quick-quick, Miss Kyne," Micka said, "Baas is in another hurry."

At the car, I hugged Biddy and kissed her neck, then shook the hands of Shonga and then Pencil. I clutched My-cat even tighter.

"Pencil," I asked, "Please remember to look after all my animals."

"Yes, Miss Kyne. Like every time."

"And also the small ones," I said, leaning closer to him, referring to my collection of bottles and boxes of bugs. "Please, Pencil, don't let the Madam throw them in the garden, even when she says they're too big. Sure?"

"Sure-sure, Miss Kyne," he promised, though I knew that my mother had more power than I.

"Otherwise you can hide them under my bed!" I whispered.

"No, Miss Kyne, they will not like the darkness there; maybe even they might die. I will keep them good in my kitchen and find fresh leaves for them."

"Don't let Madam see them! You *must* hide them from the Madam!"

My father ordered me into the car.

I hugged Biddy one more time, then handed my cat over to Pencil, who held her outstretched from him, her arms and legs dangling lost, as if he was afraid she might suddenly scratch or mess on him.

As we drove away, I hung out the window shouting last farewells between my tears to all the animals and Shonga and Pencil. Pencil followed the car for a few steps, waving with both hands; he had already given My-cat over to Shonga. Then he stopped and it was only Biddy who followed us to the end of the drive, though I saw his figure, standing and waving, until a bougainvillea hid him from view.

That was the last I ever saw of Pencil.

When I came home again a month later for a weekend, he was gone.

"Why?" I wailed, sitting on my chair on the terrace.

I had asked where he was when he had not come out to greet us at the car. Only Shonga and Biddy were there. My parents looked from one to the other. Then my mother told me that he had left.

"Why? Why did you let him go?"

"It was best, Kyne. He had to."

"You made him go?"

"No." Then she went into the house.

That evening my mother told me that Pencil and Shonga had been arguing almost daily, and that she was going batty from it all. Then one morning she had walked into the kitchen and found them fighting with knives.

She had shouted at them to stop. And then said that one of them must go.

It was Pencil who walked out. Shonga would not budge. He was determined to take the position as Cook, with all the power and prestige it held on a farm. Pencil had probably felt that my mother should have gotten rid of the new man who was making all the trouble. It was a silent and unbearable understanding - that my mother could not make the choice herself; that she liked this new man as much as Pencil. Pencil was a proud man who probably felt betrayed; he had been with us for nearly ten years.

The first thing I made my mother promise me was to teach Shonga to make pancakes.

He made them paper thin, perfectly round and crispy at the edges. I knew then that we would be friends, though he never took me up and made me feel special when I was sad. Instead he called me, "Little Miss Mess-Mess" because I was untidy. I chose to

ignore him, especially when my father heard this and laughed. He said that Shonga had his kind of humour. I did not really know if I should allow myself to like him as much as I had Pencil. My father could tease me until I cried.

Shonga was proud of his pancake achievements and we had them every time my mother was away in town or on Police Reserve duty. He filled them with chicken and mushrooms, with mango and ice cream. But we liked them best just plain with wild honey from the farm, rough brown, war sugar and the clotted cream that Sixpence brought in with the fresh milk from my mother's tame dairy cow that tagged around after the horses.

Then one day Shonga walked into the dining room to serve the food with his white cook's hat starched flat.

"What's that all about," my mother asked as Lisa and I giggled.

"I do not like a hat up, Medem. It is to be flat. Like a pancake."

We teased him and called him the pancake chief, something I had never even called Pencil. His small, very dark face, beamed as he clapped his hands in thanks.

When my grandmother came out for her yearly escape from the Danish freeze, she was shocked to hear that Pencil had left. She barely greeted Shonga though he had stood, waiting all day by the window, listening for the car to return with the "Madala Medem", the old lady. He had even picked hibiscus flowers and put them in a glass in her room.

"But he's good," my mother told her mother.

"We'll see."

She was determined to prove her daughter had made the mistake of her life. Like when my mother had wanted to marry my father, who was too old and too far away for her. My mother had proved her wrong, and was determined to prove her wrong once again.

"No," she said, "*you'll* see."

"How can you have someone who can't even read or write?" my grandmother persisted over drinks on the veranda as dusk settled in and made the garden a purple-blue.

"Nor could Pencil," my mother snapped. We looked at her as she added, "well, not very well."

"Malawians have always had the chance of a better education," my father said, as if this would stop their bickering. "Shonga's a real Shona: no education at all."

They ignored him, and my mother began asking about news and scandal from home. My father got up and left.

The next morning my grandmother came into the kitchen. I was following her around because I felt that she had not brought me enough Danish liquorice and that maybe she had saved some for better days and nicer girls. My grandmother ignored me. She informed Shonga, in Danish, that they were going to bake.

Shonga nodded in confusion and smiled. My grandmother then began ordering him around, in Danish, to get out the various utensils and ingredients. I began to translate, but her stern look told me that this was something between her and the new cook. He was under intense examination. And she was the judge.

My mother came into the kitchen and asked what was going on.

"I'm trying to teach him something," my grandmother retorted.

My mother eyed us all, and saw Shonga trying to smile as I looked away. "What?" she demanded to Shonga.

He shrugged his shoulders, trying to look interested and not like a fly caught up in a triangular web.

"Danish pastries," my grandmother replied, as if these were something every child could invent.

"What? He's not a chef!"

"Well, you said he was good."

Then my grandmother turned her back upon my mother and began ordering Shonga to get this and that though he did not understand a word she was saying.

My mother left. I knew she was angry at her mother for interfering. I wondered if Shonga could survive the ordeal; if he would suddenly throw down the bowls and spoons and leave. I stayed to watch.

As my grandmother mixed and whisked, she told Shonga to clean the counter twice before she rolled the dough out on it. She only gave him the minimum of instructions in mumbled Danish. Shonga stared so hard at what my grandmother was doing I was scared his eyes would pop out and land in the middle of the dough.

Then she formed the pastries, brushed them with egg and milk and put them in the oven, telling him to watch. He looked at her, his eyes unsure. She pointed to her eyes then to his and then to the oven, as she slammed the door and hitched the latch. Then she left.

Shonga moved a little yellow painted wooden stool over to the Aga and sat down to stare at it. He had no idea when to open it, how long they should bake or what the pastries should look like when done. He looked at me, but I shrugged my shoulders and looked away, so he went back to frowning at the Aga.

After a while, curiosity or fear, made him open the door, slightly. I ran over to peek too, but shrugged my shoulders. We had no idea. Shonga shut the door again and waited, watching the door in case something knocked within.

I thought my grandmother would only reappear when she smelt burning. Yet she was too proud. She knew that my father would tease her about it, as he had done when she had almost forgotten the butter biscuits when her afternoon walk took her too far. He had called them her speciality: "Granny's African biscuits."

My grandmother returned to see Shonga still sitting watching the Aga door and laughed. She pulled the pastries out and told Shonga, in Danish, "They're perfect. See?" Then she placed them on the cooling rack and said, "This is how they must be. Now make them."

Shonga nodded. My grandmother measured out all the ingredients and then went for a walk. I slid off the table; I did not want to get involved in this. Shonga turned to me and said, "Good, Miss Kyne, you must go."

He did not want his success to be because of me. Though I would have been completely useless.

That afternoon for tea, Shonga came out to us as we sat around the tiled, tea table. He proudly served his pastries on my mother's best silver platter. They looked a little flat, though they were not pancakes. My mother's lips twitched uneasily. We all took one as Shonga offered them around, then looked anxiously at one another. No one commented except my grandmother.

"I knew it!" she shrieked gleefully in Danish.

Shonga looked nervously around; he did not know if her cry was in delight at his success or his failure.

My father pretended to take a bite; then yelled,

"Ow!" as he held his mouth in pretended pain, "I broke my tooth!"

He looked over at Shonga who did not dare understand his humour. His dark face grew a pale ashen,

"Sorry, Baas."

"Daddy! Shame!" I squealed, laughing.

But my father did not stop there. He stretched out his arm and then dropped the pastry upon the concrete tiles. "Oh no!" he exclaimed. "It's cracked the concrete!"

We looked over to Shonga who could not control himself any longer; he doubled over, shaking his head, as if his laughter was sheer agony.

Even my grandmother was laughing. Though she suddenly broke the chortling storm with, "I told you, you should have kept Pencil. This man's too lazy!"

"Well," my mother retorted, "Why did you never try to teach Pencil your pastries?"

Though it was in Danish, Shonga sensed that the comedy was over. He picked up the fallen pastry and walked back inside.

My mother got up to follow him. I followed them into the kitchen, where she said to Shonga, "Not to worry. It was our first try. But Shonga, to be a good cook, recipes have to be followed *very* carefully; or they do not work. You cannot cook quickly or be lazy. These pastries will only be good if you fold and roll them *many* times. You only did a few times; I know."

Shonga looked sheepishly away. He had thought that he could get away with a shortcut.

The next morning Shonga had attempted the pastries for breakfast. My mother told him, "These are better than the Madala Medem's."

Shonga beamed.

My grandmother did not say anything. But the next day she went back into the kitchen with a new recipe.

By the time my grandmother's winter holiday was over, Shonga could prepare Danish casseroles, stews and meatballs. His salads were spattered with a spray of finely

chopped herbs that looked like green dust; the fluffy egg-cake omelettes were made with one side runny for my parents and the other half nice and firm for Lisa and me, with every potato and tomato lying in a faultless ring between parsley. And the Danish pastries, biscuits and bread made our Danish guests think that they were back home.

My mother had found in Shonga the Chef of her kitchen. My grandmother had found her partner. My father overstayed his lunches and Lisa and I wished we could take him back to boarding school.

Chapter 15

Sunday afternoons always filled me with a dreary, tense gloom. They meant school the next day. If we had to go back to school after a weekend at home I would often start feeling ill by early evening. I would vomit or run a temperature. If we had to return to school on a Sunday afternoon, this would all begin at lunch time. But my parents still drove me to school, thinking I was just trying to stay at home, which I was; though somehow I could not control the sickness that crept down from my head and made my body hot and shivering.

One Sunday afternoon we had been to lunch with some Danish friends in Bromley. I was feeling ill and lay in the rear window, my body squeezed against the slanting glass that had thin, green lines across it, wiggling like long, skinny worms, much like the beeping lines across the heart machines one saw in films on the TV. My father told me they were heaters to melt the ice of European winters. I wondered how they felt in the scorching heat of Africa. I often lay in that spot, my face pressed against the glass, watching the cars that my father overtook and left behind, making faces at the old people and waving to the army vehicles. It was my spot; I liked to lie up there alone, watching the world move away from me, seeing it all as though it was reversing backwards from me. It kept my car-sickness at bay, but not the Sunday gloom I felt grow within me as I watched the afternoon light redden and fade as we approached boarding school.

"Slow down!" my mother suddenly shrieked.

My father braked, then cursed her, "*I'm* driving, dammit!"

I rolled around to see a commotion on the road ahead.

"What is it?" Lisa and I asked as I slid down onto the back seat.

"Don't touch me!" Lisa growled through her teeth. "Keep to your side."

I rolled my eyes at her and squirmed to lean forwards between the front seats.

"A train accident, I think," my father replied.

We saw the goods train stopped half way across the intersection of the line. Some policemen were waving their hands about to slow us down and or move us on.

"Slow down, Jorgen!" my mother ordered.

"Slow down, Daddy," I squealed.

"Oh, not you as well!"

"But I want to see."

"Boy, you're so gory," Lisa said, pretending to be bored, though she was also staring.

We passed the train and then saw the man lying spread-eagled across the road.

"God, why don't they move him?" my mother asked to her closed window.

My father shrugged,

"Probably just happened."

"Is he dead?" I wanted to know.

"Yip. Very." he replied.

"Don't look girls," my mother asked, but we weren't listening to her. We gawked at the sprawled man who looked like he was sleeping drunk, arms and legs in a X, mimicking the sign of the railway crossing.

"No blood," I said, almost disappointed, because it meant then that he might not be quite dead.

"Oh please," Lisa sighed.

"– Oops!" my father said suddenly with a strange, unsure laugh.

"What, what?" I demanded.

"I just drove over his boot."

I spun round and looked behind me, thinking that my father had driven across the dead man that had suddenly moved. But he had not; his boot had been flung to the other

side of the road and lay there, unlaced and gaping open like the wound he should have had.

"Ha, ha!" I laughed, "Daddy just drove over his boot!"

I tried to nudge my father into laughing with me, but he was quiet. As he accelerated he shook his head and said to my mother in Danish, "No African has big boots like that. Only Terrs."

"Oh well, that's alright then," my mother whispered to no one in particular.

By the time we returned to school, my nausea had gone. My claim to fame was that my dad had run over a dead Terr's boot.

I told the dormitory the story as we were getting ready for chapel and everyone laughed, except my neighbour Michelle who came from Macheke. She looked pale and kept quiet, even in line on the way back from chapel to supper when we always tried to trip each other up and stifle giggles in the imposed silence of the march, the organ and hymns still ringing in our quiet, weekend-away ears.

That night, after lights out, some of the girls asked me, in hushed questions, exactly what had happened.

"Wait 'til the old bat's gone downstairs," I whispered back, fearing another of the back-slappings that always seemed to come my way.

We lay in silent anticipation, like criminals waiting for the deathly quiet of deep darkness. The song of crickets rose louder as the calm of the night entered the dormitory every time the curtains billowed open in the evening breeze.

We heard the click before the black darkness fell - the switching off of the corridor lights; then the clickety-clack of her walk as it disappeared into faint echoes.

"Tell us now!" came the sharp, anxious whispers.

My story-telling time had arrived; like a ruthless hunter who had been waiting too long, I spared nothing and added everything else.

Then my friend Liza, from Karoi, broke the hush that came after my last sentence. "On Saturday, my brother told me that the Terrs had been hiding in the ditch, just outside our driveway. He said they were waiting for us to return with the convoy. But we were late. We'd missed the convoy 'cause my dad was waiting for a spare part."

"Pheweey," someone added.

"Yar," she replied. "They probably thought we were staying the night in town, 'cause they'd buggered off when we got home."

We giggled at her swearing; I wished that I had a brother who would tell me such stories and teach me swear-words.

"My mother thought they'd got bored waiting. But my dad said that they were just born lazy or poop-scared."

We giggled again.

"How d'you know they were really there?" someone asked.

"We saw their signs. The grass was flat where they had been lying down -"

"Probably sleeping," I broke in.

I heard the giggles.

"My dad showed us their butt marks -"

"You could see their bums?"

"No, man. The butts from their AKs."

We giggled louder.

"Shush, you guys!" Tanya whispered hoarsely. "I don't want to get into trouble because of you!"

"Goody, goody," we snickered back; we all wanted to ignore her, but we quietened down.

"Kyne?"

My neighbour, Michelle, with the thick pig-tails that always stuck out from the sides of her head, was leaning over her locker, her face bent down towards me.

"I'm scared," she whispered.

"Why?"

"Something happened this weekend."

"What?"

Silence.

"Can I come into your bed?"

"Yar, sure," I whispered back. I opened wide my blanket to let her know that I meant it.

She came around the locker and slipped in beside me, squashing me against the wood of the locker. She was cold.

I let her wriggle closer towards me; her skin felt clammy like a caught frog. I put my arms around her.

"Someone came into my room."

"Where?" I asked.

"At home. I woke up 'cause something was scratching on the window. I thought it was the Christmas beetles, or a something trying to get out. I was gonna get up and look when I heard the window being pulled, more open. Then I saw this shadow behind the curtain."

"What was it?" My heart was beating. I had to lean my ear closer to her lips to make sure I didn't miss a word, and for comfort.

"I didn't know; but I was scared. I wanted to call out, but I couldn't. I was too scared. I tried to remember my mom's voice and her words, you know, when you think there's a bogey-man under the bed, and they tell you to just go to sleep or lie still and it'll go away, have sweet dreams and all that?"

"Yar?" I wanted her to go on, not remind me of my own mother.

"So I tried to lie still. But it didn't go away."

She paused, as if afraid to remember it and relive it once again.

"I saw the shadow. I hoped it was a dumb monster, but it was real. It opened my curtains and stepped down onto the floor. Then it came, slowly, like on tip-toe, over to my bed."

"Ach!" I tried to laugh. "Stop it, man!"

"'S not funny, Kyne. It was real! I promise."

"But there's no such thing as monsters. Even if we're scared of them, they're not real."

"It wasn't a monster, man! It was a man."

I lay still; her words had to work their way into a meaning in my head, before I suddenly sucked in the darkness in a gasp, "What?"

"Yar. It was an African guy -"

"What did you do?"

"I tried to close my eyes -"

"Why didn't you scream?"

"Dunno. My mom asked me the same, later. Guess I was just too scared. I thought if I closed my eyes he'd go away, or I'd fall asleep or something. It was all so weird. And I didn't want to look at him; see his eyes."

"What then?" I sat up on my elbow and tried to find her face, see her eyes; but it was too dark. I opened the curtains above me. The rusty curtain rings screeched against the metal rails like a train. A soft light from the far bathrooms came in and made Michelle look like a ghost.

"Yar, thanks," she murmured. "I'm also scared."

"What then?" I repeated.

"I don't know, really. I heard him move around the room; you know, normally they're really quiet, bare feet. The police said he had shoes on; boots."

"Oh, no!"

"Mm, he opened my cupboards. I was trying not to look, but also trying to peek, and then I heard the curtains moving again and then nothing."

"Then what?"

"I dunno. I just went to sleep, I guess."

"You fell asleep? Weren't you pooping yourself?"

"I was so tired." Then she sighed. "I'm so tired now."

"No! Uh-uh, you don't go to sleep now. When did you tell your mom?"

"She woke me up the next morning. I'm usually the early-bird at home, but my mom woke me by shouting at me."

"Shouting at you?"

"Yar, she wanted to know why I'd made such a mess in my room. I didn't know what she was talking about until I looked around and saw stuff all over the floor and the open curtains. Then I told her. And you know what?"

"Uh-uh?"

"She didn't believe me."

"No way!"

"Not until she saw the broken window latch. Then she was screaming for my dad!"

We laughed.

"My dad told us not to touch anything, for finger-prints. Then he called the police."

"What did they do?"

"Ag, lots of stuff. But they were really worried when they saw what the guy had nicked."

"What?" I begged.

"Just sheets and blankets and some muti."

"So?"

"So, it wasn't an ordinary African stealing for his family. It was a Terr who needed blankets and medicine."

I still did not get it.

"The police said maybe someone was lying nearby, wounded. Someone really important."

I often thought about this story, as I lay in my bed at night, wondering if that important someone had survived, or if the helper, or one like him, would one night squeeze himself though my window and with quiet boot-tread walk over to me and look down at me as I tried to feign sleep, in fear. I often think of Michelle, the girl with pig-tails from Macheke, and wonder if she still thinks of it. If she still fears the nights and feels, as all we children of the war still feel each night: the face of a black man, standing with deadly intent beside us.

Chapter 16

It was hot and bumpy in the car. My father was complaining about the rained-out roads destroying his car. My mother was complaining about my father not putting on the air-conditioning.

"Inger, you know there's a war going on?" he mumbled under breath that rolled like thunder, loud with anger around the stifled car. My sister and I looked at each other with sad eyes hoping that they would not start bickering again. Everything was blamed on the war; even the heat in the car.

"I know there's a damn war. But I'm boiling over!"

"Inger, you know that the Terrs blew up the petrol storage tanks?"

Lisa and I looked at each other again. We had seen that damage. We had been in town two days after it had happened. Large concrete tanks that rose into the skies were burning; fire had reached for the heavens as if wanting to escape the tragedy. Smoke hung thick and still in the summer heat in black clouds that seemed as doomed as we were now: our country's oil supply had been destroyed. Everyone was afraid that this would cripple us, leaving us unable to fight the war to the last, bitter bush battle or to flee to a new world, far away. Five days later the silos were still burning. We had heard it on the news that morning.

My sister was complaining that I was sitting too close. She was forever drawing imaginary lines between us, marking off her territory. My mother would shake her head, saying that she was worse than the colonialists who had drawn up boundaries without

thinking of the tribes they were splitting and wrecking. "All that hate leads to civil war," she warned. She was right. My mother was always right. Lisa and I were always fighting.

I sat in the middle, in the absent seat made when the arm rest was pulled up. Lisa wanted it down as then I could not move over to her. Yet I had to sit there, with a view of the road ahead or else I would be car sick. My mother always had air-sick bags on hand, with the logos of Air Rhodesia, SAA or SAS. She would whip them from the passenger door pocket whenever she heard me breathing too heavily. My father had learnt to swerve the car to the side in an instant. He would lean backwards to yank open my door, almost pushing me into the ditch as he braked to a halt, skidding in the gravel and dust. He did not want a mess in his car of any sort. We were never allowed to snack or drink in it. Sometimes he had a cigar while waiting angrily for my mother to finish her shopping in town. Then I would be sick for the whole, hour-long drive home, the sour cigar stench still strong around me.

My mother gave me one of the stale crackers that she kept in a bag in the cubby hole. Everyone else got soggy, salty Danish liquorice. They moaned, but took the pieces. The smell made me nauseous. Lisa butted me with her elbow, "Move, man! Don't puke on my new dress."

I looked at her, all dressed up, elegant like my mother and too dignified for her age. Her blonde hair was pulled into a perfect roll. Her dress was gathered neatly under her. Her nose stuck straight out, perfect like my father's. I was dusty and sweating, my hair a mess; I only wore a dress because my mother made me.

"Stop staring!"

I looked ahead, at the long, red winding road. It went on and on like a never-ending poisonous snake.

"Look!" I suddenly squealed, "A fire!"

"So what?" Lisa moaned, "Stop shrieking in my ear like a witch."

"You're the witch!" I retorted.

"Huh! You're the one who keeps lizards and frogs under her bed!"

"Well you've got a black cat –"

"You've got warts and ring worm –"

"They're from the cats!" I wailed. "Hey Mummy? They're from the cats?"

"Be quiet!" my father ordered.

As we drove on the smoke thickened, and the smell came in through the closed car.

"What is it?" my mother asked, for the smell was different.

"It's not a bush fire," my father answered.

He slowed the car. Then we saw it.

The village compound that we often drove past, with butchery, a store and a small brick school, was gone. The trees were bare; they seemed to be sighing their last breaths in smoke that wafted upwards in small, thin gasps. They stood like a strange forest of smoking, black poles. Everything between had been burnt down and lay in panting puffs of soot. The ground was black except for patches of red, hot ash that looked like monster eyes in the dark.

"Oh my God," my mother whispered, as she rolled down her window.

A bad smell gusted into the car. "Good God! That's not burning animals," my father said in Danish to my mother. But we heard him and understood.

We heard the piercing hysterical screams of shock and loss.

My mother rolled the window up.

"Quickly," she said to my father, "drive on - the children!"

But we were already witnesses.

"No," my father whispered back. "It's disrespectful."

I remembered Pencil telling me that Africans never thought it wrong to stare when I had complained of the piccanins in the compound gawking at me when I went past, or when there was an accident or a death. Pencil said they wanted people to stare, to see their sorrow, feel their pain; share their suffering.

So I did.

I stared as hard as my eyes could as we drove past the people sitting by the side of the road, grey as the ash around them. Children cried as they clutched their mothers; their mothers wore their eyes big, white and afraid. The men stood silent and still, looking lost, like they had awoken into another, unreal world.

I wished my father would stop and ask them what had happened, and if he could help. But he did not. He just drove slowly on. He already knew what had happened and that he could be of little use or comfort.

We followed the red road, slowly slithering our way in a deathly silence that followed us into the lunch party. My mother's friend tried to make all the children go out and play croquet. But we did not want to leave the comfort and security of our parents, who wanted to talk. By the end of the afternoon we had heard of the horrors. Pregnant women had been bayoneted in the stomach. Some had had their babies ripped out. There had been rapes and beatings and children locked up in the school and burnt as their parents stood by and screamed. The chief's wife had had her lips hacked off and her husband had been forced to eat them, raw, to make sure that his wife would not talk.

The village had no radio or telephone contact. By the time a teenage boy had run to the nearest farmer who then alerted the police and army, it was too late. The terrorists had gone. The army followed their black trackers who walked ahead barefoot after the spoor, like they were hunting animals, while the police stayed behind to question the wailing village.

We drove away just after lunch, following directly in the tyre tracks of an armoured vehicle called a "Hippo". It was large and heavy and could withstand the worst of landmines. It had been called in to escort us out of the area as everyone feared that the terrorists were still around.

We drove safely behind the slow, lumbering, camouflaged beast, a trail of whites in shiny cars passing the burnt-out blacks who had no homes. We passed them shuffling in the limp, low clouds of red dust and grey ash, wailing as they carried their broken dead between them.

Shonga was not expecting us back home so early. When he arrived in the late afternoon he found us sitting drinking tea in silence. He did not say anything but came and took the tea pot away and returned with it refilled. I wanted to tell him what we had seen, yet somehow, I was afraid. It would be like telling a tale that I had made up because it seemed so unreal.

Then my father got up and went to his truck and drove off, without changing out of his nice clothes. I wanted to go with him and complained to my mother.

"He wants to be alone," my mother said.

Lisa left to go and say goodnight to the horses. I thought she was copying my father. I did not want to be alone, so when my mother carried the tea tray back into the house, I followed her.

"Go and play," she told me, as she shut the door to the kitchen. I put my ear to the gap at the side of the door. It had warped after the water boiler in the ceiling had burst into a flood and my mother had worn gumboots in the kitchen for a whole day.

I heard my mother telling Shonga what we had seen. When he said nothing, she then told him all she had heard had happened.

"What kind of people can do this, Shonga?"

He did not reply. I thought that perhaps he was whispering to my mother, so I tried to peer through the gap, but I only caught a tremor of his shadow against the shiny, yellow wall behind the sink.

Then I heard Shonga say, "They want us to follow them, Medem."

"But how on earth do they expect you people to follow them - or even trust their notions - when they do this to you?"

My ear was aching from pressing it against the crack but the air hung still. Then Shonga said, "Because we are afraid."

An owl hooted an early call of darkness not yet fallen. I knew that the Africans thought this was a bad omen. I wondered if Shonga had heard it too. Then my mother said, "Well, let's make supper, shall we?"

My mother opened the door suddenly and found me standing there. I was sure my ear was a bright red and that she would know but she just ignored me and disappeared into the locked world of her pantry. I tip-toed into the kitchen and sat on a chair in the far corner. Shonga was using a potato peeler to remove the dark, soiled skins of carrots. They glowed a strange orange in the late afternoon sun. He sliced them into large, round eyes that lay glaring on the chopping board. He was working very slowly, as if his mind had left him and gone home for supper. I wished he would hurry and work faster before my mother returned.

My mother strode back into the kitchen carrying some of the imported South African tinned food that she bought with whispers and cash from the Greek supermarket in a small shopping centre on the outskirts of town. "They'll find out, sooner or later

where these monsters are hiding. I was told that the police are still busy questioning the villagers."

Shonga stopped slicing the carrots and put his knife down sharply, as if he were angry. Then he pulled open a drawer and took out another, larger knife. He began sharpening the knives against each other, as if invisible people were fighting each other. The slicing noise made my skin wriggle, as if it was trying to creep away into me. My mother turned and looked at him.

"Don't you think so, Shonga?" she asked loudly above the swish and scrape of blades, in a tone that demanded he stop. "I mean, the villagers know don't they?"

Shonga shook his head and carried on battling the knives.

"Shonga?"

He stopped and put the knives down.

"Then why did they do that to the woman? Why did they hack off her lips if they didn't think she would talk?"

Shonga was silent, staring through the window into the twilight.

"They must have known something," my mother said, matter-of-factly. "The police will find out. No?"

Shonga shrugged, then replied in slow words that lifted painfully into the air, "Police will make them talk, Medem. Even when they have no mouth. Even when they know nothing."

Chapter 17

The war was worsening. The government soon began to call up the men over fifty and lured more blacks by promising the pay which was normally reserved for the educated and schooled blacks and coloureds. They also held talks at girls' high schools about the prestige of being a nurse when one left school. The hospitals were bursting with young victims.

Many people were leaving the country.

The curfews became tighter and we felt more locked up within our homes than ever before. One afternoon at tea, my mother reminded my father that they were invited to a party that night at the club. It was a farewell do for a couple who were leaving the district for South Africa. My father did not really want to go out. He was tired and it meant that Lisa and I would have to come along. "It's ridiculous to drive so far at night. Just for some party."

"But everyone is going!" my mother insisted.

"Not everyone. Only those who live close to Glendale."

"Well, I *have* to go! I cannot stand being locked up here any more!"

That evening we left the locked gate behind and drove off to the club. Lisa and I were in pyjamas and had our blankets wrapped around us. My father parked the car on the lawn right in front of the club so that they could keep watch over us. Then he told us to lock the doors and hoot if anything happened. My mother took her pistol out of the cubby hole and put it in her handbag and my father took the FN rifle from the floor

beneath our feet. Then my mother opened the boot and took out a large, silver platter filled with snacks. We watched them walk away towards the steps, my father shifting the revolver that always sat in a leather belt on his hips. He carried his FN like a child against his chest. We saw them greet others who had arrived, all shifting their guns so that they could shake hands or kiss cheeks. Then they went into the bar. I imagined my father placing his FN in the gun rack against the wall, along with all the others that stood, ready and waiting, just in case.

Lisa and I sat talking for a while, wondering if there would be other cars with children that would park close to ours. We were among the first to arrive. My mother had been so eager for a night out that she did not want to miss a moment. We recognised the other cars that soon drove up and parked beside ours, waving to those who sat in the back. When those grown-ups had gone inside the club, we rolled down our windows and began talking to them.

"I want to crawl out the window and run over to them," I told Lisa.

"Why don't you just open the door?"

"Because Daddy said we should keep it locked. We promised. We can't break a promise, it brings bad luck."

Lisa scoffed, "As if there isn't enough of it already."

"Well, then we don't need more. Not for us."

Soon some boys came over to us and stood by Lisa's window smoking cigarettes as they flirted. They kept taking long drags on the cigarettes, trying to blow smoke rings to impress her and then quickly hiding the glowing ends behind them, in case someone should notice from the Club. They were daring each other to sneak off and ask the barman for some beers through the little side window. I was desperate to volunteer: I would do anything to draw their attention away from Lisa. Eventually a boy called Mark said he would do it and I asked if I could go with him. They laughed. "Well," I replied, "Mark can't carry all those bottles by himself. Plus, I can keep watch."

"Come then," he said.

I crawled through the window. My sister clicked her tongue at my absurdity. She began telling them why I wasn't using the door. It made me shrink and feel like a Daddy's girl, a baby.

Mark took the long way around the Club. I followed in his steps, my heart racing with excitement as we slunk through the shadows of the trees that lined the tennis courts. We hid for a while in the dark cover of the bushes, between the squash courts and the back entrance that passed the kitchens.

"All clear!" he suddenly whispered and then raced off.

I had a hard time keeping up with such a fit teenager, but jumped beside him in the low flower bed by the open passage that led from the bar past the open kitchen door.

"OK," he said, "you keep watch. I'm going to ask some blackie in the kitchen if he'll get me beers."

"Have you got any money?" I asked, suddenly afraid that our plan could fail.

"Of course, man! Duckie! If someone comes towards the kitchen, cough three times."

"OK."

Mark ran into the kitchen. I sat looking in every possible direction, fearing a grown-up would pop up from the other parking lot behind me or some ladies come chattering out of the cloakrooms. Or worse, that the club lady would come to the kitchen to check on the food. I sat turning my head like I was trying to figure out which way to unscrew a jam jar. The bar was noisy, and through the open door I could see people milling around with glasses and cigarettes and loud laughs. It was then that I noticed the crate under the peeling green, wooden table. I did not know how to creep like a terrorist across the open, well lit space to see if there was anything inside it. Then I just decided to get up and do it, I could always pretend that I was going to the ladies' room.

Mark returned, scuttling back to our hide, holding two bottles under his shirt. "Let's go!" he said.

"Look," I tried to sound calm.

Mark looked down to my feet and saw four bottles of beer.

"Where the shit did you find those?"

"Over there, under the green table," I pointed. "The crate's full."

"Jezuz man! What were you going to say if someone caught you?"

"That I was looking for the loo, or my mother."

"Under the table?" he laughed.

"No, man. It's right behind the bar door."

Mark laughed and gave me a slap on the shoulder that made me proud, except that it hurt. "Crazy kid! Let's go. We'll come back for the rest later."

Back at the cars, Mark told the others what I had done. The boys laughed, shaking their heads at me, saying things like, "Good on you, girl" and "tough brat". Lisa tried to be furious and shook her head as if shocked, but when the boys carried on laughing and talking about me, she became annoyed.

Mark's sister, Rosemary, and I moved around to the other side of the car with one of the bottles. Mark heard us trying to open it on the hub-cap and came over to help. He put the bottle's neck in the side of his mouth and pulled the cap off with his teeth. I snickered.

"Mark!" Rosemary scolded, "You'll bust your teeth. You're like the munts, man!"

Mark smiled proudly and then lit a cigarette, dragging hard on it as he blew the smoke fierce and high and blue against the dark night sky.

"Can I try?" I asked.

Rosemary nudged me in the ribs. Mark leant down and passed me his cigarette. I put it to my lips and felt the wet of his mouth. I was suddenly shy, almost ashamed by this intimacy I had suddenly experienced with a boy. Yet I did not pull it away: I was afraid that Mark might think I was a sissy. I pulled on the cigarette, bitterness stung my mouth and without thinking I gulped in air to rid it of the ghastly taste. I began spluttering uncontrollably. Mark laughed and took the cigarette from me. I was coughing into my lap when I heard Lisa beside us, "Mark! What are you doing, man? She's a kid! She's only ten!"

Mark laughed again and then asked if I was alright. I tried to nod.

"Drink something Kyne," Lisa ordered.

I lifted the bottle and gulped some beer.

"Is that a beer?!" Lisa shrieked.

"Shush man, Lis!" Mark retorted. "We'll be caught!"

Lisa looked down at me and said, "You're the absolute pits! I can't believe I have to have you as a sister."

Then she walked back to the others.

"Sorry," Mark said.

I giggled. "It's not your fault my sister's so bossy."

Rosemary and I sat with our backs against the car's front wheel, listening to the music that played from the Club, watching silhouettes dancing past the open windows. We were snickering about who was dancing with who. We gossiped about school and the nuns we hated so much as we drank the bottle dry.

We were giggling and feeling tipsy. When Mark returned to ask me if I would go back with him to fetch the rest of the beer, my sister would not allow it, "She's had enough already!"

I wanted to go with Mark, but was secretly relieved as my head seemed to be floating high into the cooling night air.

Suddenly we heard, "Sticks! Sticks!" as someone tried to warn of approaching danger. The boys threw their cigarettes down and tried to hide them by standing on them. They were kicking bottles under the car when I heard my father's voice, "What to hell is going on here?"

"Nothing, Daddy," Lisa tried in a sweet voice.

"Evening Mister Nislev," the boys said in muffled voices.

My father did not reply.

"Is it a good party?" Lisa asked in a voice even higher and sweeter than before.

I giggled as Rosemary knocked me in the ribs. Though I was terrified of what my father would do, I was struggling to not burst out laughing. I tried to hold my mouth closed but I snorted instead. Rosemary could not hold her laughter in either and we ended up spluttering loudly as we rolled over into the grass. Even when my father stood above me and demanded to know what I was doing out of the car, I could not stop laughing.

"What's so funny?" he demanded.

I could only shake my head as I tried to say, "The Nuns."

"Is that a beer bottle?" he asked.

"It's not mine," I said quickly, suddenly empty of laughs.

"Nor mine," Rosemary quipped.

He stared at us as we hung our heads. He knew. And we knew that he knew. I was afraid that he would slap me or pull my ears in front of everyone.

"Get into the car!"

Rosemary got up and scurried off to her car. Lisa was getting back into our car. I could not get up. My legs felt as though they belonged to someone else and I had just borrowed them for the night - they would not do what I wanted them to. I wanted to laugh at them, and then cry because of them. I had to hold onto the side of the car to try and heave myself up, but then my father pulled me sharply up by my arm. "Into the car," he ordered.

"I can't," I whispered, "It's locked."

"Then how did you get out?"

"Through the window. You told us to keep the car locked."

"Idiot," my father said hoarsely. "Lisa, open the door."

Lisa leaned over and unlocked the door. My father pulled it open and pushed me inside. "You're as bad as your mother!" he said as he slammed the door shut.

I watched him leave, realising the boys had scuttled off and were nowhere to be seen.

Lisa started scolding me, saying that it was my fault we were in trouble and that I was nothing but a painful nuisance. Then she moved through the gap between the front seats and sat down in the passenger seat.

I lay down on the back seat and fell asleep, my head turning in strange, distant circles to the music, sometimes fast, sometimes too slow. I wished that it would find its rhythm.

I did not know then that my mother was knocking back drinks in the bar. When my father came to tell her that it was time to go, she collected her empty, silver platter and went out the side door. My father followed her, telling her that she was going the wrong way to the car, but she carried on until she stood in the middle of the bowling-green and then began spinning her platter so that it rolled wildly across the lawn. She chased it, lifting her flared slacks above her knees as she tottered this way and that in her high heels. The club manager came out and ordered her off the green; he was furious that her stilettos were ruining all his work.

"Who cares about your bloody bowling green?" my mother shouted back at him, swaying and laughing. "There's a bloody war going on and we're having the time of our lives!"

My father walked across the green, ignoring the frustrated pleas of the club manager, picked up the platter, and took my mother by the arm.

I woke when Lisa pushed my legs off the seat and my father slammed his door. "Don't put your feet on the floor," he ordered, "the FN's there and it's loaded."

Then he took a deep breath, turned to my mother and said, "It's incredible how sober one suddenly becomes when one has to drive home in the middle of the night with children in the back."

"What a party!" my mother sighed as my father swerved the car around the gaping pot-holes left from the last rains. "Everyone was there!"

Before we turned onto the main tarred road, my father leant towards my mother and said, "It's quite incredible really, I mean everyone knew about this party tonight. If these Terrs were better organised they could have easily attacked the club; they would have taken out the whole goddamn district in one go."

Lisa made me sit up and I had to fold my legs under me so that they did not fall on the floor. I was feeling sick and asked for the window to be opened. My father rolled it down. He normally would never oblige as the window acted as a safety barrier, nor did he like dust getting into his car, but he was not going to stop along the way and he was not having me get sick in his car.

The cold night air blew in and kept me awake. I was glad. I did not want to sleep. I wanted to know which strange place or paddock my father would cross to find a dirt track where no one would be hiding, waiting.

Chapter 18

My father and Lisa had gone to Denmark for a holiday. It was to make up for the terrible year she had suffered at the new senior boarding school, where she was desperately unhappy. She did not like being the little, bossed-around fish in a big, murky pond. Bishopslea, my junior boarding school, had been taken over by nuns and they had made it weekly-boarding. I went home every weekend, while Lisa had to stay in the new school where parents were only allowed to visit on Sunday afternoons from two until four. The rule did not make much sense, considering most of the girls were farmers' daughters, whose parents lived too far away. Lisa hardly ever got a visit.

I think she began resenting me and my freedom. She was jealous of the time I had, alone with my parents and at home, on the farm.

We had moved from Dimwe to a small house in Glendale village. I missed my father, I missed driving with him around the farms and I pined daily for Dimwe. I had not been with my parents when they went there to take the last of our boxes from our home. I had not said goodbye to the house. My mother had left the house spotless. The floors were polished to an extra-bright shine, the windows were cleaned and there was a new light bulb hanging from every ceiling.

Two weeks later it was demolished.

My father said that the new South African owner's farm manager had done it so that his wife could have a new house built for her. My mother was furious, "They could've told us! Then I wouldn't have bothered with all the cleaning."

All that was left standing amongst the rubble was the chimney that my father had built, and the Aga stove that remained amongst the ruins for years, too heavy to be stolen.

Whenever my mother had to go to town or bridge luncheons, she left me in the care of our manager's wife and her daughter, Joey, who was a few years older than me. They had a cockatiel that strutted around the large, rambling house pooping on the wooden floors and down the backs of the sofas. It could talk just like the manager's wife, who worked at the telephone exchange in the local Post Office.

I was fascinated, trailing behind Joey and the chatting bird through the cool, half-empty rooms of the house that was always filled with the noise of the TV and several radios blaring troopie songs, even though no-one was at home. Joey would often take me into her oldest brother's room as she knew that I was both frightened and fascinated by it. He always seemed to be away in the army, and the walls of his tidied, empty room were covered with pages pulled out of magazines. They were of were motorbikes and war machines and the middle-pages from *Scope* of near topless women, their tiny bikinis barely covering large, pouting bottoms and over-sized, alien breasts. They made me feel embarrassed. We never had magazines like *Scope* at home. My mother said that they were tacky. I was even more intrigued.

One afternoon at Joey's house I was impatiently waiting for my mother. She was late. I began to worry that she had missed the curfew and would have to stay in town at Auntie Sonja's or at Meikles Hotel that gave large discounts to the farmers. As I was nearing hysteria at the though of having to stay the night, our car crunched its way up the steep hill, passing the mango plantation that we were forbidden to enter as people were always being bitten by snakes there. My mother braked to a dusty halt by the front door. She leaned over the passenger seat to open the door and said, "I've got a surprise for you."

I peered inside. On the floor was a blanket and tiny whimpering creature. "A puppy!" I squealed.

I had begged for my own dog since I could talk, and here it was: a miniature fox-terrier that resembled a small, black and white, fat rat. It was the most beautiful creature I had ever seen. I called her Butsy after my mother's good friend, Butz.

Biddy did not take well to Butsy. When Butsy's basket was placed beside hers in the garage, Butsy preferred to crawl into Biddy's basket and curl tight beside her; but Biddy took to digging through the fence and running off into the night. Lisa also took an instant dislike to the dog I had been given while she was away with my father in Denmark. I knew that she was jealous. "Don't bring that flea-bag into our room and make sure you wash your hands before entering!" she would screech at us. So my dog and I had to play outdoors.

Butsy became my shadow and I her best friend.

Lisa and I went back to our separate boarding schools soon after her return from Denmark. Because I had Butsy, she wanted her horse sent into town so that she could ride it at the school's riding club every Thursday afternoon. The horse was her only link to the farm and home.

I came home every Friday, with or without a friend or fellow boarder who needed a weekend. I did not always like having someone whom I did not know well walking around within the intimacy of our family life. When friends did come home, we would drive with my father to the other farms, where he was overseeing the renovation of our new house. I would show her where my new room was going to be, my very own room, without my sister. It was to be a large room facing the garden, away from my parents, down a long, wooden passage whose planks had been Swedish shipping crates at the turn of the century. Most people would probably have removed them, but my mother had them sanded down and their original, orange-dark forest look returned. Next to my room was a studio and office for my mother. That whole area had once been a long veranda, where we had sometimes had tea with the managers who then lived there. My mother wanted the colonial rambling of the whole house changed to a white, modern Spanish style, though the wide concrete bars and sandboxes that hid the windows made it look like something from the period of the inquisition. My father built a castle-like wall around the water tank with a wooden ladder up to it; it had peep holes so that if we were attacked, he could sit up there and fire back.

My friends and I explored the old, smashed walls and watched the new being built, or went for horse rides with Micka or dust races on the motorbike.

I asked my mother why we had to live in Glendale all this while, when we could have stayed at Dimwe until the house was finished. "Because it wasn't safe there anymore. You know how dangerous it was. They were always waiting for Daddy somewhere."

I remembered how my father always had to take a new track home to the house because someone had warned him that the terrorists were watching, and waiting for him. We thought that by leaving Dimwe we could somehow escape the war.

Yet it found us.

My mother came one Friday afternoon to collect my friend and me from school for the weekend. We drove to Auntie Sonja for the usual tea-before-the-drive-home. My father was there, busy interviewing a potential farm-manager. Their talk carried on and my mother kept coming out onto the terrace to warn my father of the time.

We were late for the afternoon's last convoy and the curfew hour was approaching with the dusk.

"Maybe we should stay in town," my mother suggested.

"We'll be fine," my father replied, always so self-assured.

We had completely missed the last convoy back to Glendale. We could not even see the lagging tail of it and its trail of dust had long since settled. Dusk was starting to filter through, purpling the deep afternoon light. My father drove fast, hoping maybe to catch up with the convoy, but night came more quickly than he could speed. Then we saw some flickering lights, far ahead, "I hope that's another car," my mother said.

"Another late one, like us," my father mumbled.

The lights disappeared. I looked out the window. The deepening shadows were covering the rolling farm-hills like large, stroking hands, although the dark was far from comforting. I watched the farmlands become the bush of the Masasa trees that crept up the hills we drove into, knowing that soon the Mazoe dam would lie shimmering and then the orange plantations would flank us almost the whole way home. I turned to my

friend and began to tell her about the orange trees, how at Christmas time when they are full of fruit they become squat Christmas trees covered in fat orange lights that glow almost red in the afternoon sunset. My friend was barely listening. She sat quiet and rather pale. My father was driving fast.

Suddenly, around a bend, we were behind the car lights. My father followed them until my mother suggested that we should not drive with them, but overtake and get home as fast as possible. "We've got children in the car, it's just not safe."

But somehow my father could not overtake the car. We trailed in the red shadow of its tail lights, my mother demanding that my father hurry up and overtake.

"I'm trying," was all he muttered back.

"Stop loitering behind this car!" my mother insisted.

My father replied that his foot was pressed as hard as possible against the accelerator. Something was holding him back.

Suddenly we saw the flashes, heard the automatic fire.

"Get down!" my mother screamed, "It's an ambush!"

I obeyed the fear in her voice, though I still looked. I saw the bullets fly above, fireball birds spinning through the darkness. I saw the car that we had been following sway into the ditch to lie slumped over and still.

Instinctively, my father wanted to help. He braked. My mother pulled the Uzi from between their seats. It always sat there, hidden like a secret handbrake. "No!" she screamed.

The impact of reality hit my father and he pushed his foot down hard, the car lurching forward like jet during takeoff. He held desperately to the steering wheel, knuckles tight and white, shaking in fright and shame.

My mother turned to see if we were alright. Then she said that we had better stay down on the floor. After that, no one said a word; fear sat stunned and hushed with us.

At home, my father sent us inside. He walked round and round the car, checking for bullet holes. When he came inside, my mother was on the agric-alert informing everyone of the incident. My friend and I sat silent as if someone had cut out our tongues. My father poured himself a drink. He drank it and then poured another, and then one for my mother.

"Nothing," he said to her. "Their automatics are so powerful and they're so badly trained, that they couldn't keep them pointed down. We were lucky."

My mother shook her head, thinking of the car in front.

"Imagine if we had overtaken," was all she said, before she made us go to bed.

The next day some military men came to ask questions. We were sent out to play. Then they told my parents who had been in the car. It was someone they knew. He had not survived.

A few days later at his funeral, as we came down the wide, red-polished, cement church steps, his wife, a sudden widow left alone to defend their farm and children, pulled my mother aside. She linked her arm tight through my mother's, as if it would connect her to the world that held the final moments of her husband's life. She asked my mother to tell her again what had happened that night. As my mother retold it, the lady stood silent and very still, watching every movement of my mother's lips. I lived through the horrors once more. I knew then that those horrors would always sit, well nestled within my mind, like a contamination that would never heal.

Death had lain in ambush where the dangerous, snaking road uncoiled itself into a long, straight stretch that disappeared down into a dip then over a steep hill that led into the valley. There, in that ditch, on either side of the willow trees, death had lain, waiting in the new evening stillness.

Chapter 19

Bishopslea School was closing for a long weekend on Friday at noon. My mother was coming to collect me and we were going to have lunch at the Meikles. I was bringing my friend along. I had often brought my friends along for lunches or the weekends, but this time, I wanted my parents to meet my new and most special friend.

Ivy and I stood holding hands in the cool shade of the arched entrance hall, our blue blazers hot and tight, our beige, felt hats itching our heads in the heat. Then we saw my mother swing round the corner and park right in front; in the no-parking zone. Ivy giggled; I was proud. I watched my mother step out of the car, all long legs and sandaled feet before her dress came into full view. I ran towards her, my feet tucked too tight in the buckling, half-shone shoes that pattered hard against the crackling tar like drums. Ivy stood waiting, looking lost within the shadows of the arch. When I think back on it, she should have stayed there. Maybe she was already feeling the anxiety that would soon come charging in to dislocate our innocence.

I called Ivy over, and she came slowly, looking shyly up at my mother. Though they had met before, a quiet uncertainty seemed to hang over Ivy. My mother clapped her hands and shouted with glee, "Let's go, girls!"

We slithered excitedly into the car, little eager lizards across the hot, sticky leather of a back seat that had baked like a rock in the morning heat. My mother drove us off in our Mercedes, the one that made people stop and stare and ask long, tiresome questions because it was the biggest in the country. They especially liked its golden colour, chosen

to camouflage the dust of our roads rather than for its flashiness. The first day my father had driven it home, Shonga had stood in awe at the garage and said slowly, as he shook his head in devout admiration, "Ah, but Baas, it is gold!"

The backseat of the car was like a wonderful, fairy-tale trampoline as the back suspension springs had given up from all the farm dirt roads it had crossed and ridden. Ivy and I sat giggling and bouncing in the back as my mother asked about school and we told her silly jokes about the nuns as she drove speedily towards the city centre, to Meikles.

Meikles Hotel was where my parents usually lunched and had tea, along with all the other farmers who were in town for the day. It was like the Farmer's Only Club of Salisbury, where they all got together as if not wanting to mingle with the city businessmen in their suits and ties. At Meikles the farmers could huddle together over gin and tonics, talk about crops and ploughs, the lack of rain or of storms that spilled their dams. Their talk flowed like rivers filled with news of the bush war. Lost within their own world they would jealously denounce the Townies who had no war within their backyards to fear. The war never ventured into the city except in isolated bombings that shattered the sale days in large supermarkets and department stores. The farmers despised the way the Townies spoke jealously of the large farms, big cars and boats on Kariba that many farmers owned, so many of us had stickers on our cars that read, "Don't talk about the farmers with your mouth full."

At the Miekles the farmers would stand with legs stretched as wide as their lands, one hand holding a drink and the other a cigarette - "to keep our economy going" was their excuse for perpetual smoking. Their aggression became louder as the drinks flowed. They spoke of a world only known to them, in a language of their own, as they stood in their uniformly beige pressed trousers or safari suits.

My parents were not newcomers to the country, yet their fourteen years as residents were not enough to make them true Rhodesians. To fit in they followed the rules of dress of the other farmers. My mother found the ladies' dress code drab and poorly fitting but it suited my father as she could keep her dresses for another thirty years and still be stylish. My mother's closest encounter with the overseas fashion world was via the outdated

Danish magazines that my grandmother would leave behind as telltale signs of her yearly visits.

Ivy and I found a couple of these magazines on the backseat and eagerly flicked through the colourful and fascinating fashions that had never visited our world. We snickered at the nakedness of Scandinavian advertising that was strictly banned in our country.

At Meikles, we scurried off to the ladies' powder room to change; though I knew that my parents preferred us in the school uniforms that would show everyone that their children attended the best and finest. I put on one of my smart, "eating out in town dresses" while Ivy put on a starched, frilly white dress with matching shoes, socks and a little handbag. Under her school hat she revealed the stylish array of tight plaits that her mother had done that morning. They looked like happy, sluggish caterpillars twisting from her forehead down to her nape where they sat tied with ribbons.

When we returned to the lobby, my father was there, waiting expectantly with my mother. I ran, forgetting my friend, and bounded into his arms. Once again, I had to call her from the shadows.

"Daddy, this is Ivy. She's my best friend," I said proudly.

My father put out his hand in greeting, and Ivy curtsied in reply. His hand moved to sit firmly upon her shoulders as he said, "Come on ladies, let's go and have lunch."

I had not noticed the stares before, but Ivy had. As we entered the luncheon room, her hand slipped into mine. It was soft, slightly wet; delicately trembling into a tight grasp as if this would help her nerves subside, but instead she infected me. I felt the anxiety spread, a strange disease that made my body ache and my face feel hot and sweaty. I needed some comfort and strength so I reached my hand out to my mother, but she was already walking with my father towards the allocated table, which the head waiter, with embarrassed uncertainty, was indicating. His eyes shifted from my parents and then back to us as he kept turning his head and staring. Normally I would have skipped to the table, but the joy had seeped out of my legs. As we passed the crowded tables, the air changed, crackling and tense as in warning of an oncoming storm. Heads turned, eyes stared, as if we were walking through a stormy sea, parting the waves of sound that divided the noise of lunch-time conversation.

My father had noticed, yet said nothing. My mother, knowing that this might happen, stood tall and calm. She put her arm around Ivy and asked her if she would like to sit beside my father. Ivy only nodded. She was brave, and gave my father a smile, as he pulled out the chair for her, because the black waiter would not. Ivy showed her impeccable manners; she sat elegantly and straight-backed in the chair, unfolding the starched napkin before placing it delicately upon her lap. I tried to copy her. My father looked up to order some drinks, the waiter's eyes were wide in fright and before my father could say anything, he scuttled off. Then the white manager came and slowly bent towards my father and asked him in a hushed voice that all could hear, "Is there a problem Sir?"

"Not that I know of," replied my father, curtly. "Is there?"

"Well, Sir ..." He nudged his head in Ivy's direction.

"We would like some drinks," my father said loudly, cutting him off. "And since the waiter has called you, I will give my order to you. Ivy what would you like to drink?"

Ivy shrugged her shoulders in an I-don't-mind-please-I-don't-want-to-be-a-bother.

"What is your favourite drink?" my mother asked her, not wanting to be left out and desperate for Ivy to feel at ease, "You can have whatever you wish."

The black waiters refused to serve our table. They were afraid of the unfamiliar. My father, as he always did, ground the matter into a bitter joke for the white manager by constantly saying, "Such service today! And by the manager too! I must be very important," and then he winked at Ivy. She tried to giggle; I sat quiet and afraid, still not realising exactly what was going on. My mother felt like crying at the stupidity of it all. She kept putting her hand over Ivy's, asking her if she was all right. I think it made matters worse. The stares grew harder, the eyes rolled backwards and sideways as if they all were drunk.

Ivy and I were allowed to eat as much dessert as we could, as if this would make up for everything. But it did not. Nothing could. Those who normally greeted my father or waved or came over to chat did not do so. We were alone. The bill came before we had asked for it. My father was determined to stay longer, to irritate the crowd and show his proud determination, but my mother was relieved to go. She was feeling Ivy's pain in double doses.

We left the room. The eyes and the silence pained the persecution as we walked past. This time I took Ivy's hand, and I do not know if it was for her sake and comfort or my own.

My mother took us to the cinema that afternoon, hoping that it would all blow over and be forgotten. But somehow, it never did. It was never the same between us again. It was as if some clandestine, unseen object had wedged itself tight between us and was slowly heaving us apart. We would always be good friends, but never again best friends. The innocence of friendship had been broken by that meal in the Meikles Hotel. Maybe Ivy had thought about this before and was afraid of it, but I never had. It was not because I was afraid of the situation arising once more, for my father had said to Ivy, as we slowly crawled into the car, that next time he would take us to a wonderful place called the Chinese Restaurant. But Ivy never came out with us again. In a silent, unspoken pact we agreed that a painful wound should never be picked at or inflicted again. I realised that day, through the hard, heavy silence and stares of the others, that we were very different. It had never mattered before as we had played together in school, but in the outside world, in the eyes of those whom we did not know, and those whom we thought we knew, somehow it did.

I was a little white girl, and my friend Ivy, was black.

I often wonder what she told her parents upon her return home that evening as they asked her if she had had a nice day. I am in awe that she ever spoke to me again.

That evening at home, when my father came to say goodnight, he took my hand and told me he was sorry. He told me he was ashamed. I did not know why. Later, I thought he was ashamed because I had brought a little black friend into a restaurant full of white farmers. I was torn between my love and obedience to my father and my love for Ivy.

The following year, when I was eleven, I realised what it was my father had really been ashamed about. I had made another little friend, who also had coloured skin, though this time, not as dark. Kirti was Indian, and she had long dark plaits that fell heavy all the way down to her hips. They smelled of coconuts and reminded me of the sea I had played in on our coastal holidays in Beira and Malindi. Every morning, Kirti brought puffed rice in metal lunch-boxes for the teachers and the older girls. She was often despised by the

others in the class for this, though I thought she was smart, for Kirti never got order-marks or detention.

One day, Kirti asked me if I would like to spend the weekend with her. I asked my mother on her Wednesday afternoon visit. She wanted to know everything about Kirti and what her parents did and where they lived and if they would be with us all the weekend. I told her that Kirti's father had a shop in town and she phoned them that evening to confirm and quench her fears of the unknown.

I had imagined that Kirti and I would play in the garden and splash in the pool, forgetting that at school Kirti hated water and would cry every time she was forced to swim in the big pool. She lived with her family in an apartment over the shop. I had never known that so many people could live so close together, and without a garden, with no farm and bush to look at, no sunset to admire and only the sound of cars in the night instead of crickets and owls. I could not eat the strong food that bit my tongue, so her mother made me special rice and toast.

That Saturday evening we all squeezed into the Patel's car and drove to the airport to collect her uncle who had been on a holiday in India. The whole airport was milling with Indians. Kirti told me that these were all her family and ran around introducing me to every uncle, aunt, cousin and grandparent. This time it was my hand that slipped its way into my friend's own. I was unnerved and felt out of place and strange for I had never known so many people all related to each other. I only had parents and an older sister and two grandmothers who lived so very far away. I had never been the only white in a crowd, except in the farm workers' compound, but there it was different for I was the Boss's daughter. I remember the stares of the other whites at the airport as they watched me holding hands with a little Indian girl.

The uncle came hidden under a mass of bags and cases and everyone rushed to be the first to greet him. I was the last. I stood in the shadows of the cracked Air Rhodesia sign that would suddenly blink bright blue and loud and then shudder into twitching darkness as someone had forgotten to repair the faulty fuse. I blinked too - I was nervous of the importance of a man who could command such a crowd. The noise surrounded and followed him, echoing as he steered it all out into the darkness of the parking lot. The airport was suddenly left empty and quiet, like the shadowed stillness after a bomb blast.

At the large house in the Indian part of town, I escaped into the garden where I sat wishing I was at home, safe and confident within familiar territory. But the noise and laughter drifted through the open windows and soon I wandered back into it all. Everyone smiled at me, touched and patted me. Their eyes and voices full of questions, their outstretched hands full of food and kindness. Even the uncle made such a fuss of me that I felt more special than even he. I revelled in every moment.

On the Monday morning, when we returned to school, Kirti's mother had made me a tin of puffed rice which I refused to give to any teachers, but I suddenly had a lot of friends. I was the Queen and I pointed out the subjects who were allowed to feast with me. I felt very important and wished that my mother would make me puffed-rice every day. As we sat huddled over it during tea break, picking out the salty peanuts first, the other girls were eager to ask me about the weekend with the Indians. I began to tell them, in detail, how I had enjoyed my weekend, but slowly, as I saw their baffled eyes, my story changed.

Somehow, I realised that to keep their friendship, I had to give them what they wanted to hear. They did not want to hear of a happy party or a warm family. They wanted to hear about the strangeness another customs that could be belittled and ridiculed.

The following day, I gave them another story, and though I had no puffed-rice to entice them with, I had a tale that would intrigue them and make them laugh. In my new story, the weekend was tedious and the food was foul: I never mentioned the toast and the wonderful sweet pastries. I claimed that the father swept the shop as he was only employed there; the mother could not read, none of them could speak English and only babbled in another tongue. Worst of all, I said they had no toilet, but a hole in the bathroom floor. The girls all delighted in that version and Kirti was teased and called a poor little savage.

We were sitting under the trees in front of the school, on the mud-red rocks that rose out of the ground when Kirti came to talk and play with me. The others began their torment before she had time to take my hand. I did not offer my hand. I kept both of them behind my back. I did not tell the girls to stop their teasing. I let them continue. Kirti

looked at me, eyes pleading, before running off. The others laughed louder, making sure that their sneers would follow her no matter where she hid.

I could not sleep that night, and the next day, when my mother came to visit, I told her. She was stunned and angered. She told me that I was a spiteful little girl and that I must apologise. I was ordered to write a letter to Kirti's parents and thank them for the weekend and their kindness, and to apologise to them too, for Kirti had surely told them. I never did. I was too afraid. I tried to talk to Kirti to say that I was sorry, but she would not let me near her. She never brought me puffed-rice again and that hurt me more, because I knew that we would never share anything again.

That weekend at home, my father scolded me and told me he was ashamed. He was shamed by having a daughter who would tell ugly stories about others, just because I wanted to be popular, or worse, accepted. He had not done that with Ivy. He had stood up for his beliefs. Yet I had gone along and played the game performed by the others because I was afraid to be alone and seen as different.

My father then told me something, which I did not really understand then, but which I have never forgotten. "Do you know why I left Denmark?" he asked me as he sat beside me on my bed.

I shook my head. "Well, many years ago, there was a big war in Europe against the Germans; the Second World War it was called. I fought in it."

The air went quiet. I had seen a framed photograph of my father in Danish Royal Guard's uniform, but I thought he had just stood outside the King's Palace in Copenhagen. I saw him often go out in our RLI military uniforms or his blue Police Reserve uniform when he went off for duty, yet somehow I could not imagine him as a young man, rushing off to kill Germans: they were white.

"Were they white terrorists, Daddy?"

"Sort of, but different," he sighed.

"But the Germans are Europeans, like us."

"Yes, but it was another war. Here it is different. You know what we say here, Kyne, 'All terrorists are black, but not all blacks are terrorists'?"

I nodded.

"Well, in that war, all the baddies were Germans. And some others."

"Who were the others? Why?"

"I don't like to talk about it," he said sharply as if he was still angry about something.

"Please, Daddy?" I was desperate for a story, and he did not often come up with something this intriguing.

"Well, one night when I was on duty, my aunt invited me for dinner. I changed my shift with a friend, and went to visit my aunt. While I was there, the Germans stormed the camp and shot the guard on duty, my friend. It should have been me."

The silence of the night rushed in and swooped around us. My father sat still, his head hanging low, like a dog that had done something wrong. I realised that he was ashamed.

I had never thought of my father ever doing something that would shame him so. But now we could share this feeling of shame, like partners in crime. I felt suddenly very close to him. "Is that why you left Denmark?"

My father took my hand. I knew there was more.

"No one knew about that camp. So someone had told the Germans."

"Who?"

"Well, I don't know, exactly, but often, it was girls."

"Girls?"

"Well, girls, young women, they went with the Germans and got things that were rationed; like silk stockings, butter, lots of things."

I could not understand how a girl, someone like me, would go and tell the bad guys such a thing. My father saw questions all over my face.

"Denmark did not fight in the war. They let the Germans invade and take over the country." My father made Denmark sound like it was a foreign country, somewhere very far away; somewhere he had never been.

"So why did *you* fight?"

"Someone had to. We weren't very many; it wasn't a proper army. Only a few of us believed that the Germans were bad and wrong."

"So were you a terrorist then?"

My father smiled as he shook his head.

"It's not easy to understand. But in every war, there are some who are right and others who are wrong."

"We're right, aren't we?"

"I don't know."

My father's words sounded like bullets; and they ripped me open. I lay there in shock.

"Sometimes I just don't know what is right with this war. I am fighting to keep peace and that doesn't make sense. I am fighting to keep the enemy out, but many will say that we are the enemy, that we should be kept out. You know, there is a saying: one man's terrorist is another man's freedom fighter. All I know is that many are dying, and I cannot see how it's going to ever stop."

My father was making no sense. And since the whole conversation had started because of me being mean to Kirti, I felt like I was being blamed for the whole war, and even the one before. I had to know how that one had ended.

"So, did the Germans win?"

"No, they lost. They were wrong. We won. We were right."

"Well, I'm glad you weren't a terrorist, Daddy."

"But the Germans shot my friend. Not me," he whispered, as he looked away and then closed his eyes. I knew I should let him be, with his shame, but I wanted to share more with him.

"What happened to the girls?" I persisted.

He drew his breath in, deep and heavy, like he was breathing in something heavier than rocks.

"Well, near the end of the war, the Danes had begun to fight the Germans. So when the war ended, many of these girls were rounded up and as punishment their heads were shaved."

"Why?"

"Well, so that everyone would see that they were traitors. But the thing is, nearly everyone betrayed that country. Many of the people who shaved the heads of those girls or paraded them around the towns were men who had also been friends with the Germans. But they did it like you did, to be part of the group; to hide what they really

were, to hide their shame. If you do something that is wrong, that you are ashamed of, then, Kyne, you must always own up to your responsibilities. And you must never humiliate others."

"I'm sorry Daddy."

He was silent. He leant over me and kissed me on my forehead.

"I know you are." Then he sighed, "So am I."

My father got up slowly, switched off the light and left.

I did not know what my father was feeling sorry for. Was he sorry for having a daughter like me, who had shamed him? Or because his friend had died in his place? Or because he had left Denmark? I lay feeling sorry for myself, for the hurt and shame I had caused. Shame was something my father taught me that evening, and, like him, I will carry it around with me, a festering scar on the soul, never forgotten and never forgiven.

Chapter 20

I had a lift home from school one Friday afternoon with Rosemary and her parents. When we walked into the little house in Glendale village, there were half-filled boxes all over the place.

"Are you moving, Inger?" Rosemary's mother asked.

"Yes! I've had enough!"

"But the house isn't ready Mummy," I told her.

"I know. I don't care. I can't stand this any longer. If the war doesn't kill me then this house, the building and that awful architect from town will. Enough is enough."

My parents began moving into the Protea farmhouse the following week. I was excited; I could not wait to leave the awful house in Glendale and live once again on a farm. The horses had been stabled at Protea and soon I would be riding out, discovering Protea and the game-park that my parents had recently moved to below the house. From the garden we could watch the zebras and sable that came up every afternoon to drink at the waterhole by the kitchen. And my father had promised me a new tree house in the garden.

That weekend, my parents and I were over at the new house bringing in boxes while my father ordered the builders to hurry up and finish this and that. He brought in extra men to help with the painting and cleaning. The air hung heavy and then went dark, a thunderstorm was moving in fast and my father rushed around with the men, moving cement bags and other material that could not stand the rain.

I stood behind my parents on the high, half-laid terrace. They stood against the wall that rose towering from the garden. My father wanted to be able to sit outside at night and still feel secure from attacks. They were discussing where the swimming pool should be built. My father wanted it just below the wall, near the house where a large tree stood, but my mother wanted it further away, hidden somewhere in the garden.

"Imagine all the noise of splashing children," she repeated. "Especially after lunch, I'll never rest. I'll hear it all in the bedroom."

"But it will look good here, be part of the flow of the house. And *we'll* use it more."

"You're not moving that tree. It's too beautiful. You can build your pool somewhere else."

Just then a blinding glare flashed with the sound of an explosion so loud it almost knocked us back.

"Get inside!" my mother screamed.

I ran into the house, my parents following right behind me.

"That was damn close!" my father gasped. "Right on top of us."

"What was hit?" my mother asked.

My father shrugged his shoulders, and then said, "Something smells burnt."

He went out onto the terrace, moving backwards as he looked at the house from a distance, to see if there was anything burning. When he reached the wall, he called, "Inger! Come and see this."

Then he burst out laughing. I stood on tip-toes to peer over the wall. "Oh my God!" my mother said, "I don't believe this!"

The tree, that just minutes ago had stood old and grand, was split and burnt black. Strange, bluish smoke drifted out from its almost bare branches.

"I guess God thought that my idea was better," my father chuckled. "Since you would not listen, as usual, He had to make you!"

Shonga came to stand beside us, wondering what damage had been done by the lightning, and I was eager to tell him, "Look Shonga! My parents were just arguing about that tree and then the lightning came down and burnt it!"

"No, Miss Kyne."

"It's true," my mother added. "I had just told the Baas that I wanted to keep the tree and he must put his pool somewhere else when the lightning came, right down into the tree."

"Ah, Baas," Shonga said, shaking his head admiringly at my father, "but you are very clever."

When Lisa and I came home a few days later for the school holidays there were still large mounds of sand-like pale anthills on the patchy, dry lawn and the unpainted garages were filled with cement bags and shovels. The house still smelt strongly of wet cement and paint. My new room had just a bed and lots of boxes piled on the floor. There were no curtains and the workers were busy hammering a new sandbox against the window, hiding the view of the terraced garden and the wheat fields that lay a comforting green amongst the dry, winter landscape.

I was both happy yet nervy having a room to myself, but as it turned out, I was not often in it. It was too exciting to be back on a farm where the space opened its arms even wider in welcome. Micka and I rode out exploring with the dogs on lingering morning rides that lapsed into the afternoons. Micka carried a picnic bag over one shoulder while over the other was my bug-bag, filled with ether, empty jam jars and a mass of tweezers. I carried my long, butterfly net.

We had only been living at Protea for few weeks and we were sitting on the terrace eating supper when we heard the shots from automatic firing.

"Into the strong room!" my father ordered.

Lisa and I ran into the house where, in the middle, my father had made a concrete room surrounded by several rooms to make it impenetrable to mortar attacks. Lisa and I sat between the unpacked boxes as my mother closed the metal door. We heard her on the agric-alert just beyond, telling the district that she had heard shots. Then we heard her running steps along the passage. I peeped out and saw the fleeting shadow of my father as he passed with the FN rifle. My mother was unlocking the gun safe and was taking another gun and a pistol.

Then the quiet of the house settled like thick, heavy dust.

"I need to pee," I said.

"Go," Lisa replied. "You know Mummy said that we mustn't hold it in, it's bad for girls. And who knows how long this will take. If we're being attacked we'll have to sit tight for ages."

"Ok." I wanted her to come with me, but I did not want to show how scared I was.

I tip-toed out to our bathroom, right beside the strong room and heard Lisa say, "Don't flush! The Terrs might hear you."

The toilet sat below the window that looked out onto the courtyard. I was too nervous to go near a window in case of shattering glass, so I squatted down in the bath tub. I hoped that my sister would never find out. When I came out again into the silence, I wondered where my parents were. I stepped carefully down the passage, my body pressed tight against the wall where the wooden floor boards were more rigid and did not creak quite as loudly. I heard my parents talking low on the front steps. I ran through the house to them.

My mother spun round and demanded, "What are you doing here?"

I stood still, not knowing what to answer; I did not really understand why I had come. Then I said, "If there's to be any shooting, I don't want to sit all bored in that room. Can I help shoot too?"

My father smiled.

We heard the agric-alert alarm and we rushed inside to hear. Lisa was already standing by it, listening to shouting voices that were suddenly blurred by the noise of gunfire and explosions. "Oh God!" we heard, "that's another mortar! There's glass everywhere!"

"It's on Longcroft," Lisa informed us.

"Sounds like a bad one," my father said.

The family that lived there had recently moved onto the farm, the father had been a manager on Protea before they left. My mother played bridge with his wife and their daughter, Gail, was a good friend of my sister's. We heard someone trying to speak through more explosions and the shattering of glass, things falling.

"Are you alright?" Control asked. "Longcroft, Longcroft, come in. I repeat, are you alright?"

"Yes, we're OK." It was Gail.

"Reinforcements are on the way. Repeat, reinforcements are on the way."

"Ok. My Dad's gone to the back and my brother Michael's firing through the veranda. I think he's got a couple."

"Right then," Control replied, "Sit tight. Help is on its way."

We sat down on the floor next to the agric-alert. My father said he was going to check that all the doors were locked and tell Shonga to go home. My mother sat clutching the two pistols.

The next day we went over to Longcroft. The walls of their home barely stood upright with blown holes that gaped like wounds. We stepped over and through the furniture that lay broken and sprawled like a sinister obstacle course, carefully treading on glass that covered the floors like a splintering carpet under our feet. They considered themselves fortunate that they had not been hurt and that only a small part of the house had been burnt. They were going to move into the guest cottage by the pool until their home was rebuilt.

A few days later, Gail came to see us, bringing gifts for my mother and Lisa as thanks for their kindness and friendship. On pieces of shattered glass she had made small dried-flower arrangements. It was hard to believe her bravery and that she had even wanted to make something so beautiful out of something so terrible, something that almost destroyed her family.

Chapter 21

Every year during the Allied Arts' Eistedford season, I burst into another person, a free being who could forget about boarding school and even the war. I could live my dreams within the solo performances of singing, poetry, piano and acting. I became the drama queen.

Not only could I leave the confines of boarding school to pass the afternoons in the festival hall, but either my parents or Auntie Sonja would be there to watch and support my acts. Whenever I received an Honours award, my father would defy the curfew of my boarding school hours and the war and take me to Acropolis restaurant or to the Polynesian restaurant at the Monomatapa hotel where they served imported fish with strange spices in frothy coconut milk.

It was my last year at Bishopslea and therefore my final year in the junior Eistedford division before moving up into the more demanding senior division.

I had been given special permission to perform my various drama categories ahead of the other children in my group of 11 to 12 year olds, because the following day I was going to Kenya for an early Christmas holiday with my mother. I would be missing a whole week of school, though that was not important: only the Eistedford mattered.

That day I was ready to give them all my finest performance ever in my favourite, most challenging category: 'Improvisation'.

My name was called out. I stepped out from behind the heavy, moth-eaten red curtains that were so dusty one had to be careful not to touch them or else one would

sneeze the whole performance through. I walked with my head high, as my drama teacher had taught me, to the centre of the stage and then took three slow and determined steps forward to the very front. I was always so tempted to look down but was always afraid that I would suddenly suffer from extreme vertigo and speech paralysis. I stood there, intent on keeping fearlessly upright as my knees trembled to the wild dance of my heart. My bladder squeezed into a double sailor knot and I tried not to think of how desperate I suddenly had become for the bathroom, though I had just been three times.

I struggled with the fear that was seeking to ensnare my mind and force me to run screaming from the stage to hide entangled within the deep, velvet curtains. Instead I forced a deep breath, drawing in the anticipation of the audience who were waiting just for me. I waited for the examiner to nod so that I could pick out a title from the announcer's hat. I knew that many others my age would try to stare into the hat to choose between the few visible pieces of writing, but I looked at the audience like a magician about to conjure a death-defying trick, as I put in my hand and pulled something from the bottom. I then had to declare it aloud before attempting to perform a five-minute act.

It was within those few seconds, between the declared topic and the start of my performance, that I scanned every face in the audience. "Find a kind, supporting face you can act to," we had been taught.

Some would choose their mothers, others their teachers or someone they did not know or care for. I thought I was much smarter: I chose the adjudicators. They became my prey and I stared intensely at them as if I was about to devour them, bit by gripping bit.

My title was 'Lost in the Woods'. I announced it, but my voice quivered and croaked. I cleared my throat, suddenly afraid of my apprehension and the possible elimination of an Honours award. The thought knocked my heart to the wooden floor and I noticed it needed a good sweep. My mother would have made sure it was spotless and polished if it was in our house. Then, in my nervousness, I wanted my mother. I hurriedly searched the crowd for her. Where was she? Where was I? I was lost in a fairytale of forgotten forests filled with creatures that flew and crawled, scuttled and screamed through the darkness I was so afraid of.

"Mother, where are you?" I cried out, crawling and falling around the stage.

"Mother! Help me!" I shouted and then I screamed, "MOTHER! I'm afraid! MOTHER! I AM LOST!"

But I did not hear my mother's reassuring voice. No one within the crowd of staring spectators called out, "I'm here, darling! Don't worry!"

I panicked. I became frantic and was gasping for air when I noticed the hat lady's hand waving desperately as she tried to signal that my time was long over. I forgot to bow to the examiner as I ran out screaming off the stage.

I continued running and screaming through the backstage and out along the corridor, down past the open windows until I felt someone's arms enclose me in a tight squeeze. I felt faint until I recognised the smell of my mother's comfort.

She had been there, after all. She had watched the whole performance with my father.

My mother wanted to go inside the hall to wait for the results. But I felt inside me, a different kind of fear that nibbled and then gnawed at my belly, just under my ribs. I felt empty and insensible to what the adjudicator had to say. As I stood there, in the long, open corridor between my parents, I understood the strange, fearful feeling: there was something desperately wrong. I looked up at my parents and realised that their puffy, teary eyes were not because of my performance. I waited quietly for someone to say something, but no one wanted to. It was as if a word, any word, would start something terrible that could never end. My mother cleared her throat and then told me in faint voice that we were not leaving for Kenya the following day.

"Why?" I asked, wondering if I was once again being punished for something I had done at school but had already forgotten about.

"Daddy's sick," she replied in a whisper.

I nodded, though I did not really know. I knew that he had been to hospital for tests on his hip that had left ugly scars and a limp he tried to hide.

"He's actually very sick, Kyne."

"Like how?" I asked, hushed, as if my father was not really there beside us.

My father turned away to look out beyond the park at something that was not there. My mother took a deep breath that seemed to echo until she said, "Daddy has something called cancer."

I had heard of this before, though I knew little about it, except from films where the sick people always lost their hair and then died.

"He won't die, will he?" I whispered in case he should hear something that should be kept from him, a secret that we had to hide. My mother seemed to take too long to reply and I spun around and grabbed my father by the arm, my voice rising, desperate and scared, "Will you, Daddy?"

My father shook his head, and said softly, "No. I won't die. I promise you. I promise all of you, I *will not* die."

I fell into his arms, wishing I could believe him. I could smell his agony and fear. As I stood sobbing from what I believed to be a lie, I felt that I was back in the woods again, alone and lost. I bawled all the way back to school and for the rest of the week until the school called my mother and asked for someone to collect me and take me home.

Chapter 22

My mother and I were driving home along the winding Mazoe road, whose dip by the willow trees made us shiver remembering, every time, the ambush that had lain waiting for us. My mother was asking me about the entrance examination I had just written for the senior school.

"I don't want to go there," I said once again.

"But Lisa's there."

"So?"

"It's the best school, honey."

"I don't care. It's so strict and I'll never come home. All those security fences, I couldn't bear it."

"It's for your safety."

"But the war is over, Mummy."

"Well, one never knows. Anyway, those fences are to keep you teenage girls in and the boys out."

"That's so pathetic. Arundel is The Pink Prison."

We had had this conversation so often, but my parents seemed deaf to my pleading, to my heartbreak at not being able to come home on the weekends, to the illnesses that poisoned me every Sunday evening before school. With senior school I knew that it would all be so much worse.

"The election results should be out soon," my mother continued, ignoring my sulking. "This afternoon, they said."

She turned on the radio, something she never listened to unless it was for the news bulletin.

"Well, everyone says that it's obvious who will win," I stated.

My mother went quiet. She was remembering the weekend before.

Large military trucks had come trundling down the farm road. "They're ruining my road!" my father had said furiously as they drove onto his graded road, spewing up dust and gravel instead of taking the tractor road. The trucks had been filled with men and women dressed in clothes that had been handed out to them, all with Robert Mugabe's face on them. The cotton wraps that the women wore tight around their bodies distorted his face into a too-wide, almost sinister grin of dishonesty as it stretched across their large buttocks. The people were dancing and clapping, singing Zanu PF slogans that few whites understood or cared to understand. Most whites just wanted the war finished and done with so that they could get on with their farming and live safely with their families once more.

Behind the lorries were large white 4x4 trucks which many of us had never seen before, filled with white military men from England and other countries. They were there to survey the elections. It was not the first "free and fair" election. There had been one two years before, but the black parties were already fighting, saying that Bishop Abel Muzarewa was for the whites and he was a puppet of colonialisation. So the world made us have another election, promising that this one would be free and fair.

We already knew that these uniformed men from another world would not understand our country. They did not understand the languages, the songs and dances that sang to Mugabe's pleasure or else his wrath. But worse than their ignorance, was our own.

We had stood in awe at the large 4x4s that seemed almost orange-red from driving directly behind the military trucks, in their dust. Amon and my father stood with the mechanics and clicked their tongues in admiration: they had never seen such cars before.

"Why are they driving in the trucks' dust?" I asked my father, who always drove his cars far behind another's dust-trail.

"Well, they're not from here. Guess they like the dust, and someone told me that they have really good air-conditioning."

The men clicked their tongues murmuring under their breaths, "Eeish, eeish."

The vehicles stopped by the workshops where the farm voting was to take place, and my father walked over and asked the men if he could look at their car. He spent ages inside it, touching all the buttons, looking at its engine, and then he went for a short drive in it. All he could talk about were the wonders of the 4x4; he hardly said anything about the voting, or the long line of workers who had been ready and waiting since dawn. He even ignored the songs and dances of the others who came in the trucks, entertaining our farm workers who stood, like obedient children, in the long queue that made the dust shiver.

Maybe that was his way of moving his mind elsewhere, or perhaps he was wondering whether such a vehicle could take us through Africa, back to Denmark, as he had done with my mother when they left Kenya at Independence.

But then the voting began. My parents were the first ones. They had to show the new, metal identity cards and then they cast their vote. The whole farm watched them. Then Amon followed and then Shonga. As he was the cook, he took his time, showing off to the farm his privilege and position. My mother shook her head and laughed.

Another farmer from the area had come to help my father survey the voting. He had a dairy farm near Concession and only one hand. The stump of his left arm was covered in a brown leather pouch that reminded me of pirates. My father had finished his car-gazing and was standing next to Amon when the dairy farmer arrived. As he came over to shake hands with my father, my father suddenly turned to the crowd of voters and said loudly, "Be careful everybody! Look what happened to this man the last time he voted. The box bit his hand off! Maybe he voted for the wrong man!"

The long, straight line of people squirmed and fell out of place as they tumbled about laughing. Even the people in all their Mugabe clothes and the white military men from England laughed. Later one of the commanders told my father that after his joke with "his" people, they had all wondered how our war could even have begun in the first place.

My father shook his head at them, "You have no idea, about anything."

It was not long after the joke that Amon stood in front of my father and tipped his head sideways as he rolled his eyes back to the singing crowds. They moved off silently together. I followed them to around to the brick office where my mother had planted cacti and Christ-thorn bushes. She had tried other plants, but whoever was in charge - normally the young clerk - always forgot to water them. One day she had come down with Sixpence and pulled the plants out saying defiantly to dry-silent clerk, "These don't need to be remembered and they don't care if they are forgotten, but at least they will look nice and not half dead."

I heard Amon say, "Baas, have you seen those dancing people?"

"Yes. What's wrong, you always dance at any opportunity."

"But Baas, they are dancing like a cock."

"Like a what?" my father's voice rose.

I had to stifle a giggle.

"Cockerel, Baas. The Jongwe, the bird of Mugabe."

My father moved around the office, ignoring me. He looked at the dancing crowd. We saw their whooping song as they placed their hands to their mouths as they bent over, their bottoms high in the air, their legs flying from side to side as their feet flicked up dust. Only then did we realise that they looked like chickens.

"Christ!" my father muttered.

Then he turned and asked, "And what are they singing, Amon?"

Amon shook his head, as if he was almost afraid to tell my father. My father put his hands on his hips.

"Mugabe songs, Baas. Can you not hear the slogan, 'Pamberi naJongwe'?"

"And what else?"

"That if they do not vote for the Jongwe then something bad will happen to them."

My father shook his head, "But they can't believe that! I mean, their vote is secret. They know that. Those people came last week to tell them how to vote and how a ballot is secret only to them and all that, so they know."

"Those people, Baas," Amon continued, "Did not say those things. They told the people that when the boxes are opened they will see who everyone has voted for and if it is not for Mugabe then there will be trouble."

"This is like their intimidation during the war! How can they expect people to believe in them?"

"They are scared, Baas. They remember the war."

"I'm not having intimidation on my farm!" my father shouted, and then he stamped off through the thick, red dust of the workshop road and called the dairy farmer.

As I was about to follow, I turned to look at Amon, but just then, a man came around the corner and stood beside him, silent, but with eyes that were menacing. Then he clicked his tongue and sauntered off, back to the crowd of dancers and other on-lookers who were not from our farm. I saw him talking to someone else, pointing with his head over in the direction of Amon. I looked back to Amon, but he was gone.

I walked over to my father and the dairy farmer and caught the last strands of their conversation. "Jorgen, this has been happening on all the farms. There's nothing we can do. It's their country now, their bloody mess. Just wait, in a few years they'll all be damn sorry, like the rest of Africa."

"But these chaps are innocent!"

"They all are, Jorgen. They have no bloody idea."

My father crossed his arms and shook his head. We knew that he wanted to kick every one of those dancers off his farm, but the dairy farmer put his only hand on his shoulder and whispered, "Just leave it. There's nothing you can do about it. These songs of Mugabe and his bloody Jongwe apply to all of us. I've lived with these people my whole life; I know their language as well as they do. What they're singing about is total terrorization; but that's all they know. Nothing's changed from the war. For them. Only for us, whites. We may hopefully be able to stay a while with no more guns under our beds, but I can tell you, I'm not getting rid of mine."

Then he moved even closer to my father and whispered so low I almost could not hear. "Don't play into their hands. They're desperate to get rid of us; we're white and know too much. And they want our farms."

"I know," my father mumbled back, "I was in Kenya, remember?"

The dairy farmer nodded. Then he shook his head trying not to smile. My father looked at him, questioningly.

"Jorgen, I'll tell you this on one condition."

My father did not nod his head.

"I mean it. After I tell you this you go home and have a long, stiff drink. You'll need it."

"What?" my father demanded.

"Check out the guy who is handing out the voting sheets."

We turned to look at him. There seemed nothing out of place. My father turned back to face the dairy farmer.

"Well, at closer inspection, you'll see where his thumb is exactly; and as he hands over the paper he says to them, 'Vote here'."

My father's stood very still. I was afraid that he would either become stone or fall over. "I won't have it!" he spat. "Not here on my farm, with my people!"

"There's nothing you can do, Jorgen. That's how they want their free and fair elections."

"And those bloody English idiots just stand around -"

"They've no idea, Jorgen. Why d'you think they were allowed in so easily? Like all of us, there's nothing anyone can do."

My father could not help it. The dairy farmer tried to hold him back. He walked in strange, gradual strides over to the men with the ballot sheets, trying to control his anger with every slow step. I thought he was going to hit them. My heart began thumping and tears burnt eyes that I dared not shut. He stood there, saw them hand the next ballot sheet over to his workers, their fingers on the square with the black cockerel. They did not care that he saw. It was as if they were proud; as if they already held the law in their hands, the rule of absolute power.

I do not know if this is what shocked my father, or whether he was just so disgusted, or humiliated that he could not help his people. He looked at the men and spat, "Bastards!"

Then he turned around and walked up to the house.

My mother wanted to drive another way home, via Concession as she liked the change of scenery from the straight road we had always had to travel. "It's so nice to have a choice," she said.

As we neared the Concession turn-off the music on the radio suddenly stopped and the broadcaster said that the election results were now out. He would announce them shortly.

My mother swerved to the side of the road and stopped the car in a storm of dust and gravel. She switched off the car's engine. She sat very still. She looked over to me, her face pale and out of shape, and then she whispered, "God, I'm so scared."

She leaned over and turned up the volume. We sat waiting as the broadcaster spoke about the elections, in which area they had started, which was the last town to be counted, and all the while my mother sat squirming in her seat, shifting from side to side like a dog trying to get comfortable for the darkness and cold.

I pressed the window button, the electric whirr of the window made my mother jump, "Don't play with the windows! You know that if they break we have to get the parts sent from Germany!"

"Mummy, sanctions are over. You can buy almost anything now."

"Rubbish. It's still the same old Rhodesian stuff we made during the war. If we hadn't been so damn good, we'd have lost the war, ages ago."

"We have lost, Mummy."

"Don't say that!" she snapped. Then she put her face in her hands and said, shaking her head, "The bloody war was lost from the moment it started."

The radio announced the official broadcaster who was to tell the election results.

"Quickly, up with the window!"

"Why? It's hot!"

"Just do it! I want to hear. Now!"

The electric hum made more noise than the birds outside, but my mother wanted to lock herself up in her little, safe and secure haven. I had never seen her so afraid.

Mugabe had won by a clear majority.

"Oh God, oh God," my mother sat, rocking herself back and forth as she continued saying the words over and over. I began to cry, not because of the results for I did not

really understand their implications, then, but for my mother. She suddenly stopped, took a deep breath and said, strangely matter-of-fact, "Well, we all knew that, didn't we?" and started the car. "Don't worry, darling, it'll be alright. Just five more years is all I ask. Just five more years in my new house."

As she drove off the gravel and onto the tar, I wiped my tears with the back of my hand. I did not really know what she was implying. Were we going to leave? Were we to be thrown out like they had been from Kenya? I closed my eyes and made my world dark. *So this is what happens after elections*, I thought. *We don't move on, we move off.*

Then I asked aloud, "Do we have to leave, Mummy?"

"I hope not. I really hope not, not after all of this. All we've been through. But you just never know."

Then reality slapped my face, stinging me. To have a loser, there has to be a winner. Mugabe had won the elections, so that must mean that we had lost the war. "We lost," I said quietly.

"Mmm," she replied, "I guess we did."

But she was thinking of elsewhere, somewhere far away. Maybe she was already packing boxes in her head.

She turned right, off the main Umvukwes road, into the Concession-Glendale road that was now becoming familiar to me, but that afternoon seemed to lie silently in an alien light, as if the world was being changed by some other, unknown force, as if it was coming to an end.

"I'm keeping the security fence up," she suddenly stated.

I had to pull my mind back into her planet. "Huh?"

"You know," she continued, "so many farmers are saying that the first thing they will do is take down the fences around their houses. Some have already done it. I won't. No. Never, not in Africa."

"Why? It'll be great to have it gone; we can run around and be free."

"We'll never be free."

I was quiet, waiting for her to continue.

"We're Europeans in Africa. We will never be free here."

"Mummy," I sighed, "I was born here. I'm an African."

My mother smiled, and then nodded. Then shook her head. "Maybe, but you're the wrong colour now."

She took a deep breath and then informed me, "And you're definitely going to Arundel. I will fight to keep those fences up around that school!"

"Mummy! Don't be so cruel! Plus, the war is over!" I yelled.

"Maybe, but you never know with these people."

PART TWO --- Independence, 1981 - 1986

Chapter 23

It was my first weekend home from Arundel. My mother had come to collect us on the Saturday at one o'clock after prep. We had to be back again on Monday morning. I had not been home for six weeks. As we drove out of the school gates I rolled down my window and stuck out my head, letting the wind blow hard against my face. I closed my eyes and felt free.

My mother did not make me roll my window up; she was not worried about her hair. I should have realised then that she was worried about something else. I did not notice that her face that was drawn tight in silence, I was only thinking about the wind on my face, imagining I was back on my horse, racing down the farm roads or across the newly ploughed fields.

When we turned into our farm road the smell of the thick dust rose up, welcoming me back. I stared at the landscape, watching the game park for signs of animals. I waved to the women who stood in the cotton fields and shouted greetings to Amon who was overseeing the picking.

"Where's Daddy?" I asked my mother.

"At a farmers' meeting at the club."

"On a Saturday?"

She did not reply. I asked her why.

"We'll tell you later," was all she said.

When the road turned at the bottom of the workshops, beside the horse paddock before it lurched upwards towards the house, I asked my mother to stop the car so that I could get out and walk the rest of the way. It was the first time that I had felt that Protea was home.

I had walked only a few steps before Butsy came careering down the road and jumped into my arms. I stood at the paddock gate and whistled. I heard the sound of galloping hooves before I saw the horses. My horse, Merlin, was the first to arrive. He pushed his head into my chest and nuzzled me hard as I hugged him. I led the horses back to the stables where Micka was busy putting fresh straw in their stables.

"Ah, Miss Kyne! Have you been well? So long time!"

"How is everything?" I greeted him.

He nodded, then asked, "And the new school for clever ones? Is it well?"

"I hate it! It's horrible."

"Ah, shame, Miss. But it is good to learn. You are lucky."

"No, I'm not. I want to stay at home."

"Home will wait for you, Miss Kyne. Now, I make the horses ready for riding."

I went through the garden and said hallo to Sixpence who greeted me with a grin of weird mumbles and a wave from the rose-bed and then Forbes, my mother's new, rather eccentric gardener popped up from the bushes and came running towards me, "Miss Kyne! Miss Kyne! Ah! Miss Kyne, you are back?"

"Yes Forbes. Are you well?"

Forbes burst out laughing, putting his hands across his mouth as he doubled over and spun around as if in a dance. I looked over to Sixpence who shook his head, pointing his index finger to his temple to show me that he thought Forbes was nuts. He was right. Forbes was completely mad, but harmless. My mother kept him because he had taken to gardening as if it was in his blood.

I went into the studio and then into my room. I stood at the doorway and stared at all my things. I never knew that one could miss books and knick-knacks and one's bed so much. I threw myself on my bed and breathed in the smell of home.

I then heard a knock on my door. I rolled over and saw Shonga standing there. He looked upset.

"Hi Shonga," I said. "I'm home."

"Yes, but Miss Kyne did not come to say hallo."

"Sorry. I was going to. I just had to see my room first."

"And the big school? It is going good?"

"No. I'm never going back. It's awful, Shonga. And the food is bad."

"Ah, shame, Miss Kyne. Shonga has made pancakes for you."

I smiled.

"And there is cake for tea."

"I'm coming now."

While we were on the tea terrace, finishing off the last of the cake, my father came home. I rushed into his arms and told him how much I hated Arundel. He held me in a tight, strange way and then went over to my sister.

"What is it?" Lisa asked.

My father sat down as my mother poured him tea. They looked at one another, but said nothing.

"Why was there a farmers' meeting on a Saturday?" I asked.

My father shook his head.

"How did it go?" my mother asked him.

He shrugged his shoulders.

"What?" Lisa asked again.

"They want Sussex Farm," he said.

"Who?" she asked.

"The government."

"Why?" we both asked at the same time.

"They want to build a township in Glendale. They say that it is for Cotton Ginnery, but I saw those figures today and there's no way that thousands of people are going to be employed there."

"Why us?" Lisa asked.

"Because we surround Glendale. But they're taking the whole farm, even on the other side of the main road. There's something not right about it."

"Of course it's not right!" my mother snapped. "They can't just come and demand farms. This is just like Kenya."

"That's not what I mean," my father continued. "There's something fishy about it all. And no one else, except maybe a few of us, can see it. All the others say it's great that there'll be so many people in Glendale – they're just thinking about having masses of cotton-pickers, but what about the rest of the year? Who's going to pay them then? Or feed them? Their government?" He stood up and said, "I need a drink." Then he looked at my mother and said, "There's going to be trouble here. When they go hungry, it'll be a mess. The security fence is not coming down."

As my father walked into the house, my mother whispered, "Oh God, we just don't need this, not now."

Then she looked over to us and said, "There's something else. Much worse."

She looked away but we had seen the tears. She got up and walked away. Lisa and I sat there.

When my father came out, Lisa asked him if there was anything he could do about Sussex farm.

"Probably not. But I'm going to fight them. I've fought them once before, now I'm going to do it again. I thought it was all over. But it's not. I'm going to sue the pants off them."

"Can one sue the government?" Lisa asked, her eyes open wide.

"*I* will," was all he answered before he went for a walk in the garden.

I went to look for my mother and found her in the kitchen with Shonga. I tugged at her dress sleeve but she just said that they would tell Lisa and me later. Shortly after that I left and went for ride with Micka, telling him about the government taking the land.

"They say the people need houses, Miss Kyne."

"But they also need jobs. Where will they get them?"

He shrugged his shoulders. "It will come, Miss Kyne. They have promised us."

I did not reply. I could only think of us and our farm, not anyone else. I had always enjoyed my rides with Micka for company, but the war was long over and I felt, suddenly, that I did not want him around anymore. I was at senior school. I did not need a chaperone.

"You can go back home, Micka," I told him.

He looked over at me. First puzzlement played in his eyes, then hurt took over and hardened them.

"I'll be OK," I said, guiltily. "I just want to ride Merlin fast."

Micka did not reply; he knew me too well. He looked away and turned Gypsy around. I heard their heavy plodding steps on the hard road, growing fainter as the gap between us distanced. Then there was a strange silence before I heard, once again, Merlin's hooves beneath me. I kicked him hard and galloped off, pushing him harder and harder, as if there was something terrible following me.

That evening we sat around the dinner table on the terrace, talking about the clear sky and all the stars. My mother got up from the table to switch off the light that hung against the wall; the candles on the table gave off a warm, red glow through the maroon glass that shielded the flames from the evening breeze, which tickled everything else. We sat quietly amongst this peace until my sister reminded my parents that they had promised to tell us something.

My father was silent. He began to cut his food. Then he put down his knife, then his fork. They tinkled on the blue, Danish porcelain plate like a clear bell. We sat and waited for someone to speak; but no-one did.

My father cleared his throat, then took a sip of wine.

"I've been back to the doctor, the cancer specialist."

My heart went cold, its beats slowed to dull thuds that rang sluggish in my ears.

"The cancer is bad in my hip. They say there is little they can do. They can't save my leg."

I did not understand. I stared at my father, wanting him to explain, but not daring to ask.

"It has to be amputated. From above the hip."

The silence of the night screeched.

"But," my mother continued for him, as she noticed his wavering voice, "it will save Daddy."

"Yes," he said, "I'll be ok. And I promise you both, my girls, that even without a leg, I will still come out riding with you."

The following Wednesday Lisa and I did not go to our sports' practice but sat waiting on the red concrete wall that lined the steps to our hostel. It was hot under our thighs and we kept shifting but it only made it worse.

"If we sit still," Lisa said, "then our legs'll get used to it."

I could not sit still. We were waiting for my parents. My father was to see the surgeon that day and schedule a time for the operation. I had a strange way of seeing my father sitting in a wheelchair with only one leg, his trouser tucked under the missing one like we had seen so many young men during the war. I remembered one boy we knew who used to come to the parties with his girlfriend. He would always be on the dance floor, his hands moving his wheelchair wheels back and forth to the rhythm of the music.

"D'you think Daddy will still dance with us?" I asked Lisa.

"Mm, I guess so. He'll do anything for us."

"How will we get him up onto his horse?"

"He'll think of something. You know Daddy, he'll build something in the workshop that will lift him up."

"Yar," I said feebly, "I guess he's too heavy for Micka to lift that high."

The afternoon was hot and glared harsh in our eyes making us squint every time we looked down the road that would lead our parents to us with the news that we did not want to hear.

We were beginning to worry that something worse had happened. I was afraid that he had probably already had the operation, and did not want to tell us until after it had happened.

When we saw the car drive snailing and lurching over the speed-bumps, I wanted to run inside and hide in the cool shadows. I did not want to see him. I did not want a father without a leg.

They parked in front of us and I could not get up. I felt as if I were the one who was amputated and legless. Then my father opened his door and stepped out. I ran to him and burst into tears.

"We can't stay long," my mother said. "We have to get home. Amon is in hospital. And the young foreman is busy on the other farm with the cotton-pickers there."

We did not really care about Amon, then. We wanted to know about our father. But he said nothing.

"What did the surgeon say?" Lisa finally asked.

My father shook his head.

"Nothing," my mother answered. "We sat waiting all damn afternoon and then he went home. He did not even excuse himself. He did not even greet us."

"I'm just another slice for him," my father said.

I saw my father as a piece of meat, like a large steak, on a wooden chopping board as the doctor stood over him sharpening his knives in the air like Shonga always did.

My mother looked away. She was angry that he had said such a thing in front of their children.

"Maybe then it's not so bad, Daddy," Lisa tried to console him.

He put his arm around her, but his blue-grey eyes shivered, then looked away. I had only seen him cry on the evening he told us that he would still go riding with us, with or without a leg. I began to sob.

"Please don't cry," he begged. "It's too much for me."

I tried to stop, but I could not breathe. I drew in each breath with a gasp.

"We have to go," my father tried to say cheerily. "We've still got a farm to run with a bumper crop of cotton."

"Please don't go," I pleaded.

"We'll come tomorrow again," my mother said as she held us. "We have another appointment. I yelled so much at the secretary that she fitted us in tomorrow afternoon. I hope everyone else in the waiting room did the same."

I did not want them to leave, but I felt relieved when they got back into the car. Yet as they drove away and lolled over the first bump I cried out for them to come back.

Lisa put her arm around me and led me into the hostel. We sat down on the cold, beige steps that led up to the dormitories and cried into each other's shoulders.

The following afternoon I had a row with my swimming instructor because I tried to excuse myself from practice. She was tired of all my problems. I was always making up excuses as I hated swimming practice. I had been put in the lowest group, with all the

Africans and Indians who could swim. Even when I came first in every race I felt stupid in front of the team swimmers whom I saw giggling at me. I could not be bothered to discuss my father with the swimming instructor so I walked off. I heard her shout behind me that she was giving me an order-mark. Now I had another debit.

The next day, Lisa and I sat again on the red wall and waited. One of her friends brought us a cool drink from the tuck-shop. I knew then that Lisa had told her. I was angry. This was our family; I did not want others to know, though I felt lightened with the sympathy that her eyes gave us.

We waited for a long time, our thighs twitching nervously to the heat beneath them as anxiety crept deeper within us, strangling our guts until they ached. I poured the drink out onto the tar.

"I feel sick," I said to Lisa before she could scold me.

Then the House Mistress came out and told us that our mother had phoned to say that they would not be coming.

"Why?" Lisa asked her.

She shrugged her skinny shoulders. She did not know and she did not care.

"Please," Lisa asked, "May I call her?"

"No. You're not allowed to. You know that."

Then she turned and was gone. I said to Lisa, "I'll run and catch Julia before she goes home. She always phones Mummy for me."

Julia was a day scholar who was kind enough to phone home if I needed to hear about the horses or Butsy or if I needed my mother to bring me something I had lost at school.

"No," said Lisa, "I will call them."

Lisa was not someone to cross when she wanted something. I followed her determined march to the House Mistress's door, where she knocked loud and hard.

The door swung open. "What now?"

"I have to call home," Lisa informed her.

My toes curled. The Mistress was taken by surprise, but then her eyes hardened again as she said, slowly and clearly, as if she was talking to retarded children, "I said no. You know the rules."

She tried to close the door, but Lisa put out her hand and stopped it. "I have to."

The House Mistress glared at her.

"My father has cancer," Lisa told her.

Her words were hard and flat, and I felt faint at their significance. I had never heard it sound so real and brutal before. But that was what it really was: real, cold and achingly brutal.

The House Mistress stood still and then she nodded and opened the door.

I walked behind Lisa, but she put out her arm and stopped me, "No, not you. One's more than enough in my flat. You can wait outside."

I looked pleadingly to Lisa who just nodded and went inside, the door closing hard behind her.

I stood pressed against the door, trying to hear what was being said inside, but then a prefect came down the stairs and asked me what I thought I was doing, spying on the House Mistress.

I shook my head at her and sulked off back outside. I felt a hand on my shoulder and then I was hauled backwards.

"How dare you walk in front of me through the door?"

"Sorry," I whispered back, taken unawares.

"You're so insolent! I'm going to give you a punishment -"

"My Dad's sick!" I shouted.

"Don't yell at me! Or interrupt!"

"My Dad's got cancer!"

"I don't care two hoots!" she spat. "You can wash my underwear tonight and make my bed for a week."

She pushed me out of the way and walked through the door.

I was always being punished or having to stand on the landing in the dark while the others went to bed. Once a prefect forgot about me and I stood there in the cold until I fell asleep against the wall. I went off to bed but got up early the morning to stand there again. She ignored me as she passed me, embarrassed that she had forgotten me. She never told me that I could leave so I had been late for prep and had to sit the afternoon in detention. Sometimes, in winter, they made me sit on the toilet seats for them, to warm

them up before they went for a pee. Almost every afternoon after sports or in the evenings I was polishing shoes or cleaning their rooms or being woken up in the middle of the night to make them coffee when their kettles sat right beside their beds.

I was sitting out on the hot steps when Lisa came out. She sat down beside me and then she took my hand. I was terrified. She sighed wretchedly and said, "Amon's dead."

My mother had told Lisa that after they had left us the day before they had gone to see Amon at Concession hospital before they went home. He had seemed better, and the doctor in charge had told them that he had very bad stomach trouble, but that he could probably return to the farm the following day if he would rest for a few days.

That evening they received a call from the hospital asking them to inform Amon's family that he had died. They could not explain why.

My father had gone to the hospital with Amon's wife and son. While they were weeping in the morgue, my father demanded answers from the doctor.

They did not know. They could only say that some family had come to visit him not long after my parents had left him and they had brought him some food from home to help his stomach. Amon had then begun screaming in pain and frothing at the mouth. He had been poisoned.

We found out later that the visitors were not from Amon's family. Whoever they were, they had come to kill him. During the autopsy the doctors had found a toxin that was commonly made by witchdoctors. Someone had paid a high price to have Amon murdered.

Chapter 24

"Not all blacks were terrorists," my father said.

I liked his use of the past tense. The war was over.

We were home from boarding school for an exeat weekend, a new public holiday created by the new black government to celebrate Zimbabwe's first year of Independence. My father had given everybody on the farm time off, and had given them beer. We had hardly slept the night before for all the drumming and dancing and singing that came from the compound.

We were having tea, sitting on the terrace behind the high walls built to save the house from a mortar attack.

"But the Prime Minister was a Terr," my sister said, reaching for another Shonga-made Danish butter biscuit.

No one answered; no one knew what to say.

"Please," my mother begged into the afternoon air, "just give us a few more years here."

She was thinking of her home: finally she had the big house and terraced garden she had always wanted. Though my father was proud of the house, he loved the farmland more.

"Well," my father continued, putting down the paper that informed the nation of the names were of all the new black government ministers, now called Comrades, "As I said, not all blacks were terrorists."

"Still, you can't trust anyone," my mother said as she poured him another cup of tea.

My father ignored her, and continued, "Just as not all whites are good."

He looked at my sister and me. It was the present tense. We knew that he was referring to my sister's new boyfriend, of whom they did not approve. Lisa rolled her eyes and looked away.

"Lisa, can't you aim a little higher?" he asked, trying to catch her attention.

Lisa's lips went tight; I noticed their corners quivering. I hoped that no one would say anything else, but my mother, who was now pouring a cup for herself, added, "Yes, darling. You're so beautiful, and have got everything. His family's awful and -"

My sister erupted from her chair, tornado-stomping from the terrace. We heard the slam of her bedroom door echo through the corridors. My father got up, fuming that Lisa could be so rude.

"Daddy, leave her!" I shouted.

My mother tried to sound calm, "Just let her be. She's upset."

"I don't care what she is! I will not have that kind of behaviour in my house!"

He stalked after her. I was tired of these stormy outbursts,

"I'm going for a ride."

On my horse, Merlin, I felt the world was mine; that I could reach out and have whatever I wanted.

The war had ended and I was allowed to ride out alone to wherever I chose. I escaped the real world for hours, until riding through the bush became my real world; the only world in which I wanted to live.

At dawn Butsy and Biddy would already be waiting on the top step at the studio door, and when I pulled the large curtain open, they would jump in leaps and bounds. Merlin would already be saddled, waiting impatiently in the early morning heat. I was always ready and armed for action, with my long-poled butterfly net, my father's old army bag filled with bottles, empty envelopes and *A Bundu Bug Book* slung across my

back. The bottles would soon be filled with live insects, the envelopes with carefully squeezed, dead butterflies for my collection.

Merlin was a calm gelding who never shied at anything, not even when the white net suddenly crossed his vision as we galloped after a butterfly I was desperate to catch. We would chase game across the open vleis or walk slowly to let the skittish zebra follow Merlin like a lost cousin. When the heat made us slow, I would let Merlin rest his hooves in the cool, shallow waters of the Boroma River while the dogs swam around chasing ducks and fish. Or we would all swim in the deep, brown Marodzi River that my father had dammed to irrigate his new wheat fields so that they spread like a green carpet of magic in winter when the rest of the farm was dry and brown.

I heard my father's voice inside my head, "Not all whites are good."

"No," I thought to myself, "and not all whites have it this good."

My father made no attempt to hide the fact that we were privileged and that we were different. He wanted us to be.

"Look at your mother," he would tell Lisa and me. He wanted us to follow her strength and elegance like a tail.

My sister did. She had always looked like a woman, even when she was thirteen. She never hid her maturity. She would call me "rat", imitating our local ballet teacher whom I had been sent to as a six–year-old. Her name for me gave me the excuse to leave her boring lessons, faking tears of humiliation so that I could stay at home and ride my motor-bike instead.

My father had only recently given up asking me to clean myself up and brush my hair "like Lisa" before meals, though he was insistent that we bath and change into appropriate attire for the dinner that was always served by a waiter in starched uniform. I detested this formality. It reminded me of boarding school. I attempted to explain to my mother how wonderfully free life would be if we could abolish the useless laws of the house.

"At Trish's place we're allowed to eat in front of the TV, even in our wet bathing cozzies!"

"I'm not Trish's mother."

I often wished that my parents could be more lenient, more tolerant of what it was to be a teenager in the eighties. My father was stuck in a time warp, mimicking his upbringing in the late twenties and thirties on the estate in north-eastern Jutland, where the old Manor house sloped through the wind down to the sea. It was something he was determined not to shake off, even in Africa, and he was determined to pass it on.

My escape from it all would be long horse rides or a stay with Trish who was my best friend from Arundel. My parents adored her and so I was always allowed to visit her. She would come to our home too, but only for a day or two. I guess she missed the noise of her home that was always more than fun. It was like being catapulted into another country; a country whose culture represented that of the majority of whites in Zimbabwe, but which I had never known.

Trish's family of six was extensive in comparison to mine; and she had three blustery, undomesticated brothers, with lots of friends who also came to stay. I was insanely jealous. However they did not live on a farm, but in the rural town of Mvurwi, and after I few days of staying with them, I would miss farm life.

Whenever I stayed, along with everyone else's friends, the house was a shaking shamble of raucous laughter which no one ever forbade. There was always someone to talk to and play with, and the freedom to do whatever we wanted. We could sleep until late morning, we could go for walks without informing anyone and we could swim at midnight, or watch TV until dawn. Taking a nap just before supper was fine. We could chase each other with water pistols, screaming down the blue carpeted corridor and lie about in the sun drinking beer-shandies out of bottles. Trish was allowed to call her parents Mom and Dad. Nothing was ruled out, no rules were laid down.

Wilder than anything, Trish was allowed to step out of her clothes and leave them everywhere: on the bathroom floor, the bedroom, the bed, the lawn, by the pool. They would always be picked up by large, smiling nannies. I longed for such a second mother.

It was a very different world.

Trish's mother drank white wine with ice, dyed her thick, short hair strawberry-blonde and went to Bible study. While she was away, we would watch naughty videos, blushing and snickering in front of the boys every time we saw a piece of forbidden flesh.

At home, Lisa and I were never allowed to simply go into the lounge and turn on the TV. We weren't even allowed there unless we were with our parents, watching the news before dinner or a scrutinised family film that my father often stayed up to watch with us, in case it became risqué.

At Trish's we could lie on the sofa, put out feet on the table and drink cool-drinks while watching TV at anytime of the day, even in the morning. There was always a TV on or a radio blaring in the kitchen or the stereo playing the latest hits. There was constant noise. Someone was always calling for someone else or the nanny, or screeching in the pool or shrieking as the older boys chased us girls on the motorbike around the small garden. And we were allowed to go along with her older brother to his parties, or anyone else's, returning home whenever we wanted. I finally realised what being a teenager was: it was learning to copy the adults. I revelled in the late nights of dancing and drinking beer without my father always keeping his clear, blue eyes on me.

It seemed strange to me then, when one day Trish's father told me that I was the one who had taught Trish to be naughty.

It was almost dusk when I returned to the stables to find that the other horses were not there. I rubbed Merlin down and put him in his stable, but he was whinnying for the others. I heard their return calls from far away; they were still in the paddock. I cursed the new groom. Micka had left us for another job in town. I went down to collect the other horses and on my return, saw the groom standing by stables, leaning against the tree. I thought he was sick. He staggered towards me and then I smelt the beer. His eyes were large and red, like angry fire-balls. I tried to ignore him and tied the horses so that we could brush them. But he did not offer to help. Instead he leered at me. I moved off. He followed me into the tack room and stood in the doorway so that I felt trapped within the darkness. He reached out his hand and began touching my arms in a strange way. Butsy growled. I knew then that something was very wrong. I pushed him aside and walked briskly away. I did not want to run, in case I angered him. But when he followed me, I did. I ran through the garden and into the house; I found my mother in the kitchen telling Shonga that he smelt of beer and that he had better go home. I pulled her away and told her in whispered Danish what had just happened at the stables.

"Oh, God!" she spat and then she stalked off into the garden towards the stables. I tried to keep up with her without having to run, but she had put on her very determined strides. When I saw him still standing there, next to the horses, but doing nothing, I stopped and hid behind the mango tree by the trampoline, and watched.

"Now what's this nonsense with you?" my mother demanded.

I cringed. Now he would know I had told her.

"Medem! Medem!" he slurred as he stumbled towards her, "Harare is born!"

"What are you talking about? You're drunk!"

He stopped and steadied himself against the fence, smiling. "Ah, but Medem, colonialists must go! Yesss!" and then he staggered some more.

"Stop it!" my mother ordered.

"Salisbury is dead. It is Harare now! Mugabe said so. And he will be President – for always! Pamberi naJongwe! Pamberi Mugabe!" he shouted into the air. My mother moved towards him. I was frightened.

He looked at her and said, "Harare! No more white people, now this land is ours!"

My mother stood her ground, staring him down, then she said, slowly and calmly, "Go home. Leave the horses alone, and go home. Now."

He moved off and I came out of hiding. Halfway down the hill he turned around and shouted, "Just wait Medem! Just you wait!"

I stood by my mother, ashamed that I had hidden and left her alone, ashamed that I had let this happen to her. "Sorry Mummy," I whispered as I took her hand.

"Stupid bugger. He's got to go."

We put the horses in their stables, fed them and then locked the garden gate.

"I'm going to check the main gate," my mother said. "You never know what they may do next."

"Is Shonga also drunk?"

"No, he wouldn't dare. He just has the sickly-sweet smell of chibuku about him. I don't want it in the house. It makes me tense."

It was dark down at the main gate. "We must get a security light here," my mother said. "Where're the dogs?"

Butsy was running around sniffing the outside grass, but we could not see Biddy. We called; only Butsy came running. We called and whistled then locked the gate.

"Maybe we locked her out the stable gate?" I hoped aloud.

We went back to check, calling as went. There was nothing.

"Was she with you when you came home?" my mother asked.

"I think so. She always is. I would have noticed."

"Well, not to worry, she'll come back, she always does. I'm just not getting out of bed in the middle of the night because she's yapping at the gate wanting her basket."

As we came in the kitchen door, we saw Shonga standing by the stove. It was laden with boiling pots.

"You still here, Shonga?" my mother asked as she wiped her feet on the green, fake grass mat that my father deplored.

"Medem," Shonga said firmly as he turned to face her, "I am not drunk."

"I know, Shonga. But you know I don't like that smell of beer."

"But Medem, I have showered."

"Then go and brush your teeth."

I heard my mother go into my father's office, and shut the door.

I stayed in the kitchen so that Shonga would not feel that everyone was against him and I told him about the groom being drunk and what he had said to my mother. Shonga clicked his tongue, but did not say anything else. I wondered if he thought the same: that all whites should leave. I wanted to ask him, but did not dare. Then my mother called me into my father's office.

My father looked at me from across his desk.

"What did he do to you?" he demanded.

I was taken aback.

"Nothing, really."

"Tell me."

I was quiet. This sort of conversation should not happen between us.

"Did he touch you?"

"Daddy!" I was embarrassed.

"Well, did he?"

"Yar, he -"

"Not yar - yes! Speak properly. Not all that bad Rhodesian slang."

"Yes, Daddy. I was in the tack room and he stood in the doorway and then he, I don't know, tried to stroke my arm."

My father said nothing. He looked away.

I sighed, "But the worse thing is he knows that I went and told Mummy."

"Don't worry, darling," my mother said, "he was so drunk he won't remember a thing."

"Well he's fired in any case. So you won't have to see him again," my father stated.

"But Daddy, you can't really fire him because he was drunk at work. It's Sunday, his day off and he only has to come and put the horses in their stables, which he was going to do."

My mother looked at me, as if I were a traitor who had hopped over the fence to the other side. I shook my head, "I'm not sticking up for him. I was scared and I won't ever like him again, but it's for Daddy. You know how they're like now, with all the new laws so we can't fire anyone. I don't want Daddy to get into trouble."

"I won't," he said. "Anyway, I don't care if he was drunk. That's not why I'm firing him."

I saw that the case was closed. I was glad. I asked if I could go, and my father nodded. As I left the room I heard my mother say,

"I never really trusted that guy. He was always too clever."

Biddy did not come home that night.

The next morning I went to the studio door but only Butsy was there. I wanted to go out riding but did not want to face the groom.

I took the motorbike and drove down to the workshop to find my father. He was tinkering away at a tractor.

"Biddy's not back," I said.

My father nodded.

"I want to go out riding to look for her, but -" and then I switched into Danish, "I don't want to see the groom."

"He's gone."

I looked at my father questioningly. He smiled.

"I was waiting for him. He came five minutes late. I told him he could dig holes by the weir or go. God, I wanted to hit him."

I was glad my father could control his temper.

"Go and get the horses ready, and I'll come with you."

We rode all morning, following the paths I had taken the previous afternoon. Lisa was with us; she was very upset. My father had come home to change into riding gear and found her on the phone to her boyfriend. His face was a breaking storm when he came down to the stables, my sister sulking ten steps behind him.

By midday we were all tired and tense. We had criss-crossed acres of bush and were covered in ticks and grass seeds that pricked and scratched our skin through our clothes. The horses shivered and shook to remove flies and irritating seeds, stamping or bucking when a horsefly bit them. I kept imagining I saw Biddy suddenly running through the grass, bounding up to us as if she had been playing a long game of hide and seek.

"Let's call it a day, for now," my father announced. "If she doesn't come back we'll go out again this afternoon."

Biddy had often run off by herself, but she always returned a few hours later and my father would give her a severe talking to and make her go to her basket, and stay. Sometimes she had returned with porcupine quills stuck in her face or limping from a fight with a jackal. She was not a shy dog, but not aggressive either; she liked the freedom of the bush. Like we all did.

That afternoon we went out again, and when dusk began to fall, my father said that we had to ride home. The horses were getting jittery, they sensed our tension, and they did not like the dark. My father did not want the horses to rear from a noise they did not know and throw us. Despite the situation, I liked riding in the dark. It was like travelling through a mystery where all the familiar noises and calls were louder, closer, as if they were about to surround us, reach out and touch us. Nothing seemed afraid of us because we were hidden in the smell and sound of the horses. We had never done it before, even since the war had ended. Some practices are just too embedded to warrant change. We only just getting used to driving in the dark. After so many years of curfews and convoys,

driving alone in the dark seemed like a criminal offence, a mistake that could never be put right.

I did not want to go home. I began to believe what my father had feared: she was caught in a snare. I asked him if she might still be alright.

"In this heat, without water for a whole day, I don't know."

I started to cry.

"If she's not back by tomorrow, I'll send as many men as I can to search, especially the places with snares. They know where."

"But Daddy, we have to go back to school tomorrow morning!" Lisa wailed.

"I know, but we'll find her, I promise."

It was a full moon that night; and the wind was so quiet that it brought the dark world to my window. I heard the owl that sat high upon the garden's security light pole call to her young in sharp, loud calls. They responded with the piercing shrills like lost crickets. Bush babies called from the mango trees and every once in a while, I could hear the impala bark hoarsely at nothing but the wind in the trees. They were still nervy about their new park, not yet realising they were safe from all predators, especially the worst: man. The slow, Sunday drumming and songs from the compound grew louder with the night wind that brought it all into my bed. Butsy barked continuously for Biddy; she did not like being alone outside. I imagined Biddy rolling her warm, brown eyes in irritation. I could hardly sleep, and lay awake listening to all the noises, wondering where Biddy was. It was a full moon. I no longer feared the nights as much now that the war was a year over. But I would still awake to the rustle of wind in the old palm trees planted with the first foundations of the house almost a century before. I still would shiver in bed if I heard the quiet tread of feet on the wet, irrigated lawn, always hoping that it was Shadrik the guard passing by.

The next morning at dawn, my father stumbled over Biddy's body as he unlocked the gate. When we came running out to the kitchen in our pyjamas my mother was there, bending over Biddy, cooing as she stroked her matted fur full of blood and grass. We sat down around her and saw the large gaping hole in her stomach.

"I hope it's just one of her cists that have burst," my mother said to calm us.

We looked to my father.

"Looks like horn wound," he said.

"From what?" Lisa asked.

"Don't know. Maybe from a sable, if she got too close to her calf."

"But Biddy wouldn't hunt it!" I said, shocked.

"We don't know what dogs do at night," he replied.

Then Shonga leaned over and said, "Uh-uh, Baas. That is from a knife. A very big one."

"Let's clean her up," my mother said quickly. "Then I'll try and stitch it up. If not we'll take her to the vet when we drop you off at school."

"I'm not going!" I shouted. "I'm staying here, with Biddy."

My mother drove us back to school, leaving Biddy at home in her basket. She was weak and I cried when I said good-bye to her, begging her not to die. She looked up at me, with sad eyes that seemed to be telling me something else.

The next afternoon my parents came to see us at school. Parents were not allowed to, but my mother always did. We asked feverishly about Biddy and they told us that she was fine. They did not want to upset us and then have to leave us. I went to the boot of the car to see if my mother had some biscuits for us,

"Don't open the boot!" she suddenly screamed.

I stopped still. I knew she was hiding something there but did not dare to ask.

When they drove away, and we stood waving them goodbye, I turned to Lisa and asked, "What d'you think was in the boot?"

Lisa shrugged and walked quietly away. Maybe she already knew. I did not. I had no idea, for I had believed my parents when they said that Biddy was well. I did not know that they had taken her to the vet in town. He had told them that the dog was suffering and would not get better. I did not know that my mother had sat with Biddy's head in her arms as the vet injected her.

My mother sat stroking and talking to Biddy, until the vet informed her, "It's over, she's been gone for a while now."

Biddy was put in a sack and then into the boot.

When my mother came home she asked the gardener to dig a hole in the garden under the palm trees. Then she turned to my father and asked him to open up the sack.

"What for?"

"I want to make sure that Biddy's inside."

"And what if she isn't? What if there's another dog?"

"Then I'll drive back to town, right this minute and get her."

Biddy was in the sack. And my parents buried her in the twilight. I was not there.

Chapter 25

My father never went back to the amputation specialist. My parents flew down to South Africa for a second opinion. The doctors there told them that such a harsh amputation was not necessary: he could have a hip replacement along with radium treatment and that one of the leading specialists worked in Denmark.

They returned in time to take us home for an exeat weekend and we celebrated that afternoon with the champagne that had been saved from my christening and was meant to be for my wedding.

My father got happily tipsy as he had brought a bottle of cognac back from South Africa. He was telling bad jokes and old stories that made Lisa and I laugh while they my mother forced a smile and shook her head. After a few more glasses of cognac my father decided to call his best friend over to share the news and the rest of the bottle.

Des had been helping to look after the farm while my father was away. My father still had not found another foreman. It was as if he did not want to taint the fine memory of Amon with another.

Des looked solemn when he arrived. Even after hearing my father's news and sharing another bottle of champagne, his quiet gloom did not lift. My father spoke to him about having to find someone reliable since he was going to be so long away in Denmark. Des suggested that he get a young, white manager, but my father disliked the idea.

"Not a young chap, Des, they're always at the club or running to town to find girlfriends. I need someone here the whole time, someone I can trust."

"I know of someone," Des then suggested. "I don't know him well, and he's not a farmer, but he was always looking after farms for people during the war, when their districts got too hot and they moved to town. I think he was a gunner, like myself, in the Second World War. He's quite tough, nothing bothers him. Like I said, he's not a farmer, but he'll look after things and I can come around and check up every now and then."

My father nodded his thanks. He was looking at Des, trying to assess the atmosphere that sat fat and heavy about him. He thought he knew what it might be. He poured them large cognacs that swirled intense and clear brown in the round glasses.

"So Des, what's all this I hear about some killings down in Matabeleland?"

Des shrugged his shoulders.

"We met a farmer from near Bulawayo in Jo'burg airport. He said that the place was a mess; that so many Matabeles have been killed down there."

"Mm," Des agreed quietly, "I've heard something about it, apparently it's been going on for a while. There's talk that it's Mugabe's Fifth Brigade."

"What's that?" I asked.

"Some young Shona guys," Des explained, "all totally loyal and brainwashed by Mugabe and trained by the Koreans. They're quite ruthless."

"The worst of the war lot," my father added.

Then Shonga came down the steps swinging an empty tray to collect the tea that sat untouched on the tea table on the other side of the terrace.

The talk stopped.

Shonga saw Des and greeted him, "Afternoon, Baas Nyamhanza."

"Good afternoon Shonga. How are you?"

"Good, Baas. Thank you Baas." He moved like silent spirit over to the tea table and began clearing the cups away without a sound.

I looked over to Des, my eyes resting on his bald scalp, the name the Africans had given Des was "the bald one".

"Shonga," my mother said, "Baas Nyamhanza will also be here for dinner. You will stay, won't you, Des?"

Des nodded in silent, listless agreement; he did not seem cheered by the offer. No one said anything more. The talk resumed only when Shonga had left.

"God," my mother said, "the Fifth Brigade! So it's not all hearsay."

"Why are they down in Matabeleland?" I could not bring myself to ask why the Matabeles were being *killed.* I could not use that word, not since our war.

"The Shona hate the Matabele," my mother replied. "You know that."

"*Mugabe* hates the Matabele," Des added, correcting her.

"But why?"

Des sighed then explained, "They're a threat; their man Nkomo fought against Mugabe's guys during the war. It's a power struggle."

My mother said, "I didn't want to believe that farmer from Bulawayo. I've never heard of such a thing, Des."

"Well the papers won't say anything, but they're all run by Zanu PF now. And the other little reads either don't want to believe it or don't dare publish anything."

"They're taking over everything!" Lisa blurted. "Daddy, you should see at Arundel, how some of the black girls are now. I mean, it's only three or four, but they're like Terrs!"

"They're probably daughters of some," my father tried to smile, but it looked like a sad wince instead.

"How bad is it, Des?" My mother asked, "Down there in Matabeleland? D'you know the numbers?"

"I was playing golf the other day at the Mazoe club and some chaps there seemed to know a lot of what was going on. They had family down there, or knew of others who even had a few Matabeles on their farms. They said that it's quite shocking."

"How many?" my mother insisted.

Des shrugged his shoulders,

"They say thousands."

"Thousands?!" my mother gasped.

"Maybe even more, no one knows. They've just been slaughtered. Probably more than the total killed during the whole war."

We sat in bewildered silence; the evening crept in, creating strange shadows on our faces. Suddenly the light on the wall was switched off, and we shrunk deeper into our

silence. Shonga stood at the door with a tray of dinner plates and glasses, "O! Sorry, Medem. I did not know you are sitting here."

"Shonga," my father asked, "have you heard about these killings in Matabeleland?"

Shonga shook his head.

"They say many have died," my father explained.

"Eeish, Baas. That's no good."

"Just put the tray on the side table, Shonga. I'll lay the table. Then bring the food when it's ready," my mother said.

"They wouldn't know," Des said when Shonga gone back inside. "No one knows."

"God," my father muttered, "what is happening to us?"

Then he got up and went inside. We heard him opening the fridge from the bar cupboard and then the sharp pop of a cork being pulled. He returned with a bottle of wine and poured them all a glass.

No one moved, or said anything. Des was drawn and glummer than when he had arrived. His mood had spilled over and infected us all.

"I couldn't be bothered changing for dinner," my mother said.

Lisa and I looked at each other. She had never done that before.

All was quiet on the terrace though the shrill of crickets rose from the garden. The grown-ups had finished the bottle of wine. My father got up to fetch another. It seemed like many glasses of wine later, that Des said quietly, "Something terrible has happened."

He looked at my sister and me, wondering if he should ask us to leave, but he was not that type of person. He was very much the sensitive gentleman.

"What is it Des?" my mother prodded gently.

Des took another heavy sip of his wine. "I wanted to phone and tell you, but I did not know what the doctors were saying or doing. I thought you probably had enough on your hands. But Barry and Diana have been murdered."

"Good grief!" was all my father could whisper.

"Someone was at their gate the other evening and Barry went down to see who it was. Then Diana heard a shot. She ran out but was grabbed by some men who dragged her back into the house and made her open the safe. Then they shot her. The next morning, when the cook came, he found Barry's body at the gate."

"Oh how awful!" my mother breathed. Her hands clutched her mouth as if trying to silence the shock. "They lay there the whole night." Her words fell like heavy fragments to the grey, slate floor and bit cold at our skin.

"They died instantly," Des continued, as if to comfort her, "shot at point-blank range to the head."

"When?" she wheezed.

"Four days ago. The funeral's Tuesday afternoon."

My mother put her head in her hands and began shaking. She ran from the table as my father poured the rest of the cognac into tall water glasses.

"Go to Mummy, you two," he said to us, quietly.

We did not move. I felt sucked tight against my chair.

"So they were after money?" he asked Des. "How much did they take?"

"Nothing. There was nothing in the safe. They weren't after money. I think it's political."

"Go to Mummy, please girls."

Lisa and I left the table; I was relieved to go though I wanted to hear the discussion that I knew would follow. Lisa and I found my mother lying on her bed. We lay down beside her and cried with her. They were our neighbours, my parents' dear friends whom Lisa and I had known all our lives. They were gone.

"Nothing bad happened to us during the war," my mother whispered between heaving breaths. "And now, everything's just going wrong. Everyone's being killed!"

My father had his cancerous hip removed in Denmark. They replaced it with a metal copy was connected to the thigh muscles with something that looked like barbed-wire. Then he was given long sessions of radium, just in case. The surgeon told him that it would take him months before he could walk properly, even with crutches.

Yet when he returned home, he walked with just a slight limp using an arm crutch.

When he stepped out of the car Lisa and I were shocked yet delighted. He was not in a wheelchair, he had his leg, and he was not even hanging over under-arm crutches. But he was thin and tired, the grey sheen of illness had crept and crawled over his skin

and settled on his face. Lisa and I cried as we hugged him again. He was back, he was whole and walking, yet he was a changed father.

A few weeks later he would find out that the specialist he had first seen knew that an amputation was not necessary, that a hip replacement and radium were all that were needed, and he could have performed both. Yet an amputation cost more. My father would never forgive him for something that almost happened. And he would never forget the drawn faces of all those others with whom he had shared the waiting room; people who, like him, were waiting in line for their limbs to be severed not knowing they could be saved. People who did not have the money for a second opinion in South Africa or an operation overseas. People who now live as half of themselves. Every time my father passed a beggar who stood hobbling on crutches supporting one leg he would almost throw his full wallet at him. It could have been him who, for the rest of his life, had to beg others for help, always saying "please" and "thank-you". Something he was never very good at.

When my parents returned home to the farm, more appalling news awaited them from Des. Mugabe had named himself President and two more friends had been murdered in our district. This time it was not political. My mother's friend, Lisa's old dancing teacher, had just returned home after having her leg amputated from the gangrene that had set in after a small operation. Her gardener had come into their bedroom one night and hacked her husband to death. She attempted to crawl away along the floor, trying to reach the telephone, but he followed her, striking and slashing at her with his axe, leaving her bleeding to death in the passage. He left with only a stolen watch.

"I can't take this anymore, Jorgen," my mother said as she wept. "Every time we go away it's because you're ill, and when we return someone has been killed."

"Then we'd better not go away anymore," my father informed her in a soft voice.

My mother wanted to sue the specialist but my father had enough on his hands with trying to sue the government for Sussex farm. The government had only wanted two-thirds of it, but one day he found people building on his remaining land. Only half of the farm was ever used for housing. Some Zanu PF official moved into the house on the hill which now had a view over a sprawling township. Markets sprung up on nearly every

corner and bars filled with prostitutes and drunken, unemployed men swaying to the loud rattling music that the wind carried over to Glendale's shopping centre. But the wind also carried with it the terrible, pungent whiffs of the sewage works that lay on the other side of the main road. Since the township residents had to pay for their water, they did not flush their toilets often. During the summer months, the stench was so disgusting that we drove the other way home from town, through Concession. My father preferred it. He could not bear to see what they had done to his once-profitable farm of rich, red soil.

No houses were built on the side of Sussex farm that lay over the main road, by the sewers even though plans had been drawn and approved. Instead, some minister's family turned it into a brick laying business where they sold shoddy, badly formed bricks to the contract builders who were building the rest of the houses - all friends and family of the minister.

My father was so infuriated that he was determined to bring the government to justice for stealing his land. He won his court case and the government had to pay him out, though they never paid the full amount. The government had no local currency - it all seemed to have been swallowed up - so they paid my father in foreign currency, probably taking it from an Aid donation. My father was so delighted with the money that he was allowed to send overseas that he told the government that if this was their way of doing business, - they could have the rest of his farms and he would become a politician. They laughed. They liked joking with some white farmer they had probably tried to ambush or blow up during the war.

The brick enterprise took only a small portion of the land at Sussex. Apart from a few houses for the government official himself, the rest lay fallow and soon reverted to bush.

My father approached the new owner and asked him if he could lease his old land back. The man laughed at him.

"You know some of it's still my land," my father told him. "No one has paid me fully for it. And it belongs with the rest of the estate."

The man laughed again, and replied with a sneer, "Just wait, soon we'll take it all. This land is ours now."

Chapter 26

The cancer was just as determined as my father, and their battle began again. It was hard and long. The second opinion had taken too long, and the first scrapings which had never been sent for testing had not been properly removed. The cancer had grown and spread, hiding within marrow of my father's shoulder. He did not know how sick he really was.

Even the specialists in Denmark, when he returned to see them, denied that the new pain in the shoulder had a cancerous source. So my father went to physiotherapy for a frozen shoulder. I stood once with him in the room where his shoulder was being manipulated, and saw tears spilling from his agonised eyes. This big man, who held the world as lightly as he could hold me high, cried like a child. I screamed. I began to thump the therapist who seemed like a witch, wielding the power to break a grown man. But I was sent out. My father remained inside the torture chamber. I was never allowed back.

Eventually the cancer was discovered, sneering from its hideout between his shoulder blades. My sister and I were called over to Denmark. The surgeons wanted to remove his shoulder, but they were afraid to carry out the operation, as he was already weak. My sister and I were sent away to ski with friends of my parents. When the telephone call reached us in Italy - to say that my father had awoken without a shoulder - his friends cried in relief. I could understand this, but cried for a father who

was not all there. They all hid the critical nature of my father's dwindling future from me, his little one.

He could use his arm again, they said. When my father finally removed the bandages in front of the mirror and saw his arm, attached to his body by only a thin muscle, and the red gaping hole where his shoulder had been, he cried. But they were tears of determination. Within three months he used that skinny, hanging arm. He taught it everything he knew.

My father put on weight again, and returned to a life of evenings in the open under the starry African skies with his family and a good brandy.

Then we heard a tickle, and a cough.

The dreaded cancer was back, this time in full force and determined to come through triumphant. It was as if the whole pathetic scene from a Monty Python film was being played to us. This man, who would not give in, was prepared to continue the fight until the bitter bloody end where there would be nothing left to chop. But life's humour had left our home. Little by little, his life was being taken away. This big, strong man soon weighed less than his little, skinny daughter. Shonga would bring a tray of soup to his room where he lay in bed; then he would sit down beside my father and say, "Baas, you must eat. Baas, you must be well."

But my father could not swallow. Then he could not get up. The cheeks which had always laughed loud grew grey, and fell in. Even his voice could not bear to linger in his infested body. He could only whisper.

Workers brought scrawny chickens and caught birds which they asked Shonga to cook to make the Baas well. They would stand at the gates waiting for him, and when my mother came down, they would ask to see him.

"You can't," she would reply. "The Baas is too sick. He cannot get up any more."

They stood staring at her, as if she was lying. Tears sprung to their eyes, but they just stood there, waiting.

"You must go now," she would tell them. "Please."

Some did not. They sat down on the warm 'waiting stone' in case my father should suddenly appear and need them to do something for him. They would stay until

evening called them home to their families. Those that turned away would say to my mother, "Medem, tell the Baas to go well."

For the last week of his life my father lay waiting, without speech or strength, but with the determination to live. Only his eyes moved, the only thing beyond his active mind which continued to exist, and yet we could not bear to look into them. We were afraid of what we might see: a dying man already dead.

My mother, who had kept him at home throughout the ordeal, was ready, waiting for the slightest nod of his head for a soothing dose of morphine. But the nod never came. Pain meant to him that he was still with us. And she was there, my mother, as always. She was there, by his side, when that moment finally came.

My sister had been sent back only the day before, to university in Durban, South Africa. Taking a degree in nursing, she had taken her study period to come up and nurse her father. Finally all the years of being a child were put away and she could repay his love. Yet the university eventually threatened to drop her from the course if she did not return immediately.

I had been sent back to my new bush school the evening before to lie alone though a night of desperate uselessness.

The next morning, during assembly, I felt a chill rise and fall along my spine, and then a warmth wrapped itself around me. I turned to a girl standing beside me and whispered, "My father's dead." It was ten minutes past eight and he had given me a last hug as he passed from this world of ours into the next.

Later, my father's friend stood before the art-room door and confirmed what I already knew, but feared.

My father had nodded his head to my mother with the final closing of his blue-grey eyes. She had let her head fall upon his sunken chest, and cried the tears she had withheld for all those troubled years. Suddenly, her strength had gone too. She let it slide into the soulless form beneath her. But it was not enough. He did not return. He had lost. The battle was over.

We had all lost. She a husband, but Lisa and I had lost a father.

And life was unbearably unfair.

When I arrived at the farm, I saw a crowd of workers standing with bowed heads at the gate. Within the hour of being told of his death, they had left their workplaces, tractors and fields, and flowed in a stream of sorrow to the garden entrance. My mother was waiting for me by the front steps; she looked old. Shonga looked at me, then turned away to cry in a corner. I put my hand on his shoulder,

"Sorry, Miss Kyne. Sorry, sorry, many times."

I went with my mother to sit beside my father. The room was cool and unchanged from when I had left it the day before. Yet there was something very different: it was so quiet. An empty eeriness hung in the still air. I kissed my father's cheeks, but they were cold. I knew then, that he was not sleeping: there was no wheezing struggle of breath, no sound at all. He lay sunken in and dead.

A nurse came to declare his death and helped my mother get him out of his pyjamas and into a suit. I did not know why they should be bothered; he was gone. But my mother wanted it. Then Shonga came to me and said that the men at the gate wished to be let in. I nodded and went outside. The gates were opened and our garden was alive as a moving swarm of people crept up and over the grass. They came through the garden and stood by the steps to the front door. My mother called Peter, Moffat, Shonga, the foreman and a tractor driver inside. My boyfriend arrived, wearing a dark suit; my mother had called him to help. The chosen few carried my father out of his home. The men saw the large, dark box and gasped: it was true. They watched him borne through the front door, and then slowly brought down the steep steps to where they stood, heads hung low, eyes staring at the ground, following the possible path of his spirit in the dust.

We bore him over the gravel road he had himself constructed, away from the house he had rebuilt, and onto the lawn he had first planted. They circled around the coffin, wrapped in death's sweet silence, and stood there, staring, sorrowed and afraid. My mother could not stand the hush of death's bad breath, and asked them to do something.

A low voice began, like a purring drone, then mounted, and slowly the others, one by one, joined in. They sang, a song without words, humming, in perfectly synchronised sounds that rose radiant from low within their souls.

Then the heavens opened.

We watched the coffin being loaded into the hearse.

My mother wanted to follow my father off the farm, to see him off with goodwill from his home. She climbed into the car, and I joined her, Shonga insisted on coming with us, then Magai the domestic worker and the gardeners. The others looked up pleadingly, but there was no more space, already we resembled the bursting pirate-taxis. If we had known this was going to happen, we would have provided the farm truck and a tractor with trailer. My mother told the hearse to take another road, the track road that snaked its way throughout the farm. She wanted my father to have his last drive. It was the longest drive I have ever had on the farm. The hearse had to trickle along, almost not moving, over the gravel roads and grass, so as not to rock the coffin sliding around inside, my father within. He probably could not care. He knew these roads well, and was used to the bumps. I kept wondering if he was lying inside, cursing the fields that were not properly planted or the irrigation sprinklers that were not working because the men were up at the house.

At the edge of the tar road, we waited, watching him disappear over the rise in the distance. My mother had followed him all the way.

Lisa only arrived the following day. She had not been told of her father's passing until the evening. Her matron had kept his death from her until the late afternoon, after the last plane had flown north to Zimbabwe. Lisa had spent the whole night alone. She never saw him at peace, nor watched him leave the home he so loved, nor heard the humming which sung him off the farms he so lived for.

We collected Lisa at the airport when all the important things were already done. She only saw, in the grimly lit funeral parlour that played crackling classical music, a large box lying covered with flowers of red and white laid in the form of a Danish flag. Inside, she was told, her father lay.

At home that evening, we tried to sleep to the drumming that crept with the clouds over to our house. It was a slow, painful beat. The compound was helping to send him away to their other world.

At the funeral - held in our old school chapel, for my father never had a church he wanted to belong to - pews were filled. A large group of workers sat in the new, dark suits that

had once been my father's. The choir sang the songs he had loved to hear his daughters sing when we were once in those same robes.

My mother had managed to find a priest who had once met my father, at someone's wedding somewhere.

It was through the speeches that I learnt who my father really was.

The priest spoke of him as if he knew him. He told of a man who had wanted to be better than his own father, even though he had been born to an estate in Denmark, and how after the war he had been prompted to move to Kenya. My father had never spoken of this. Only at his funeral did I learn that he had been a member of the resistance during the Second World War in Denmark. It was then that I remembered him telling me about the death of his best friend for which he forever blamed himself. I had never known that he had been an active resistance fighter. My mother would later tell me that he never spoke about it. It was not because he blamed himself for his friend's death, but because the conflict had often been so intense that he wished never to remember any of it. I was saddened that he had never spoken to me about it. It was as if a large piece of my father had been missing and would now always be lost. I would never be able to press my ears to the cracks of his life, listening for a part of him that was now silent.

The day after the funeral, we said our final goodbyes to a coffin that had bizarrely become my father. We sat for a while at the crematorium, three girls alone, and then we left before the coffin went below. As we drove off, I turned to take one last look and saw the smoke rising, taking my father upwards and away.

Lisa had to leave the day after. The matron at her hospital had only given her three and a half days' funeral leave. She could not come with us to Denmark to bury her father's ashes in the old farm's church graveyard that for centuries had borne his family's name. When she got back to the hospital she was transferred from the children's ward to the cancer ward. She cried so hard every time a patient left that the deceased's family had to comfort her.

I do not know why we did not wait until the following year, when she had leave, to fly across the world with my father's ashes and place him in the cold, pebbled ground together. I think my mother wanted it over and finished as soon as possible so that she

could forget the years of diseased anguish and pain, the traumas and the tears, and move forward.

I did not want to move forward. I wanted time to stand in stilled silence. Or even step a little back, so that I had, once more, my father's laughing face before me and his strong arms around my childhood.

My mother and I left with his ashes in an ugly urn which resembled a mini-coffin from a gimmick shop, and four bags filled with the soil from his four farms. We had driven over to collect the soil from Dimwe and Sussex, the other farm the government had taken. We flew via Frankfurt, where the Germans made my mother's anger rise dangerously.

They demanded to know the contents of the urn, as they held it high, turning it over like an old shoe being checked for holes in the soles. My mother tried to explain to them, in a lowered voice, and handed them the letter. They read it loud, passed it around, translated it to those who did not understand English, and soon the whole security department was in a shuffle over a little box which contained a handful of ashes. I eventually broke out, and yelled furiously, "That is my dead father!"

In bewildered authority, they began grabbing our papers and passports, wondering what to do with a dead father from Africa. The x-ray machine showed nothing. They were determined to open the urn. A whole crowd had now queued into line, and were waiting their security check. The Germans continued their hullabaloo in loud bellowing voices, as my mother argued and I cried.

Then they found the plastic bags of soil. There was no letter for them but eventually, my mother got us - and the soil - through, muttering under her breath, "Just as well he wasn't here. He never did like them for what they did to Denmark."

That night we did not want to leave my father alone in a strange hotel room so we took him with us, in my mother's large handbag, out to dinner. The next day he came sight-seeing. We spoke to him constantly and my mother said her prayers to him every evening before she slept.

Once in Denmark, at my grandmother's house, he took his place upon the commode upstairs where she stayed, waiting for the day of his burial. It came too soon.

I dressed in jeans and one of his shirts, the way my father always had known me. My mother was in her finest, bejewelled in her favourite gifts from him.

Only the closest of his friends followed us on the long drive north to the family graveyard. The flag billowed at half-mast in the wind and an organ played inside the old church. The priest had taken out the silver which the family had given to the church. It was all polished and displayed on the pulpit.

He gave a little sermon and then thanked us for bringing my father back home. We moved outside into the rain and walked in loud, crunching steps over the gravel to the family area. My mother then set the little box down inside the tiny hole. It looked ridiculous. My father was a large, strong man; it was strange that this was all that was left of him. We took turns in pouring over the soil of his lands, the reds of Africa brightening the grey, cold sand of Denmark as the farm dust rose and sat stilled within the wet air.

We lunched at a restaurant in full view across the thin fjord of my father's childhood estate, which he had left for the dark, rich soils of Africa. As the rain pelted down, I realised how relieved I really was that he had chosen somewhere else to live his life.

Life never returned to normal after my father died, not for any of us. My sister lost her will to nurse and I went overseas to Europe as soon as I finished school.

My mother became a farmer.

"Now I shall run two farms instead of two daughters," she would laugh with a drawn out smile. She was alone, and had no learned experience about farming save the three months my father lay dying, and she had not really concentrated then. She had other things on her mind and a ripping soul. Then suddenly she had nothing else – no husband, no children at home, only the waking at the crack of dawn and the planting and ploughing and harvesting and picking amongst all the new and forever-changing labour laws. She said that the worst thing was being alone and not having a wife to come home and talk to as my father had. My sister and I did not realise that her constant phone calls with the moans about farming were because she was lonely and needed to talk, to lift the frustrations which she found so heavy to bear. We enjoyed her calls, the long chats about our far-away lives and her farming, but we had moved on and away and never understood

how alone she must have felt; especially when she called only to be greeted by the recorded messages of our answering machines.

PART THREE --- Collapse, 1998 - 2004

Chapter 27

As the plane began its descent for Harare International airport, there was, as always, the euphoric feeling of homecoming. Peering through the small, rounded window of the plane into the outside world of home, I saw the early morning sun making its glinting, long, pale-orange way across the sleepy shadows, warming me so that I was able to forget the cold life I had just left.

The cold winter, the greyness of the north, the past months of marriage, moving and trying to become Danish, all gone The land rose up to swallow me again. I had missed it, and my eyes closed in a silent welcome of return as the plane cruised along the long runway, braking with the finality of the distance travelled. I watched through the window as some men in uniforms of blue trousers and white shirts came skulking aimlessly across the tarmac, shuffling hand in hand. They stopped now and then to wave or call to their co-workers, which led to lengthy, idle discussions. Our plane waited. Then a little vehicle with a staircase on its back sped across the tarmac, and stopped beside the group. They slowly moved forward, laughing, slapping backs and clutching hands while the vehicle moved at their pace, the driver not wanting to miss out on the talk. Our eager faces watched from inside the stuffy plane, impatient passengers eagerly following the very slow progress of the steps with its old Air Rhodesia signage peeping through the peeling newer Air Zimbabwe paint.

At the open doorway of the plane, the heat hit hard. I stood for a stiffened, moment at the first step of the stairs. They shook with age and from the tread of descending,

exhausted travellers. I stared out across the tarmac to catch the first glimpse of my mother who always stood on the airport balcony to wave her welcome. I saw her only because I saw a small Danish flag waving ecstatically. Once I was safely down on the ground, the African warmth seeped through my shoes as I walked. I heard my mother, her voice carrying across the laughing workers and the noise of Boeing engines. I put down my luggage, and waved with both hands. The rest of the crowd took her cries as a start, and soon the whole balcony was ablaze with screams, whistling, tears, but still I could hear my mother's voice clearly. I crossed the oil-stained tarmac which during the war boasted of being the longest runway in the world. Near the entrance to the airport building, I looked up to the balcony, knowing that my mother had since squeezed herself through the crowd and into the corner. She leant, as always, precariously over the edge, and we began to chat. We were Africans after all. And I had come home.

Inside the old building boasting to be the "New Harare International Airport Terminal" - I moved to the shortest queue, for Returning Residents.

As I stood and waited I looked around at the building.

Attitudes had not changed. I sighed my way forwards in the line towards the custom official who would stamp my entry home. Nor had the airport changed much since it had been built. Change was seen in the collapsing ceiling and growing cracks that yawned, mimicked by the bored men in uniform. Efficiency, dwindling in prior years, was now lost. I tried to be positive, I had only just arrived and things would probably only get worse. Standing with a pasted smile up at the lopsided customs counter, I wanted to blame the already stifling morning heat that for causing the custom's official to be so lethargic. Head dozing in a cupped hand propped up against the desk, he looked at me and got up before walking away. I waited a while before another came and sat down and asked for my passport.

I braced myself as I handed over a new, Danish passport. The old one had been stolen. I had all the necessary papers and countless letters from the police and the embassy explaining the situation. I was a resident of Zimbabwe who was the bearer of a new passport, though the man could not be bothered to even look at the papers. "Wrong line," he muttered as he called the person behind me.

"No, I'm a returning resident."

"How come?"

"I had my old passport stolen. Those papers help to explain."

He made a face at the papers, then said, "How do I know?"

I showed him my Zimbabwean I.D. and my driving license.

"Yar, but this is no good. How do I know that you are a resident?"

"From my I.D."

He shook his head. "Let me see your birth certificate."

"I don't have it here; it's at home on the farm."

"Where's the farm?"

"Glendale, near Chiweshe." His eyes bored into me; I could see that he hated me. "Why do you not have your birth certificate?"

"I don't normally carry such an important document around with me."

"Why not?"

"In case it gets stolen."

Grunt. "You cannot come in," he said and then got up and left.

A while later someone else came and sat down; and then they too got up and left. I tried to apologise to those behind me, but they just stood and shook their heads, and swore under their breaths, "This bloody country." A black man in a well-cut suit, who stood a little behind me, apologised to me. I smiled and thanked him, but I had been refused entrance to come home.

I stood for over an hour explaining my situation to several officials, and then to more, who did not care. I told them that I too was an African, returning home. They laughed, and that was when I realised the reasons for my torture: I was a local white woman, holding a red EU passport which was new and unstamped. They had been given what they had been longing for: the opportunity to harass me with their status and their

big boots. They were enjoying their power over me, their control of my passport, my entrance, my time and my claim to come home. They were having fun at my expense.

"Where's your birth certificate?"

"I don't have it. And I don't know why you need it when you have my I.D. I would not be given an I.D. if I hadn't been born here," I tried to explain.

The more I tried to explain, the less interested they were; and when the black guy in the nice suit stepped up to speak on my behalf, he was rudely told to mind his own business. Finally the official got up and left.

Another came in and sat down. He looked at all the papers and the new passport as he stretched his body in a yawn, then got up and called another person. They offered and returned greetings and asked about children and sick grandmothers, before yet another official sat down at the desk and asked to see my passport, still lying there on the table with all the papers.

"You are in the wrong line."

"No, I'm a returning resident. I was born here."

"Where is the stamp?"

"I have a new passport."

"Where is the old one?"

"Stolen."

"Why?"

I shrugged my shoulders. And the questioning continued.

Finally, he let out a large sigh, flicked fast to the end of the stack of papers and with an incredibly important thump, pounded his stamp. He pushed everything towards me and said, "You have a three-day visa."

I tried to protest but he waved me off and turned to his friend beside him and began conversing loudly. I walked away feeling that I was not wanted; that this country would prefer not to let me come in again.

This was my return home. "Welcome to Zimbabwe," said a trolley pusher who was leaning on a wobbly trolley. I nodded to him that he could help me with my suitcases.

"It will not come now-now. It is broken," he said pointing to the conveyor belt. I saw the mess of people pushing and shoving in and out of the crowd with the suitcases they were collecting from a drop-point by the wall. I had no more patience for crowds and told him the colour and sizes of my suitcases and bags.

The green-route official was talking loudly to a woman who sat on the table beside him in a short, red dress and false, red ringlets that flopped over her face. I tried to manoeuvre the squeaking trolley that only turned on two of its wheels. He asked me to open all of my bags. Throughout the next half hour he rummaged through everything, pulling out things and showing them to his lady-friend who was bending over the open cases, clicking her tongue and nodding or shaking her head. The trolley man was making eyes at me, but I shook my head at him. I would not give them anything. Eventually, he said that I had too many cigarettes when I only had a new box in my handbag. As he took the cigarettes and put them in his pocket he waved me off with his head, and turned his back to me as he continued flirting.

When I came through the open doorway, my mother, who had stood patiently waiting all this time, was still all smiles as she rushed up eagerly and threw her arms around me saying, "Oh that was quick!"

As I told her about the passport ordeal, the black man in the suit came up and told me that what had happened was unfair and that I should go immediately to the main department building in town.

"It's almost noon on a Friday! We can't get anything done now!" my mother said furiously. "They've probably already all gone home!"

Jimmy, who patrolled my mother's house, saluted me and smiled as we shook hands.

"Was the journey a good one, Miss Kyne?" he asked. I could only nod. I asked my mother in Danish why Jimmy was here, and she told me that he now accompanied her in the car every time she came into town, for cars have their tires slashed, then are followed,

attacked and all the goods stolen. "And they love this airport road. Lots of full suitcases and cash."

I was quiet.

"Oh it's not that bad! It also means that I can double park all over the place and leave Jimmy to deal with the others."

The ride from the airport towards the city was filled with mixed emotions. The trees and bush shimmered in the burning heat. I asked why it was not green.

"Another drought," she told me. Then the talk moved on to the falling Zimbabwe dollar, the soaring prices of food, the long fuel queues that snaked their way out of petrol stations and down roads and around more corners. My mother said that now people were leaving their gardeners there to push the car in the queue, or just to guard them. Often when they came back in the afternoon, the gardener and the car would not have moved. There was no fuel to be found anywhere; not even on the black market. It was affecting the farming, which was already suffering from rain shortages.

My mother took a new route into town, for driving the usual road had become too dangerous.

The other road had also changed. As we reached the area of Mbare, my mother made sure the doors were locked, and the windows completely closed.

"It's got so bad, here," she said. "Look how it's just exploded. It's like every unemployed person - and boy there's a lot now - comes here."

All along the way vendors sat squatting beside their shops of corrugated iron roofs held high by sticks and broken poles, cluttering the side of the street and the pavements. Mbare Market, which had once been a fun place to shop for clever carvings or witch-craft potions, was now a sprawling shanty-town of thousands of little roofs attached to one another, where, for a price, anything could be bought. It was all stolen goods. Mercedes tires, cameras, handbags, identity documents, windows, furniture, medicine: anything and everything. My mother said that when her purse had been stolen recently, she went to look for it there.

"I couldn't find it until a chap told me to ask people to find it. I came back the following day, and he had it. No questions asked, I just paid him for my empty purse. Your pictures were still there, but the one of Daddy was gone. I hope some witchdoctor

doesn't use it for bad medicine, they do that you know; especially a white man's picture. And hair. It's like Kenya. I never left a dirty hair brush lying around, I always flushed my hair down the toilet, or else they would take it and sell it to the witch-doctors."

"Well, you got your purse back," I said.

"But not everyone can sell there anymore," my mother continued. "There's this Mafia-stuff going on, and they are mean businessmen. There's all kinds of drugs sold in there, and even body parts! They say that they also own the street children; they take them from the orphanages and then send them out to beg. The mob takes their coins and pays them in glue to sniff."

My mother swerved as a bus, its roof piled high with bags, cases, beds and the odd person, cut across in front of her. She sped up alongside it and then hooted and shook her fist at the driver. "Mummy! Why bother?" I was more embarrassed than concerned.

"Bloody bastard! I'm so sick of this place!"

I looked through the window and noticed that in my absence, the market mess had crawled on poled legs across the intersection and was closing in on the graveyard.

"I thought that they wouldn't go near a graveyard," I said aloud, to no one in particular.

"It won't stop there," my mother answered. They seem happy to start digging and messing up that place; those graves hold the dust of white men, and this country is just screaming white hate."

I thought how strange it felt, to feel so much a part of a country that did not want you around. "Were we ever that bad?" I asked.

My mother knew what I was referring to. "No; it's never been like South Africa here. Not everyone got on, but we were just politically slow - we never hated them."

"Some did."

"They left at Independence. We, who've stayed, did so because we want to get on and live here and do whatever it takes. Why are you asking this again? You've been away for too long. Are you becoming Danish?"

She laughed. I did not. Trying to fit in Denmark seemed impossible: my mother knew it.

"How's married life then?" she asked.

"That winter kills everything," I replied. "It's so dark, so lifeless."

"I know; it's frightful. I could never go back - for the pastries yes, but not the weather. But you're settling in alright?"

I shook my head. "I'll never settle in. I don't want to. I'm so scared of becoming Danish and forgetting who I really am. And, ok so this place is falling into a shambles but it's home, Mummy. It's where I belong."

My mother double-parked and left Jimmy in the locked car. We went into the building that looked and smelt of old Colonial days and took the stairs to the fourth floor. The lift was not working. The queues began on the third floor. We walked past the waiting people, excusing ourselves, until we reached the immigration department, where we were informed that the man in charge had gone home and never came in on Mondays.

My pleas fell on deaf ears. My mother stood her ground and refused to leave the office until something had been done. Eventually someone let us into an office with a broken window and a table with dirty old tea-cups and an old-fashioned, black dial telephone on it. Files and papers were stacked against the walls. Then a man came in, asked us to sit down on the two, torn chairs, and listened to my story. He listed the things he wanted to see by Monday. He got up to leave, but the phone rang so he sat down again and began a long, loud conversation.

"The list's impossible," I whispered to my mother in Danish.

She nodded, then replied, "And he knows it."

"What does he want a bank statement for?" I whispered back.

"So they can check to see if you have any cash outside the country."

"Of course I have, I'm married over there! And how do I get hold of the rest - marriage and birth certificates, working permits, more letters from the embassy - when it's closed all weekend? And the art school?"

"Well why did you tell him you were at art school?"

"He asked what I was doing, why I wasn't working."

"So, you must ignore them. You know that. He'll probably have forgotten about it all by Monday. Let's go home."

As we got up, the man put down the phone. I asked him why he had to have a letter from the art school when I was only doing a few courses.

"To see if you are wasting your time there," was his reply.

"I'm married."

"Do you have children? Then maybe your husband would like know if you are wasting his time."

My mother stood up abruptly and tried to pull me away. Disagreeing would have only led him to leave and refuse his assistance, but I could not help asking why I needed another letter from the embassy stating again all that which had already been stated.

"Just to double check. Don't discuss," he hissed.

"Thank you, Sir," my mother said sweetly, and we saw him melt. But then he said, "Oh, and bring all the previous passports, to speed up the case in proving that you have been a resident."

My mother added this to her long list. He asked to read what she had written. He could not even remember the rules he had just spat out, for there were no rules. He was eager to continue the intimidation process which his airport colleagues had begun. The thought of immigrating now rang in my fuming mind with the sweetest of bells. What was I coming home for? That was what Peter had asked before I left Denmark.

As we walked back down the stairs, past all the people who were still waiting on the same steps as before, my mother said, "I forgot to tell you, our phone lines are down."

I was relieved that my weekend would not be spent on calls and faxes on fuzzy lines that were always being listened to or cut off between Zimbabwe and Denmark.

Once we had passed through the outskirts of town, we began to follow the winding Mazowe Road which leads us home. The Masasa trees were still in spring mood; their new leaves and shoots soft sprouts of orange and brown, reds which deepen into summer greens. We stopped at the Mazowe Citrus Estate shop, and drank large glasses of cold Bezant orange juice as we stood in the late afternoon warmth and looked over the dam that irrigates millions of orange trees.

Our farm borders the Mazowe Dam, and my parents had waged a running battle with the Citrus estate. Their labour would cross our cattle fences and leave the barbed wire hooked up in large holes or the gates open so our cattle ran onto the main road. Our insurance premium grew with all the accidents. As he lay dying my father had told my

mother to get rid of all the cattle though she still had guards patrolling the area, saving our trees from being chopped down for firewood or preventing people from fishing in our dam.

I used to feel sorry for those not allowed to fish in our dam, until my mother explained the destruction they would left behind. The fishermen would fell trees upon the electrified fence. The fence would then collapse into the water and fizzle out, switching off all the irrigation. Their traps and large nets would catch all the water fowl and river animals and they would leave behind their day's litter.

My mother suggested we sit down at one of the broken, concrete picnic tables.

"Something's going on here, Kyne. I don't think you and Peter should buy another farm, not right now."

"That's what Peter keeps saying, but I think he's just making more excuses to not leave Denmark, not even for half the year."

"He's right, though. The government are brewing something poisonous. Something's about to happen, everyone's talking about it. But, you know how we whities are here - we play ostrich and stick our heads back into our soil and carry on farming as if there's nothing that can touch us."

"Well, what can?"

"The government's making lists of the farms they want to take."

"But they've been talking about that since Independence, Mummy. You know they can't organise anything, let alone a list. And anyway, they'll probably be unutilised farms or whatever."

"We hope so, but many don't think so, especially with the farmers supporting the new guys."

"What, Tsvangarai's MDC party?"

My mother nodded.

"Are you supporting them, Mummy?" I asked, intrigued.

"Of course. We lend our guys tractors and trailers to take them to the meetings and we give a little money towards petrol or whatever."

"Well, done, Mummy! I'm so proud of you!" I laughed.

"Oh, but I'm not involved," my mother said quietly, looking around as if afraid that someone might overhear our Danish. "You know me and politics don't make a tasty cocktail. But our guys on the farm are. They go to all the meetings and support all the rallies. They tell me every day that they want change, so I'm helping them, like I've always done. Got to keep the masses happy," she smiled.

I got up and walked over to the dustbin that dangled on a piece of wire above the mess of litter. I noticed baboon prints in the dust and smiled. It was good to be back. I wanted to go home to the farm. I turned to my mother but she was sitting, lost in thought. "What is it?"

"The Armitages. They had a riot on their farm. They beat him up quite badly."

"Who?"

"Their own workers. But it was instigated by some Zanu-PF youths. Well, that's the excuse now. Anyway, as she was trying to get away in the car to get to her husband and take him to the hospital, they surrounded her and told her to get out. I would've driven through, but she was scared that they would topple the car. So she got out and they slapped her around. Imagine, they actually hit her hard across the face! And you know what? She just picked herself up off the ground, wiped the blood from her nose and asked them what they thought they were doing."

I could not imagine the always well-dressed and properly English lady standing proud amongst a raging mob. "God, how awful. Are they alright?"

"Still in shock. Not from the beatings, but that it was their own workers who had done it."

"Why?"

They wanted the farm."

"That's ridiculous! What, they're going to try and run the whole tobacco operation?" I snorted in mockery and anger. "I mean, one still has to make them come to work and watch over everything they do and then they think they can do it all themselves?"

My mother shook her head.

"It won't happen to you, Mummy. You've got four blacks as managers and one of them is a loyal Zanu-PF guy, so it's not going to happen."

My mother shrugged, then got up and walked to the car.

We drove on, my mother telling me how the dam was drying from lack of rain, but that we still had enough water for this year's irrigation. "But if the rains don't happen, we can't plant soya-beans. Lisa's quite upset, especially since she's budgeted for a bumper crop."

"Always the optimist," I muttered.

"Stop it; she's doing very well managing the farms. You know she had to step in, I couldn't cope anymore. Not after my heart problem and then that bloody manager who stole almost the whole workshop from me. He's working for someone else now. I warned them that a leopard never changes its spots, and they still took him on. Good luck to them!"

I saw the dam named after my father, shimmering its hidden blue between the bushes. Just before we turned left towards Glendale the stench of the sewers crept into the car and we moaned as we held our noses.

"Welcome home," my mother laughed.

The rest of farm that the government had taken at Independence lay part fallow field, part derelict brick field. On either side of the road, the murky, open sewers bubbled forth their fumes. Close by a few people were hoeing the open treeless ground. The remnants of hacked bush stood in short, burnt stubs.

"Their maize must taste great, so close to the sewers," I remarked.

My mother sighed, "They don't have to walk so far to collect water if the rains don't come."

As we drove a little further on, I noticed a car in an open field. "Is that our land there?" I asked.

"No, remember they took that piece as well."

"I was going to ask where the Merc came from. What's it doing there, stuck in the middle of a field?"

My mother slowed down and looked. "I don't believe it!" she laughed. "Look what it's doing! It's pulling an old plough!"

My mother stopped the car on the side of the road. "Look at that Jimmy! The minister's black Benz is ploughing the field!"

I shook my head in disbelief as Jimmy laughed with my mother. "Why don't they buy a tractor? It must be cheaper than a Mercedes!"

"Why buy a tractor," my mother replied, "when you can get a Merc for free?"

My mother collected her post at the post office and when she got back into the car, Jimmy said, "Medem, you say I must remind about Peter Guard. At the clinic."

"Oh no! Jimmy, why didn't you say that before? I'd have taken the other road." She turned to me answered my quizzing looks, "Peter Guard's had an accident." And then she and Jimmy burst out laughing.

Peter had been my personal guard ever since I moved into the cottage on Protea. Though I had only come out for half a year at a time before returning to Paris, my mother had asked Peter to become the guard for my house while I was there. He was the sergeant of our guard force and was proud to have been offered the position. He and his brother Moffat were the most loyal people we had.

I tried to ask Jimmy what had happened, but he just shook his head and laughed all the more. Finally my mother sighed and said, "You won't believe what he looks like!"

I heard Jimmy snort amusement behind me.

"What?" I demanded.

"Well, yesterday he came in the early morning to my gate and said that he had a headache. I thought there was something funny about him, and then realised that under his hat – which he did not take off – was a hole. Right there in the middle of his forehead. A huge hole, like a large golf ball had made its mark. There was no blood or anything, and when I asked him, he told me that he'd fallen off his bicycle. He'd struck his head on the bell on the handlebars and it had simply sunken into his skull."

"Didn't you take him to the clinic?" I asked.

"He'd just been. They didn't have any aspirin so he came to me for some."

"And?"

"Well, he didn't want do anything but sleep, so I gave him a handful of panadol and he went home."

"How did he fall?"

"Ask Jimmy," she laughed.

I turned around to ask Jimmy, but he collapsed into laughter. Then he said, "He was coming back from the beer hall, Miss Kyne."

"Anyway, I left him at our clinic this morning, to be checked out, and said I'd be back soon to pick him up. I wonder if he's still there, since we're so late after all your immigration nonsense."

We drove past the farm entrance to the private clinic that the farmers from the district had built and paid for a few years ago when the hospitals were too full and too badly organised to be of any use. It had since grown into a small hospital, with private rooms, consultation rooms, a veterinary department and a health and beauty salon. We always joked that one had to be sure to enter the correct room.

The waiting room was full; blacks came from everywhere, willing to pay the high fees in order to consult a doctor who could give them the proper diagnosis, and where they could receive medication. All the governmental clinics in the area were a sorry sight.

My mother had joined the board of the largest local hospital, because they hoped her connection with the foreign embassies would bring in some funds, though no one wanted to support a government clinic, fearing that their funds would be misappropriated. I had often been with her to see the hospital and write about it in the papers, asking for donations. The dilapidated hospital, built in the 1940's and not renovated since, was meant to aid over 200 000 people, but it could only accommodate 65. It was manned by 10 overworked staff who treated over 250 outpatients a day. Children lay with the adults, those infected with TB lay amongst the sick, and the rest crowded the floors and corridors, making it impossible to walk. Outside the building, the veranda was packed liked a cattle pen, and the lines of people waiting filed down onto the dusty patches of lawn. There they would wait all day, critically ill, only to be told that there was no space and no medicine.

The only added structure built since independence was a mortuary which could only hold six bodies, but there was no facility to do a post mortem, so bodies had to be transported to another clinic over 60 kilometres away. One night during the hottest period of the year, the generator was stolen and the bodies rotted. My mother had pleaded with an embassy to donate an ambulance, but it was never around when it was needed as the

clinic administrator used it to drive himself home and to the shops or his son used it as a taxi, making money ferrying people back and forth.

Peter was sitting patiently inside the clinic, flicking through a worn, donated magazine. He jumped up and came over to shake my hand.

"Peter," I asked, "what have you done?"

I could not take my eyes off the enormous, perfectly round hole in his head, imagining the bicycle bell still ringing there. My mother checked his files and spoke to the nurse who said that it was a miracle nothing had been damaged.

"I have a hard, hard head," Peter said proudly.

"I know, you don't have to tell me," my mother replied as we walked back to the car.

Chapter 28

Philip, a young, Glendale farmer whom we had known all our lives, had been awoken by his dogs barking. His fiancée was staying with him. To frighten the intruders he saw lurking in the garden, he jumped through an open window, shooting into the air as warning. When he stopped to look around him, a figure stood silent and calm before him, pointing a gun at his chest. Philip turned to flee back inside, and the gun fired, ripping into his lower abdomen. As he fell to the ground, the figure disappeared into the darkness. Philip was losing blood rapidly. His fiancée called for help on the radio to the district. Only two people responded: a middle-aged neighbour and my sister. Some replied that they were scared to leave their families alone, others did not respond at all. Yet Lisa, who apart from my mother was the only woman living alone, heeded their call for help. She left the security of her home and with a bag of medical supplies, the radio, a pistol in her hand and a shotgun across her lap, drove off into the dark night to help a wounded man who lived quite far away, on a farm near Dimwe. Often, the radio frequency left her with no contact. She knew that the armed robbers could be anywhere, waiting.

She arrived at their house and set up a drip. Philip's fiancée held it high as Lisa tried to stop the bleeding. When an ambulance eventually arrived, Lisa had to explain to the staff what they should do. Then she drove the long dark road home, alone.

That evening I had locked the house and the wrought iron gate that led to the bedrooms and then secured my bedroom door. I never had any guns as I did not want them near me. I thought that I would be in greater danger with them under my bed, as people were

prepared to kill for weapons and I did not think that I was would be able to kill an intruder. I had even taken Peter Guard's shotgun from him. It took much explaining as Peter Guard was very proud to be one of the few guards who had a weapon.

"But Peter, you know there are many bad people running around."

"Yes, Medem (He was one of the few to promote me to Madam - even since my marriage most still called me Miss), There are many, many tsotsis now, with too much nonsense in their heads."

"So you cannot have the gun here. If you fall asleep, they will come and take it from you. Then they will shoot you and then me."

"Ah, but Medem, I cannot sleep at night-time."

"I know," I lied. Peter Guard's snoring could be heard from the garage every night. When he awoke, he would stamp past around the house, deliberately stepping on as many twigs as possible, before coughing loudly outside my bedroom window. I would call to him that I could hear him, then he would trudge back to the garage and the snoring would resume.

"Are you scared here at night, Peter Guard?" I asked.

"Ah, no, Medem."

"Then that's settled. You don't need that gun."

Peter Guard then came to work every evening at six sharp with the wooden stick his father had made and a black police truncheon that I dared not ask the origin of.

I had pulled my telephone out as the party lines rang until late at night and began again at five in the morning. I had, as usual, not charged my radio, so it was only the following morning that my mother came to inform me what had happened during the night: she had been in town and had been told by the managers. I heard her hoot loudly at the gate. I was exhausted, as I had been kept awake throughout the night by the drumming from the compound, an incessant thumping and pounding which had shaken the evening air.

I knew that it was no party rhythm; the beat was too heavy, too sad. Someone had died.

Nearly every week someone from our farm passed away, or a relative whose family needed financial support from one of our workers. The labourers were always

complaining that funerals had become so very expensive. As each family member passed away, their wage sheets were becoming full of loans.

Three men had stood at my mother's gate the previous morning as she was driving out to town. I was with her in the car as I had been up for an early breakfast and chat. They stood, glum and hunched, telling her of their sorrow and asking for money to buy planks for the coffin. The irrigation foreman's brother had died.

"I'm so sorry," my mother said to him. "How old was your brother?"

"Ah, Medem, but he was young. He is from my father's third wife."

"What did he die of?"

"The sickness, Medem."

She nodded, and then muttered to me, "That AIDS is killing everybody."

She turned to the foreman and said, "You don't have to buy the planks. You're a senior man here on the farm, and a good worker. You can have the planks. Just tell the manager I said so."

He clapped his hands in thanks as we repeated our condolences.

As we drove away, I agued that he was the only one who could afford to pay for his funeral and that she should then give planks for all the funerals.

"I can't. The line has to be drawn somewhere. I used to let them take the wood, but then so many people started dying in droves. We didn't know whether it was AIDS or something else."

"But Mummy, there *are* many who're dying -"

"I know, but these weren't from our farm."

She stopped at the tractor that was slashing the grass near the horse paddocks and called to the driver. He jumped down and came running over, holding his hat in his hands, "Morning Medem."

"Morning Clever, now be careful there, you know there are many pythons in this area, I saw one yesterday when I was walking."

"Yes, Medem."

"I know it's difficult to see them in this grass, and that's why I don't like you slashing it so late. Don't slash them to bits! Try to keep a look out."

"Yes, Medem."

She drove off in a spray of dust, "Oh I wish you wouldn't come to breakfast when I have to go to town! We talk too much and now I'm going to be late."

"I'm sure the tractor parts will wait for you," I said.

"It's the irrigation pump I'm worried about. The parts were just something else the manager asked for this morning."

"Anyway, what about all those dying?" I said, trying to remind her of her story.

"Hm? Oh I can't now, I'll be late. I'm dropping you here; you'll have to walk the rest of the way home. It's not far."

"Just quickly," I pleaded.

She sighed. "Well, someone else was collecting our wood, building coffins and then flogging them off to grieving families in the township and the whole surrounding area. I was furious! So I stopped all free wood, even for firewood, immediately. You know how many new guards I had to employ to walk the bush making sure that no one was stealing firewood?"

She stopped the car and waited for me to get out. I waved goodbye only to get sprayed in her dust.

As I turned into the curving drive of the bush that surrounded my cottage, I noticed the new gum plantation on the other side of the field. It had been planted for firewood. The saplings were planted, watered, sprayed, then cut down and chopped into cords which the labourer could buy at a price that didn't even cover the price of planting the trees. Before my mother had made this rule, every hut in the compound had piles of logs and wood lying outside, more than a family could use all year.

"You have to learn not to waste," my mother had said. "There aren't enough trees in this land if everyone must have a big fire every night."

I awoke to my mother's hooting; I could still hear the measured, melancholic beating of drums that shook the Sunday stillness.

I got out of bed and moved over to the window, opening the curtains to see how early it was. I heard my mother hoot again. I left the window and began the tedious morning routine of finding hidden keys, unlocking bedroom doors and then the inside gate. In the kitchen I had to search through the box of keys to find the right one for the

door and another for the gate. If there was ever a fire, I thought, I would never make it out in time.

As I stepped outside I saw Kadavario, my housekeeper. He was a fine, old man who lived in a small brick house at the end of my garden and had the best vegetable patch on the farm. He had even taken in some of the bush beyond the fence as a mealie patch. My sister was furious as no one on the farm was allowed this, except in designated areas or there would be no bush left. Yet I allowed it as all of Kadavario's seven children and their spouses had died of Aids and he had been left with over twenty grandchildren to look after. He and his wife were as desperate for food as they were for Kadavario's wages.

"Kadavario?" I called. "It's Sunday! I'll open the gate."

He waved to me and continued on towards my mother's impatient hooting.

"What is it?" I asked annoyed as she sped in and stopped under a tree.

Then she told me about Philip and what Lisa had done.

"She's mad," I said. "But, honestly, that girl's made of Victoria Cross material."

"Can you believe the others?" my mother ranted on. "None of them, not even the bachelors who lived next door, went to help! I know she's crazy, but I am proud of her."

"Where's she now?" I asked, wondering if I should go over to her house.

"She's gone to town, to see Philip at the hospital. She saved his life, you know."

"Yup, she would. Come in and have some tea."

In the kitchen Kadavario was preparing a tray.

"Go home, Kadavario. It's Sunday."

"Good morning, Medem. But I can make tea."

"I know you can make tea, but just go. It's your time off."

"Thank you, Medem, then I shall go and see my family."

As he was leaving, my mother told him about the incident. He shook his head, saying, "Ah, ah!" after every sentence. Then he turned to me and said, "Medem, it is not good you live here by yourself. You must call the Baas in Denmark and tell him to come here, chop-chop."

"Yes," my mother agreed. "I think you should stay with me until he comes or you go back."

"I'm fine. Good bye, Kadavario."

My mother and I sat on my little terrace overlooking the garden that trickled into the bush.

"You have to cut your lawn," she said. "And get Peter Guard to remove the grass from around the fence. It looks untidy and it's not good for the fence to have all those creepers crawling up it."

"I like it that way," I replied. "Anyway, Kadavario doesn't have the strength to push a lawnmower around."

"Then Peter Guard can bemba it at night. That should keep him awake. You could measure how much he is awake by how much he bembas."

"Mummy," I sighed, "I tried that. But I couldn't sleep with the slash-slash sounds. And then every half an hour he would sharpen the blade on the kitchen steps. I was going nuts."

"Then get him to do it until midnight – when you eventually go to bed. Honestly, I don't like you sitting up all night painting or writing poems or whatever. And Peter Guard tells me that you sit out here, on the terrace. It's too dangerous."

"Mummy, this is my place. We agreed that when I moved in, you wouldn't faff around or get involved. Anyway, what does Peter Guard know? He sleeps most of the time anyway!" I laughed, but then added in a more serious tone, "But honestly, Mummy, I don't think he's well. He's so thin, his uniform hangs on him and he coughs the whole time."

"I know. I used to tease him about all his smoking those tobacco bits they used to steal from us when I used to put tobacco scraps on the lawn to make it nice and green. How they can smoke it rolled in newspaper I don't know! Then I thought it was T.B. But, I think he's got it too. Maybe you should get another guard."

"No. Peter Guard would be devastated. He'd think that he's incompetent or demoted – you know how proud he is."

"I'm more concerned about your safety than his pride. We'll get him an assistant."

"No," I chuckled, "I couldn't handle two snorers in my garden - I'll never get any sleep!"

"It's not funny, Kyne. Things are happening. Things we have no idea about. I don't like you down here alone. Move up and stay with me?"

"No, Mummy. I love it here. And we both need our space. We agreed, remember?"

"That was before all this nonsense. And I didn't think you'd be so stupid as to take down all the bars everywhere."

"I couldn't live here! It was like a prison! Look how nice it is to sit out here on this open terrace. It was all bolted up before. I mean what's the point in staying in Africa if you have to be locked up?"

"That's Africa," my mother stated firmly. "And don't think it's ever going to get better. Only worse, I can promise you that. Move up with me, please? Just until Peter gets here next week?"

"No."

We drank the tea in silence. Then I heard the dog bark. I got up and looked towards the gate and saw a man standing there. I told my mother I had never seen him before.

She got up and looked. "Send Kadavario down," she told me.

"He's probably gone."

"I don't like the look of him. And it's Sunday."

I sat down. "Ignore him then."

My mother could not. "Where's your radio?"

"I told you, I forgot to charge it."

"What if something happens to you? How can you get hold of us?"

"Nothing will happen to me, Mummy, I don't go driving around in the middle of the night to other people's farms. I'll go and see, I mean, we're not at war."

"You can't trust anybody!" my mother added.

"I know, you've been telling me that my whole life."

I walked down to the fence. He was a fairly young man, who, as my mother had said, did not have a nice air about him.

He tilted his chin as he asked, rudely, "Where's the Boss?"

"Who are you?"

"I want to speak to the Boss," he said curtly.

"Which one?" I asked.

"The one who lives here."

I was about to tell him that I was the Boss here, but suddenly realised that I did not want this man knowing that I lived alone.

"He's off today," I replied. "You'll have to speak to me."

"Call him."

"No. I said that he is off. If you cannot speak to me, then you can go."

He tilted his head towards my mother's car. "It's because you have visitors. I have come from far; so then he can come here."

I shook my head at him, tired of his rudeness, wary of his attitude. I walked away back to the house.

My mother wanted to get her radio from the car, so that she could call the manager and some security, but I told not to let the man see her.

When he left, I locked up the house, cursing every key turned and then drove with my mother up to her house. She did not want me staying at the cottage alone.

As we drove up the road to her security gate, we saw the man standing there.

"Go and get the manager, Mummy," I told her.

"No, just call him on the radio. I can handle this guy."

"You don't know who he is!"

"If he had a gun, he'd have shot you already," she replied.

"And who are you?" she asked him as she stopped the car alongside him.

"I'm Mishek, your old gardener," he replied as he stared down at her.

My mother rolled her window up until there was only a small gap at the top.

"No you're not."

"I am. I worked for you long time ago."

"You are not Mishek who worked for me," she said curtly.

"I am. I have proof." He put his hand into his shirt pocket and pulled out some tightly folded papers.

"Don't open the window!" I hissed.

"I'm not interested in your papers. You are not Mishek -"

"I am. Look here." He began to unfold the papers.

"I'm not looking at your papers. You are not the Mishek I knew. Now what kind of nonsense are you bringing here?"

"I want you to sign these papers."

"What for?"

"For compensation."

"What compensation? I don't owe you any worker's compensation!"

"Uh-uh, not worker's compensation. War veteran money."

"What are you talking about?"

"You must sign saying that I was Mishek, that I was the one who helped the terrorists attack you."

"What?" my mother's voice rose to a shrill.

"Yes. Then the government will give me war-veteran compensation, as I fought with the other freedom fighters."

"You were not even born then!" my mother snapped. "And for your information, I was never attacked during the war. Now get off my farm!"

My mother revved the car forward. Jimmy just managed to open the gates in time, "Close them quickly, Jimmy!" she screamed as she sped off up the drive, past the garages and parked the car right in front of the kitchen yard door.

"Quickly, get inside!" she ordered.

We ran in and locked the yard gate. Then we went into the kitchen and locked both doors.

"God, I hope Jimmy's alright!" she suddenly said. "I forgot about him!"

"I heard the gate clang. I'll go and check from my window."

I ran through the house to my old bedroom. I saw Jimmy walking across the lawn. He squatted down by the orange tree and began weeding around it. When I came back through the house, my mother was in the office, talking on the radio to the manager. "Keep an eye on him," she snapped into the radio. "Make sure he gets off this farm!"

I sat down in the chair opposite and shook my head. "What's all that about?"

"I've actually heard of it before. I thought it was a joke. Some people are apparently going to their old employers and asking them to sign papers saying that they were Terrs during the war."

"You mean freedom fighters," I said.

"Oh stop it! I'm not being politically correct now! Too late for that. They didn't fight for anyone's damn freedom except their own bloody pockets! Look the mess we're in now. They're promising war-vets money if they can prove fought or killed people during the war! I mean, imagine those who were attacked? They're probably thinking that maybe their old, trusted gardeners or cooks or whoever, *did* help to try and get them killed."

"Yes, well, obviously it's going to get the greedy going."

"And everyone else. There's so much unemployment. Every person's going to try. Hopefully most of them will be liars. I mean this one was. He's never been in the war; he's probably younger than you. He'd better get off this farm quick!"

"Oh he's probably on his way to the neighbours, trying out the same story," I said.

"But why did he use the name Mishek?" my mother asked, shaking her head. "Maybe it's just a co-incidence, Mummy. Maybe his name is Mishek – it's not that uncommon."

"Or maybe he knew Mishek," my mother said, her voice lowering, "and he knew that Mishek was involved with the other side or whatever you want to call them."

I shrugged; anything was possible. The war had no sides, really.

"God," she said, a quiet sadness in her voice, "why can't they just let it all lie still? Opening up all these old wounds is not good. Not for anyone. "

"No," I agreed, goodness knows what it can trigger off."

I returned home to my cottage and the heat to hear that Peter Guard was sick.

"Yes," I nodded, "I know."

"No, Medem," they told me. "Now he is very sick."

I knew what they meant. If Peter Guard could not come to work, then he was dying.

I took a blanket and some tinned food and walked the tractor road. It was full of the empty, gaping potholes that lay in the sun like hungry mouths ready to swallow an ankle or break a leg. The dust billowed softly up with each step and sat like a thick sock, gently choking me. The contractors' compound lay over a small ridge, and it was here that Peter Guard lived. He was in charge of looking after it and those within. His home was easy to find as it was the only brick

house amongst the many mud and straw huts. My mother used to take all the foreign visitors there to show them an authentic African village.

It was quiet, even for the middle of the day. Cotton picking season had sucked the life out of the village; not even a chicken squawked.

Peter Guard's wife was sitting beside the front step, her body leaning outwards from the shadowy cold of the dark house and into the light and warmth that the afternoon sun lent the cracked, concrete step. Her face and torso were lost somewhere in the shade; only her legs seemed to live, stretched out straight in front of her, her bright orange and green wrap tucked tightly and too neatly around and under her thighs. Her feet stuck up stiff and straight from the ground, toes rising, pointing heavenwards, as if in prayer. Her soles held a pale, matted dust-colour, each heel telling tales through their many deep cracks of the years of walking and working, shoeless.

Quietly, I moved into the shadows and saw her eyes, bulging white. She was scared of death, like all wives and mothers who are left with nothing. She would move with her family to her husband's brother: at least Moffat was a good man. I stood for a while looking at her, wondering if her thinness was from grief or if she too was ill. Would she then pass it on to her husband's brother, and his wife?

She blinked and her almond eyes were suddenly dark and empty as they fell to the dusty ground as if searching for the comfort she knew I could not bring. She stood up, bob-curtsied to me, and went inside, her slight figure disappearing into a cool darkness that gulped her whole. I heard her talking low; her soft, kind words bouncing in hushed echoes off the walls of the empty room. I imagined Peter Guard lying half within this world, upon a thin mat in the corner of the cold shadows. I realised that I was intruding. The weak man within would not be the same one I had known all my life, and yet, his faithfulness and respect would force his frail body to come to the bent tin door and greet me. I did not want that. I did not want to see him. I was scared too.

I suddenly called out,

"Hallo Peter! I just brought you something. Don't get up. I will leave it for you here."

I waited a few seconds, no reply came. I felt awkward and useless. I was sweating in the shade. Then his wife came out and I thrust the blanket and plastic carrier bag of food into her arms and said, "Sorry, Amai. Sorry many times."

And then I left.

Days later, I sent the new security guard with some more food, though I knew that Peter Guard was not eating. Every evening, when the new guard arrived, I wished it were Peter Guard, with his familiar, trusting smile and the hacking laugh that would end in a spluttering of coughs. I missed him, but I never went back to see him. I left to go away again without going to say good-bye.

I wonder what he thought. That I had deserted him? Or that I was ashamed of him? Or maybe he thought that I had moved on with another guard and had forgotten all about him?

I should have gone into his house the day I came with the blanket and every other day as well. I should have told him that I was sorry. That he was a good man. I should have shaken his hand like a friend would, to let him know that I cared and that I was there to help. I should have thanked him for all the nights he patrolled my garden. For even though I only allowed him to use that useless stick as a truncheon and not a gun, Peter Guard would have fought whoever or whatever until the bitter end because that was the type of person he was. He was faithful. He was bound by respect and trust. He was not just a man with a job as a guard. He was my guard, because he was the most trusted on the farm. He knew that and he proved it every evening in his work. He was proud of being chosen as my guard. And I was proud to have him.

But I never told him this. I gave his wife a blanket and walked away. And I will never really know why.

Peter Guard died while I was away in Denmark. He had been with our family for thirty-four years.

My mother gave beer for his funeral.

But I gave nothing at all.

Chapter 30

We could hear the drumming pounding harsh and flat from far across the river. When the wind blew in our direction, we could hear the wailing song, the drunken calling and shouting. A neighbouring farm had been invaded by the so-called war-veterans.

"Those poor people," my mother sighed as we sat on her terrace eating dinner, "Can you imagine being locked inside your house with such a bunch of hooligans outside your fence?"

"They haven't been allowed to move for days," Lisa said. "Some neighbours had to bring them food today."

"Why them?" my mother asked. "It has to be political." Then she turned to Peter and explained, "You know that their parents were murdered just after the war? He was shot at the gate and then she was shot, point-blank, at the empty safe. It was political then, and it's political now. But, I still don't understand it! Why?"

"When will it be us?" Peter asked.

"Oh, I don't think it'll come here," Lisa said. "I've been told by reliable sources that someone rather high up is interested in our farms. Not these people."

"That doesn't sound convincing," I replied. "Those high up have more power."

"But they won't take the farms, just a stake in them or something. Maybe we can pay them out?" my mother said.

"They're stopping all those farms from working. Those farmers are losing their whole crop. If they want the land so badly for food or whatever, why don't they let the farmer farm? It doesn't make sense!" Peter retorted.

"This is Africa," my mother replied. "Nothing makes sense."

"I hope it's just a phase," Lisa added. "Pre-election hype. You know, Mugabe's promising land to the peasants to get some votes."

"Why does he bother?" I asked, "I mean he rigs the elections in any case."

"Because Tsvangarai is popular," my mother said. "Mugabe's scared. I think he'll be the next President."

"I think so too," Peter added. "From what I hear, every time I sit with the farmers on duty on Brawlands Hill, they all say how their chaps are so excited and can't wait for the elections to happen. They want change, and every one thinks that we'll get it."

"Well, we're trying hard," Lisa said. "We send tractors and trailers full of people to the MDC meetings. And for the first time, there are political rallies full of blacks and whites! It's so amazing! You must come, Mummy!"

"I will, I have to! I'll come with you on Thursday."

"No wonder Mugabe's mad at the farmers," I added. "We're helping these rallies against him."

"Of course," my mother quipped, "what does he expect? He can't hang on forever. We've had enough. Every one's had enough."

Then my mother's new cook came out with the cheese platter and we all kept quiet.

A few weeks later my sister's best friend was locked into her garden by the war-veterans. She phoned Lisa and told her that they were all young, angry men and very high on drugs. They were frightening. She had tried to leave with her twin toddlers but the war-vets would not let her. The girls were traumatised and were having terrible nightmares from all the singing and dancing around their bonfires, from the drums that beat throughout the night as they shouted that they were going to kill them if they did not hand over their farm.

One morning she phoned Lisa to say that they had run out of food. Some neighbours had tried to get some food sent in to them, but the war-vets had taken it and thrown it all over the road. Later, they had eaten it.

Lisa packed some boxes of food that she hid under a blanket in her car. Taking an old white jacket and a stethoscope with her, she drove to their farm. The war-vets stopped her and began pushing her car back and forth: she thought that they would roll it over. The gang leader came up and banged on her window. She rolled it down. "I'm a doctor. I've been called in because one of the children is very sick. If I don't get to treat her immediately, she may die."

The man looked at her. He stank of beer. "What's in the back?"

"Medical supplies," she replied.

"First you help me." He showed her a gash on his leg.

Lisa was reluctant to get out of her truck. She was a white woman alone with over forty drunk, drugged, frenzied men. She took a deep breath and stepped out, leaving her car door open. She put on surgical gloves and bandaged the wound, wishing that she had cyanide instead of aspirin.

Then he let her through, ordering, "Quick-quick, I give you an hour."

My mother was furious when she heard the story, but she was also very proud. She asked Lisa never to do anything like that again, but we all knew that she would. Lisa would help anyone, with or without thinking of the consequences.

One day she came over while my mother was having tea at my cottage and told her that she could no longer handle the responsibility of having my mother live by herself.

My mother was angry, "I'm fine! I know how to protect myself."

"No, you don't," Lisa said. "I don't want you living on your own. I think Peter and Kyne should move up and stay with you. Their place is a safety hazard."

"No, you move up to live with Mummy," I replied irritably, "You also live on your own!"

"My house is Fort Knox. And I can't live with any one!"

"Nor can I!" my mother replied heatedly.

"Mummy," Lisa said, "A farmer has just been murdered! You're a sitting duck! Then move to the house in town."

"No."

Peter went, nearly every day, to sit 'on duty' with other farmers on the hill on Brawlands where Lisa lived. It was the highest lookout point over Glendale and the township. They sat on folding picnic chairs and drank beers and coffee and smoked cartons of strong Madison cigarettes as they took turns staring through binoculars. They could see all the cars and trucks coming and going and were looking out for the white government vehicles that transported the groups of war-vets to the various farms. Over the radios that covered the entire district they would inform each other of the directions of these trucks. Yet nobody moved off their farms. It was just like the war all over again, except that when a farmer was besieged or attacked no police came; only other farmers who tried to talk to the drunk and drugged youths that brandished machetes and axes and sticks at them. Once again the farmers and their workers feared for their lives – in fear of the same people who had threatened them years earlier.

There was such a bizarre feeling of deja-vu, except now I was all grown up and no longer an innocent bystander who did not understand politics.

Now I understood everything: we were slowly being tortured by a new league of terrorising youths.

The farmers had security fences around their homes, though often these did not stop the war-vets from climbing over and killing the dogs that barked at them through the fence before sitting on verandas with their drums and beer. They would beat on bedroom widows throughout the nights as families trembled under beds, parents pressing their small children against the walls with their bodies in a feeble attempt to protect them.

We had all stock-piled. Our pantries were full of tinned food and biltong, our bars with drinks and cigarettes, and our safes with ammunition. Yet, strangely, we were a new breed of survivors who did not fight. Some of the older farmers said that the young had no guts; but we had grown up in a war and most of us had children or parents to look after. We did not want another war. We had seen that death brings nothing but revenge. Maybe we were scared to fight; we were scared to lose all that had been fought for before.

Some did not think that it would ever get so bad that farmers would lose their land. Others thought it would be civil war so we had emergency back-packs ready, filled with a list of items to keep us going for five days, as well our passports, some US dollars and walking boots.

The farmers that left for town for the sake of their children's safety never returned. Once they had driven out of their front gates with their children, a few photo albums and their dogs, the war-vets took over. Sometimes they lived in the houses, sometimes they trashed them. They burnt the workers' compounds and raped the women. Yet many of the workers stayed. They had no money in bank accounts and nowhere else to go.

Soon after only a few farms had fallen into the hands of the war-vets we began to realise the truth about their intimidation. We knew it was government sponsored. But we also thought that the landless peasants would keep the farms, as the government had promised them. Farmers were hoping that after a short season they would have run it all aground and be bored by all the hard work and then the farmers could return. Instead, government officials moved into the houses and demanded the furniture and the trained servants as they sent the war-vets on to the next farm. Just to make sure, they demanded that the farmers hand over their title deeds. When they found out that most farmers had loaned their title-deeds to the banks, they stopped insisting. They were the government after all; they did not have to ask for anything.

Every day a new list was printed in the state-sponsored paper. Without glancing at the headlines we would turn to that page to see if our farms had been listed. If one of them was, then hundreds of pages of paperwork needed to be filled out according to a new law. Yet no one really read any of it. They had probably already dealt the farms out between them.

Our farms were kept until last. When all the small fish had been fed, the sharks closed in. When Lisa began negotiating with Mugabe's nephew, she made my mother leave with as many farm papers as possible. My mother obeyed. She left the country with the few papers she could get hold of, her diaries, photo albums and some family silver.

While she was in Denmark, the war-vets, geared up to intimidate as many as possible for the forthcoming elections, invaded Protea. They harassed the workers in the

compound, threatening to kill them if they did not side with them and vote for Mugabe. Moffat, Peter Guard's brother, shook his head and told them that he had lived in Zimbabwe for most of his life. He was a Malawian who was not interested in politics. He was trying to save his family from a beating, his home from being burned. They dragged him out to the centre of the compound, where, on weekends, he had played drums and danced in feathers and masks. In front of all the others, they beat him to death. Then they threw his body in the river. This was the ultimate betrayal, for he could never be found, given a funeral or buried. His family would always mourn his lost body and the spirit that could never find a resting place or peace.

My mother sobbed when she heard of his murder. She not only cried for Moffat, but for shame at not being there to protect the loyal workers who had always been there for her. Peter and I flew out to the farm to hurriedly pack up her home. Losing her farm would be devastating enough. We wanted to help save her belongings that she had collected and cherished throughout her life. We made my mother stay behind in Denmark. We were worried that if she came home she would not leave again.

Chapter 31

I took a dirt track through the farm over to my sister's side of Boroma Estates. It was early. Lisa wanted to be first in line at the voting. I had barely driven up the steep drive to her hilltop house with splendid views over the farms to all sides, when I saw her security guard unlock the gates. I waved to him as I drove through, relieved that I did not have to do a hill-start in my old farm truck. As I parked the car, Lisa came out with her dogs. "You're late."

"It's not even half-seven, Lisa. The polls aren't opening 'til eight, and knowing this country, they won't open until after lunch."

"I want to be the first in line."

"I thought you'd have organised that," I sighed.

"I sent the gardener down at six, but he can't keep my place if they open on time."

"They won't. D'you have some tea?"

"Hurry up. D'you have all your papers and ID.?"

I nodded as I walked into the house and to the kitchen. Shonga was standing there frying pancakes.

"Morning Shonga," I said, taking a warm pancake from the pile beside him. "Is there any tea?"

"Morning. Yes, Miss Kyne," and then he called to the domestic worker outside to bring me a cup of tea from the dining room.

"I'll get it," I offered.

"No!" Shonga insisted, "He's too lazy enough."

"So, you're coming with us Shonga?"

He shook his head.

"You're not going to vote? You must Shonga!"

"No!"

"Why? It's important. Everyone must vote. I came out here especially to vote."

"You came to pack Medem's house," he said, looking at me angrily, as if I was the person forcing my mother to safe-guard her belongings against the war-vets.

"And to vote. I chose this week, especially. Anyway, you guys are the one who wanted free and fair elections, now you must vote."

"Not for these people. Uh-uh."

I took another pancake.

"So, then you must vote them out."

"We cannot, Miss Kyne, you know that. No one can get them out. I am an old man now. I don't want all this nonsense."

He turned his back on me. I took my cup of tea and walked out to join Lisa. She was speaking into the farm radio, telling them to hurry up and get onto the trailer and go to the voting polls.

"Let's go," she said, getting into her red four-by-four. I stood trying to sip the hot tea as she reversed and revved the car. I left it by the steps.

"How's the packing?" she asked as we drove off.

I shrugged. "Shit. It's horrible walking through that almost empty house. I'm glad Mummy's not here to do it, let alone see it."

"Rather you than me," Lisa said as she stopped at the workshop to collect three men who were waiting for her.

"Morning Medem," they said to both of us.

"Ready to vote for a new government?" I asked them cheerily.

"Oh shut up," Lisa spat.

The voting was being held down at the local Zanu PF headquarters. The gate was still locked when we arrived. There were quite a few people already there, sitting in small groups or leaning against the fence. They were mostly men.

"Where are the women?" I asked the men on the backseat.

They shrugged. Lisa turned on the radio, but switched it off again when someone announced that today was the day that the country and the whole world would see how much the people of Zimbabwe loved their President.

"That doesn't even make sense," I said.

"He's probably already won," Lisa replied.

Then the gardener came up and Lisa asked him to get back into line, even though there was not one.

We waited a long while until a line of military trucks came up and hooted until the gates were opened. The people began to walk in, slowly, dejectedly.

Lisa and I followed them, the three men behind in a silent escort. We let a group of people go ahead of us as now Lisa did not want to be the first, "You know how racist these guys are," she said.

When it was finally our turn, Lisa walked up to the small desk around which some people sat squashed between others who leaned over, checking papers with eyes that did not know what to look for.

"Good morning," she faked cheerily. "How are you?"

"Name?" was all the man with the only pen in the group said. He did not bother to look up. He knew who my sister was.

Lisa handed over her metal ID card. "Lisa Brochner Nislev."

"Huh?" said another who was trying to read the list of names, from a pile of papers stapled haphazardly together. It seemed odd that there should be so few people named on that short list, considering the size of the township.

Lisa placed her card on the table.

The man with the pen, did not bother to consult the names, and began talking in very fast Shona to the one still trying to flip through the papers.

"Oh," the man with the list said. "You can go now," he said to Lisa.

"I've come to vote," Lisa replied, stiffening.

I felt the tension tighten the air.

"But you have already voted," he said.

"I have not. I've only just arrived."

"Ah, but it says here that you have been."

"How could I have been? I've just arrived and you've only just opened the gates."

He shook his head.

"Let me see those papers!" she demanded, leaning over the table.

"No!" the man with the pencil ordered. "You have not been given permission."

"I have to see them! I have to prove to you that I have not voted yet!" Her voice rose in irritation. I tried to nudge her gently. She lashed out at me causing the men to chuckle as they looked smugly from one to another.

"You can go now," the pen-man ordered. "You have voted."

"I will not. Not until you show me my name on those papers."

He nodded his head sideways indicating that the other man could show his papers. He began paging through them, as Lisa said, flatly, "N, look under N ..."

I could not believe how ridiculous the situation was. I wanted to laugh aloud.

Lisa took the papers from him but they were snatched from her by the pen-man. He looked up at her with venomous eyes. I saw how much he hated us. Slowly and very determinedly, he licked his finger, then his thumb, and began to page leisurely through the papers. Then he took out his red pen and used it to point to a name on the list. "Look, you have voted. And so has the rest of your family."

Lisa tried to lean over to look, but he would not turn the page around for her to see.

"Have I voted as well?" I asked.

"Name?"

I told him. "Yes, you were also here early this morning."

"I was not!" I shouted.

He looked up at me, then shook his head, clicking his tongue.

"Don't make it worse," Lisa turned to say to me in Danish.

"How could it get any worse?" I asked.

"They have a prison truck parked under the tree," Lisa said. "They would love to have us locked up for the week."

"Go now," he said, "You are wasting everybody's time, here. The country must vote. Go!"

"But we haven't voted," Lisa said calmly. "I'm not going until I have voted."

"Look," he said, knocking his pen against the paper with a loud, smacking sound, "you can see that you have. I told you, your whole family has voted!"

"My mother's not even in the country!" I said, lifting my hands up in desperation.

"She was here!" he shouted. "With your father, Mr. Nislev. They both voted early this morning."

"Really?" Lisa said flatly. "It's amazing what an election can do. It can even get a dead man to come out of his grave."

The people looked at us; their faces paled, just for a moment. One never spoke ill of the dead. Then the man made evil eyes at us.

Lisa leaned forward and said, "My father's been dead for seventeen years! You know that!"

Then she picked up her ID and turned around, pulling me with her.

Back at the car we noticed that the three workers and the gardener had followed us.

"Go and bloody-well vote!" she shouted.

They stood still. One shook his head.

"Go on! You wanted a black bloody government! Well now you've got one! The same one for the rest of your lives!"

I put a hand on her shoulder to calm her as I looked around to see if anyone had heard. People from the line were staring. I felt nervous. I was scared of being reported. I lit a cigarette and gave it to Lisa. She sucked so hard on it I thought she might swallow it whole. Then I offered the pack to the men who stood before us, looking lost.

"Go and vote, please," Lisa told them again.

"No, Medem," the man in the blue, grease-stained overalls replied. "We do not want to vote anymore."

They were scared.

"What a god-damn fucking country!" Lisa swore when she dropped the men off at the workshop. "What the hell am I doing here?"

I shrugged. "You know we'll never leave. Even Mummy. We're packing up her home because she's intimidated to return in case they demand the farms' title-deeds, but she's never going to send her stuff away. The containers will just stand in Harare somewhere until she feels it's safe to come home again. Then she'll unpack it all again, curse me for packing it all up for her in the first place, and carry on, business as usual."

"I need a drink," Lisa said.

"Make mine a triple."

We walked into the house and Lisa called for the domestic worker to bring some ice. She took out a bottle of vodka and a whiskey. Shonga came through with the tray, looking for gossip.

"We voted, Shonga," Lisa said.

He nodded as he put down the tray.

"Yes," she continued, "they said we voted early this morning, before anyone was up and about and the place was even open. We all voted. Even the Madam overseas and the dead Boss."

Shonga stood up, and looked at her with a frown. He did not like anyone talking so disrespectfully about my father.

"Shonga," she tried to explain, "They said that even the Boss had voted this morning."

Shonga shook his head. "Uh-uh Medem. That's no good."

He walked off the veranda still shaking his head and muttering under his breath.

"Mm," I said, as Lisa poured us stiff drinks on ice. "And guess who we voted for?"

"Daddy's probably turning in his grave!"

"If he's got back in it again. Denmark's quite far."

Lisa lit another cigarette.

I lifted up my glass and said, "Cheers. Here's to whoever we voted for."

"May he have a slow and painful death, soon," Lisa said, taking a long sip of her whiskey without flinching.

"And cheers again," I exclaimed loudly, "to the New, Democratic Republic of Zimbabwe!"

"Oh, piss off."

Chapter 32

The road wept when the storms came down on it too hard, or lay cracked and gasping thirstily when the rains were late. It lay, moody and unpredictable, in the coolness of the shade of the Bauhinia trees that followed its curve from my cottage road to the cotton fields.

I walked it every day, knew everything about it, how it swelled or shrunk. I knew what vehicle had spun the dust off it from the tracks left like scars in the thick spring dust or from the slung gravel stones in winter.

Every dawn I stepped out onto it with a new song in my soul that caused a spring in my tread. I would stand, in the moments before morning, watching the sun rise pink-floating and free with heat that called deep shadows from the trees. The moon would fade with the last star, promising, as I did, never to leave.

I began to follow the sun as carefully as Sixpence did. I watched its slow, loyal movements, my dread rising with its descent; for once again, we feared the nights and all who would sneak in with the darkness, bringing a day that could see our demise.

That time lay upon our lives like an alien dusk holding us between harmony and the unfamiliar. Every evening a heavy, strange feeling sat low and growling in my chest. I knew that the time was coming closer - that soon we would be forced to leave. Yet when I watched the sun set behind the purpling blue hills, something within me would not let me believe that I might be walking my dusty, gravel road for the last time. But then the

calls of early twilight screeched and swooped around me. The African night fell and no one was safe. In one fleeting moment, it could all be over, it could all be gone.

The frail, translucent flowers of the Bauhinia trees shone like grey sad stars in the evening stillness. I was walking back along the road to my cottage when I heard the drone of a motorbike. It was Ernest, the farm manager. I waved to him and he swung off the main farm dirt road and drove up to me. He switched off the engine, "Please Medem, you mustn't be walking late now. There's too much trouble around. The war vets are everywhere. They can come at any time."

"I thought you were a party member," I replied, rather curtly.

He shook his head, "I have no power, Medem. I have been many times to the headquarters in Glendale. But now, I don't know anymore." He looked away, dejected. I felt sorry for him. He had believed in it all; he still wanted to, but no one understood what was happening in the country.

"Have you been checking the irrigation?" I asked to change the subject.

Ernest nodded, but shrugged. Silence crept in and sat heavy upon our backs. It was as if the wet weight of the dew made me sink at the knees. Something was not right.

"What is it Ernest?"

"I have come from Brawlands. Miss Lisa has a visitor."

"Who?"

He shrugged again, then sighed. "Someone in a big, black Benz."

"Oh, not again," I whispered. "I'd better go over there."

"They say he is drunk."

"Who said that?"

"The guard at the gate. He asked me for reinforcements. He is very afraid."

I nodded and walked away.

"Medem," he called after me, "Please, you must remember your radio this time."

I nodded, and then walked back to him. He had more to say. "Take Tobias with you, he is your guard for tonight. He has a gun. He has to. I will send someone else down to watch your house. We cannot leave it alone. I have put four men at the Medem's house, they are all armed."

Then he shook his head and said, "I'm sorry, Medem."

I waited for the other security guard to arrive and then I drove to Lisa's house. I did not tell Peter why I was going. I did not want him with me. I gave the excuse that I had to drop some papers off at Lisa's and I would be back immediately.

The dark road was lit up by the truck's lights. Though I was desperate to drive fast, I could not help slowing every time I saw the bright blinks of the nightjars huddled in the dust, warming themselves in the heat left by the day in the dust. Then, as I turned a corner, I saw a long log lying across the road. My heart shook then stopped: I thought it was a barricade. Tobias gasped beside me. I did not want to stop to turn around, I was afraid of what lay waiting in the dark bush. I had to chance it. I accelerated. The car jolted and bounced over.

"It is not dead," Tobias said.

"Huh?"

"The python, Medem, you did not kill it."

"Oh thank God!" I exhaled.

I flashed the headlights three times before the next corner. The guard was standing at the barrier that had recently been set up to stop the trucks of war vets or thieves. I called out the window ordering him to hurry up. He fumbled for keys and then tried, in the darkness, to unlock the padlock. He seemed shaky.

"Has he been drinking, Tobias?" I asked.

"No, Medem. He is afraid. He is afraid of the sound from a truck."

As we drove past, I called out that I would be returning shortly. His salute disappeared in the dust I left behind me.

I left my truck with Tobias beside it outside the fence and walked into Lisa's garden on foot. The polished black Mercedes was parked under the bright security light, shimmering like a bad omen. I peered through the glass of the front door and saw figures in the lounge. I thought I could hear voices coming from the veranda. I wondered how many were here. I walked in the opposite direction, around the house to the kitchen. I tapped on the door. A very worried looking housekeeper released the door and peered around.

"It's just me!" I said.

He let me in, whispering, "Sorry, Medem."

I walked through the kitchen and saw standing against the wall at the end of the unlit hall, a figure. I realised that it was Shonga, eavesdropping. He heard me approach and lifted his finger to his lips. Then he tip-toed over to me, shaking his head.

"What's going on?" I asked.

He shook his head sadly and began to walk away.

"Shonga!" I whispered hoarsely, "Tell me."

"He's drunk, Miss Kyne," he said as he tried to pass me.

I took his arm, "Is it Mugabe's nephew?" I whispered. He stood still, then nodded before moving softly back into the kitchen. I realised that the voices were not from the veranda, but from the lounge. I snuck past the open double door and stepped onto the veranda. The evening breeze welcomed me. I sat down on the sofa beside the dog, chiding her for being out here when she should be protecting my sister.

The glass door from the lounge to the veranda was closed. Yet the old, colonial-style sash windows were not. They were too old to shut properly. Through the small gaps the murmur of voices became more audible. I sat very still. It felt strange, sitting there, listening through the cracks to Lisa trying to negotiate the fate of our farms.

"But I need the dam," I heard Lisa say. "Otherwise I can't irrigate. How am I meant to grow wheat for the people's bread with no water?"

"The dam is mine," replied a voice that rose sharply. It sailed in strange echoes through the stillness to land with a thud in my chest.

"There's not enough water for all of us. The rains have not been good this year, even you said that."

"Yes, I know. I am the farmer now."

The season had been a good one; we all knew that. Yet the government blamed the poor crops on drought and the miss-management of colonial, white farmers who, until then, had kept the economy going and the nation fed. I shook my head, wondering how anyone could believe their dictatorial, mismatched, illogical statements.

"I want more drink," I heard him demand.

"I don't have any more whiskey," Lisa replied. "You've finished the bottle."

"What kind of place is this? You people with all our money!"

"I've got some vodka," Lisa then said slowly. I wished that she had not.

I could hear the slur in his words, the anger rising in his voice. It was a dangerous sound. "No! I want imported whiskey!"

Silence fell. Then I heard a heavy tread of shoes, like someone trying to get up.

"Maybe we should talk another time?" Lisa offered.

"No. There is nothing more to talk about. No more negotiation. I am tired of you people. I come here to be nice to you; only because I hear that people like you and your mother are good. The women from Glendale say so."

"Yes," said Lisa, "We have given many jobs with the export business of vegetables. My mother built them a crèche so that they could bring their children with them every day. Do you know that their children get fed here, too?"

The man grunted. Then asked, "How much American dollars do you make on those vegetables?"

"I don't know, we only get paid in local money."

"But it is profitable?"

"Obviously, or you wouldn't be here."

He laughed loudly. I heard the slap of large hands; the clap echoed greedily through the air.

"I think now, my friend," he said in a slow, aggravating tone, "that I want everything. I like this house, too."

I heard an owl calling over the garden through the silence.

"Huh! You are quiet now!" he laughed. "You can go, now. I like it here."

"Please," Lisa said, her voice exhausted and flat, "Please go. I'm really tired. I've had a long day and I have to be up again at five tomorrow."

"Yar! Good. You keep working on my farm. When it is all ready, I shall come again."

I heard him cackle as he stood up, then fell over, cursing. His tread was sluggish upon the wooden floors. I sat very still, wondering what would happen if he came out and saw me, but then his steps changed direction and he walked into the hall.

I noticed a movement on the other side of the veranda. Through the darkness, two figures stood up and walked slowly towards me. One stopped right beside me, lifted a

beer bottle to his lips and drank while his eyes bulged red, watching me. I wanted to look away but was terrified that any movement would detonate a reaction from them. Then they walked away. I shivered.

I heard the front door open then slam. Then I heard Lisa get up and walk after them, locking the front door. I got up and walked quickly towards her, she reeled when I thudded down the step.

"What the hell are you doing here?" she shouted.

I lifted my hands up and said, meekly, "Hi."

"Don't creep up on me like that! If I hadn't put away my gun when they came I would have shot you!"

Then Shonga came out of the kitchen.

"Are you still here?" she asked.

"Yes, Medem. I will not go with these people still in the house."

Shonga looked out of the window and we followed his glance through the glass of the front door.

"Oh God!" Lisa exclaimed. "The arrogant bastard! He's peeing on my roses!"

"And the other two are peeing on your car wheels," I added.

"Like bloody dogs!" Lisa spat.

"No," I said. "I like dogs."

We saw him stumble his way to the car, then call angrily to the others. One came hopping over, pulling up his trousers as he opened the back door. The man fell in.

"Bloody bastard. He finished my best whiskey." Then she turned to me and asked, "Where's your car?"

"Outside the fence."

"I hope they won't notice it. Mind you they're so sloshed I doubt if they'll even make it back to town. What the hell are you doing here, in any case?" she asked me, turning her gaze onto me.

"What are *you* doing, Lisa," I asked, "Negotiating the farms away?"

"Don't!" she shouted, wagging a finger at me. "I've had these bastards all afternoon until now. I don't need your shit as well."

"You can't negotiate with these people, Lisa. And it's not your farm to bargain in any case. It's still Mummy's."

"If it weren't for me, we'd be long gone like so many others!" she argued. "I'm trying to make a deal so that we can stay."

"And who gets what?"

"Get out!" she shouted. "I've had enough of the whole bloody lot of you!"

"Don't take your frustrations out on me, Lisa. I only came to help, to see if you were OK."

"I don't need your fucking help. You could have created havoc by barging in like this! Now go home. Get out my house!"

She unlocked the door and pushed me out, slamming it so hard behind me that I heard the glass tremble.

"And you, Shonga," I heard from behind the door, "Just go home when I tell you to! Now!"

I walked down the drive and said goodnight to the guard as he opened the gate. Tobias was waiting next to him.

"Let's go," I muttered.

The next evening there was a party at the club. The theme was medieval fancy-dress, and all who did not dress up were put in the stocks and had tomatoes and eggs thrown at them. Everyone was so drunk that eggs and tomatoes were being thrown in all directions. Then a food fight began. The floor was littered with chicken bits and pudding and people were slipping and sliding in all the mess. Peter came over to me with a green gin cocktail and shouted above the din, "I wonder what these black waiters think of us white farmers now?"

I shrugged. I couldn't care. I was trying to avoid the man chasing me to chain me to the stocks.

"They probably think we're nuts! I mean, having a party at this time!" he continued. "And look at us! Like savages!" Then he laughed. I threw an orange at a friend.

It was the last night before we left for Denmark. My mother's house was packed up and empty. The two containers had driven away that afternoon. I had stood in the drive, tears streaming as I watched them leave. As they went over the bump by the gate, I heard my father's grandfather clock chime. I sank to my knees and sobbed.

There was no reason to hold the medieval party at the club. There was nothing to celebrate. It was simply a drunken get-together. The last one we would ever have, though we did not know it then. We did not know that we were celebrating the last dance, commemorating our lives as the last farmers still standing, cheering ourselves on, raising our glasses to the beginning of the end.

I would never return. My planned return would be cancelled because there would soon be nothing to return to.

I was cursing being back in the cold of Denmark and having to put the dishes in the dishwasher. "I hate this!" I moaned. "And this machine's so noisy."

"It's a beautiful sound," my mother replied. "To me it's like a song, singing to me that it's doing all that work instead of me."

The phone rang; it was Lisa. She sounded anxious as she asked if I was alone. I lied and said that I was, putting my finger to my lips to tell my mother to keep silent.

"We're locked up in the office," she said.

"What?" I asked sharply. I saw my mother's face pale. I shook my head at her and turned my back, facing the garden. "Who's we?"

"Me, Ernest and the secretary."

"Why?"

"They did it."

"Who?" I shouted down the phone. My mother was standing beside me, frowning.

"The bloody war vets! They came this morning and locked us in here because I wouldn't give them the keys to the farm."

"Can't Ernest get you out? I mean he's a Zanu PF guy?"

"All that's over! They couldn't care! And anyway, he's tied up in the conference room. Look, they've taken our radios and cut the telephone lines. I can't get hold of

anyone. Something's wrong with the district's satellite mast so I can only call long distance on my cell. Just call some neighbours and tell them. We need to get out of here. It's really bad."

"Who shall I call?"

"Anyone, just hurry! I don't want to be in here all night. Don't call me on this phone. I don't want them to know that I still have it. And Kyne? Don't tell Mummy."

But I had to ask my mother for the telephone numbers of those neighbours still left. And I had to share the terror with someone; she stood right there.

We finally managed to contact some people and then we sat by the phone, waiting for someone to call back. Every time the telephone rang, we leapt at it, hoping that it would be Lisa calling us to say that she was free and safe. But the hours passed and morning came trying to peer through the grey drizzle and mist that surrounded the house.

Only that afternoon did Lisa call us.

"I'm OK. But God, I was so scared! I thought they were going to beat us up, rape us, even kill us. But we're alright. They got given some beer and money. I think they've gone to Glendale Township."

"I'm so sorry," was all I could say.

"I have to hurry. They're going to be back. I have to get as much as possible off the farm and my things from my house. I'll stash what I can in town. I'll call later. I can't stay here anymore."

As I put down the phone, I knew that it was over.

The next day a small convoy of black Mercedes Benzes drove up the farm road and stopped at my mother's gate. They ordered Jimmy to open it. That evening Lisa phoned us again. Ernest had just called to tell her that the President's sister had moved in. She was a general in the Zimbabwean army and her husband was a priest. They had taken over my mother's farm. They were living in my mother's house.

The following week an even larger convoy appeared at the farm. It was the President's wife. She had come to take my mother's remaining Shona sculptures that had been too large and heavy for me to pack in the container. Then she ordered Forbes to pull up all my mother's prized roses. They were loaded into the military trucks that had escorted her and then she left. Ernest phoned to tell my mother the exciting news: The President's wife, The First Lady herself, had been to their farm; she had taken their Madame's sculptures and plants.

My mother did not reply. It was too pathetic. When she put down the phone, she sat down and cried.

Chapter 33

The royal ship sat silently behind us. We had just walked down its wooden stairs and we stood, like forlorn pirate rats upon the red carpet. People stood meekly behind the barricade of ropes and the procession of song and fiery lanterns that lit up the late, still blue, Scandinavian summer light. We all wondered if Her Majesty was watching. Few saw her stand on the upper deck, half hidden by the life-guard boats, a quiet, small figure, lost in the twilight of her thoughts.

The fireworks began and the late summer sky came alive with sparks and thunder. A strange sense of pride wriggled through me, then rose and sat tight in my throat. For the first time, I felt a bewildered sense of satisfied esteem for this so Nordic nation, this distant country that I had been forced to call my own.

Like any child who has lived through a war, I feared the fireworks. I stood under them and watched them rise, explode and fall, and yet I felt an inexplicable determination not to be intimidated. I saw their beauty and found an art, hidden through fear for so long, within the poundings of the lights that reminded me of mortars and gunfire. I overcame the sense of fear, the hopeless, reckless, desperate need to hide. I let it all fall away from me, layer upon layer. It peeled off and disappeared like a soft evening breeze. My tears fell slow and free. I could not wipe them away.

I turned and saw the Queen standing proud. This was all in her honour. It was so very beautiful and dignified. And yet I was saddened, for I thought of my mother, who once had stood so proud. A young sailor all in starched white, saluted another who was

walking swiftly down the gangway, the two royal dachshunds pulling on their leash for their evening walk.

I thought of my home as once it was and how our own guard had saluted at the gate when our dogs were taken out for their evening pleasure of smells beyond the garden. I thought of how my mother had been queen of her domain, and how she too had been respected and held in awe.

And yet, when my mother left, there had been no fireworks in her honour, no crowds waving and wishing her well, no royal boat sailed her away to another life. She did not tell anyone she was leaving. Her journey was alone. The tears she wept were hidden well for the few still within the house should never see or sense her fear. There were no dogs for her to pat and tell that she would soon be home again. They had been put down or given away.

She left quietly, a few of her bags tucked in hiding in her car. She drove off, hearing the gravel of the driveway crunch under her wheels for the last time. She drove through the green gardens, the beds planted full of colours, tilled and grown with her adoring fingers. She passed the palm trees that had stood for a small century and who rustled her only farewell.

Jimmy the guard had opened the heavy wrought-iron gates. He had stood smiling and saluting, thinking she was only going to town for the day. As she passed her tears rolled low and hard. In the rear view mirror she saw him close the gate and thought she heard it clang as it swung shut. She knew it would never be opened for her again.
She passed the few workers still left in fields that had not yet been closed by the government. She could not return their waves. She could not lift her hands from the steering wheel. She was afraid that they would twist and turn out of her control and steer her homeward, back to something which was, after so many years, no longer hers. She drove through the high, white farm entrance. She saw the trees she knew so well, the fields, the bush and it was as if she was seeing it all for the first time. As if she really had never known it all.

That is how she left her farm, her home and her labourers.

That is how she left her life in Africa.

The finale of the fireworks detonated and fell like red, blue and gold stars, down towards me. I wanted them to reach me, fly to me, swallow me whole and burn me. And then Peter tapped my shoulder and whispered, "She is gone."

In the midst of all the glory, the Queen had sailed on in silence. I had not noticed. I wondered how many had, how many had pulled their eyes away from the night sky lit up in colourful flames and seen her disappear into the darkness of the fjord.

I wondered how many had noticed my mother leaving, and how many would think back upon her stay as a beautiful experience. I wondered if she would ever be missed.

I wondered if the Queen had looked out of her cabin window to see the lights of the town grow dimmer. If she had thought back upon her day.

I know that every morning and every evening my mother looks out from her new house in a foreign land and watches the lights of the day dim. And every time, she thanks life for giving her all that she once had, while telling herself how fortunate she is to have the opportunity to begin again. But every time she looks out of those windows, upon the new strangeness that she has to feel is now a part of her, she feels a small desperate desire to be looking over her own garden once again. There the guinea fowl that called were hers, and the trees that rustled in the wind were those she had planted.

Then that second is over, and her heart falls back into an unmistakably slower rhythm. She tries to fight this longing, every time she looks out of the window, as she has fought so much in her life, but she knows that this is something she will never conquer. It is a fight that has no end, this search for her lost home, a struggle to reclaim the part of her soul that was left behind.