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Hemingway Drank Here & Other Stories

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

Faculty of the Humanities

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*COMPULSORY DECLARATION*

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

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Signed by candidate
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 \_\_\_\_\_ Date: 1 April 2005

### Abstract

“Byron Loker is a particularly gifted and dedicated young writer. His writing is terse, spare, with a dry wit and wryness. It is inspired and extremely well polished, revealing a commendable sense of structure, achieving maximum effect with a minimum of means. [*Hemingway Drank Here & Other Stories*] is certainly one of the best short story collections produced [by the University of Cape Town’s Creative Writing programme] in the past few years” - André Brink

“As much as he is known for his brilliant parody of Hemingway, Byron Loker has learnt the lessons of that master in shaping a style that carries no fat. The strictness of his talent is a tonic to the culture of letters, as also the body politic. Byron never writes for gravy. His work is free, independent and bracing” - PR Anderson

The Centre for Creative Writing at the University of Cape Town offers the premier creative writing programme on the African continent. Both a Nobel laureate and a nominee have been part of its staff of committed, exceptional writers. Joining the University of Cape Town's Creative Writing programme offers students from around the world a chance to play a role in the cultural renewal of South Africa and work closely with some of the world-famous authors whose writings helped transform this country.

No less than 10 graduates of the University's MA in Creative Writing programme have establishing themselves on both the local and international literary landscape. In this tradition, Byron Loker's collection of short stories, *Hemingway Drank Here & Other Stories*, is a satirical look at life by a previously advantaged young South African male. Like all good satire, *Hemingway Drank Here & Other Stories* is spiked with sadness and truth. It is honest and sometimes sexy, and attempts to portray the struggles and insights of a young, aspirant writer. The title story 'Hemingway Drank Here' was published in *New Contrast - The South African Literary Journal* in 2003. *New Contrast* is a quarterly non-profit publication with a mandate to find the best writing available in South Africa. Its list of contributors is a who's who of modern South African fiction and poetry, all helping to set the standard for literary excellence.

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## HEMINGWAY DRANK HERE

**S**ome nights it wasn't so wonderful to come home because I'd fall down the stairs and break my leg or maybe my arm, or both, or if I landed on my head I'd fall asleep and not wake up until the next morning and it would be raining.

When that happened I would look at my leg or try to move my arm, if I was still awake, and say, 'Don't worry, it's not as bad as the last time you broke it, and soon your wife will notice that you didn't come home last night and she will open the door and find you lying here and carry you into the house and put you into the bed and you can lie there for four months until you are well again and it is spring.'

Once I lay out there for five days. In the rain. It was very cold. It was the time of the year when the days are very cold and clear. Except when it was raining. When my wife opened the door I said, 'Just leave me here, I want to die.'

‘OK.’ She said and she stepped over me carrying the little wicker basket we used when we went to have picnics in the mountains.

‘I’ve met someone else and I’m going away to have a picnic in the mountains with him.’

‘Do you love him?’

‘Maybe.’

‘Do I know him?’

‘Yes, he’s your best friend.’

My wife walked up the stairs and turned left onto the Boulevard St Michel where we rented a little room sometimes when the money came in if I had a good day at the races. Our room was nice. There was a café opposite it called the Anover Café where I sometimes stopped to have breakfast if I’d been out the night before and hadn’t fallen over. The Boulevard St Michel ran parallel to the Rue Saint Jacques where there was another café where I would stop for a nice cool beer after I’d had breakfast and if I still hadn’t fallen over yet.

I watched my wife walk down the Boulevard St Michel and turn round the corner and walk off to the mountains to have a picnic with the little wicker basket that we used when we had picnics in the mountains.

I was very hungry thinking about all those picnics. I tried to stand up and discovered that my leg and arm weren’t broken this time. I did have a pain from the time when my testicles had got blown up by the landmine, but that was usual when you’d been lying out in the rain on the cold concrete for days.

I was happy now to discover I could walk, so I walked up the stairs and went to the Anover Café and ordered a *café au lait* and a carafe of cold white wine, *dos cervezas*, *treize* Pernods, a rum St James, two bottles of whiskey, some cloudy stuff that tastes like liquorices

and comes in cow's udder, a brandy and soda, a case of champagne and a dozen fresh Portuguese. The drinks tasted very nice. I drank them all slowly, savouring the different tastes and mixing them all together and swirling them around in my mouth and I began to feel very happy and the world was a grand place.

I didn't feel sad anymore from falling down the stairs. I began to feel like making love. A beautiful girl with blonde hair walked into the café and I looked at her because she was very beautiful and I wanted to make love to her and divorce my wife because she was always going off to have picnics with other men in the mountains and I wanted a new wife. I went over to the girl and sat down next to her and said, 'You are a beauty, you must be my new wife and come home and make love to me and we will lie in bed and be warm and I promise I won't fall down the stairs and not come home at night.'

'Oh, wouldn't that be *fun!*' she said.

'Yes,' I said.

'But, oh *dear*, I already have six boyfriends and I'm meeting one here soon. I'm English, you see.'

'That's OK, we can run off before he gets here and go to the mountains and catch fish and no-one will ever find us there.'

'No, that just wouldn't *do*, I'm afraid.'

'I'm a famous writer, I do that all the time, I also write true sentences. We could have such fun and do secret things to each other and catch fish and row around at night on lakes.'

'*Could* we? Oh, it *does* sound *awfully* nice.'

'Yes.'

'Oh it does sound *so* nice.'

'Yes it does.'

'OK then, let's go!' We got up from the table and I fell over and broke my knee.

'Ouch.' I said.

'Oh my *darling!* My *poor, poor* darling!'

'I'll be OK,' I said.

'What are we to *do!*'

'I'll be OK, I'll just lie here and I'll be OK in a little while. But maybe I'll die first.'

'My poor *darling!*' said the girl, cradling my head in her lap and I could smell the scent of her perfume.

A strong, tall, handsome Spanish boy came in and walked over to where I was lying on the floor and the girl was cradling my head in her lap.

'Darling!' she said and stood up and let go of my head and it banged on the floor. She threw her arms around the big, tall Spanish boy and kissed him.

'Oh darling, I've missed you! How I've *missed* you so!' The Spanish boy looked at me. My knee was hurting where it had broken.

'Who is this?' he said in Spanish, so I didn't understand him.

'Oh, he's *nobody,*' said the girl, 'Come, let's go darling, let's go to another café and have a case of champagne!'

I watched the pretty girl and her Spanish boy walk out of the café and down the Boulevard St Michel and my knee hurt and I was the only one left in the café then, except for the waiter.

## SHAKESPEARE AND COMPANY

**I**n those days there was no money to buy books so I would go down to Sylvie's Bookshop on the Rue de l'Odéon to borrow books and we also had a book club meeting there once a week. It was a nice bookshop. I liked to go early before the meetings to talk to Sylvie about who was the best writer in the world and look at the photographs of them on the walls.

Sylvie was the only person in the world who was nice to me. She used to ask me about my writing and worry about me and ask, 'Your arms and legs look thin, Ernest. Did you have lunch today?'

'Yes,' I would say.

'What did you have?'

'A *café au lait*, a carafe of cold white wine, *dos cervezas*, *treize* Pernods, a rum St James, two bottles of whiskey, some cloudy stuff that tastes like liquorices and comes in a cow's udder, a brandy and soda and a case of champagne.'

'To eat, Ernest, what did you have to eat?'

'Oh. I must have forgotten to eat.'

'You mustn't forget to eat, Ernest, really you mustn't.'

'OK.' I said.

Miss Stein also came to our book club meetings. Sometimes she came early too and we would sit and talk about who was the best writer in the world, only they didn't have a picture of her up on the wall.

'You must not read dead writers like the ones on the wall,' she would say.

'Why?'

'Because they're dead, you must only read alive writers.'

'But they look alive to me up there.'

'They're dead, you mustn't read them.'

'Does that mean I'll only be a good writer when I'm dead?'

'You'll never be a good writer, you're *inaccrochable*'

'Oh. So you didn't like the story I showed you?'

'No, it's *inaccrochable*.'

'Oh.'

Miss Stein always came to our meetings with her friend. She brought her friend to talk to the wives only none of us brought our wives anymore because they were embarrassing. So Miss Stein's friend had to sit by herself and do needlework while we waited for the others to come. 'When does James come in?' I asked.

'Don't mention him in my company!' said Miss Stein. If you mentioned James twice in her company you got excommunicated from the book club and you weren't allowed to come back again.

*Mother died today. Or was it yesterday? I forget. I killed her. I refused to get down on my knees and pray for her, so she died. Received the telegram: MOTHER DEAD COME HOME DAD. I shall have to borrow money to catch a boat. Will miss the book club meeting again. Ce la vie.*

*-I wonder where I can get the money. Damn mother for dying, how inconvenient. Ernest owes me money, he owes everybody money, that bastard. I will go to the book club meeting and ask for money. I hear Pound is collecting money these days for deserving writers. I'm a deserving writer. The most deserving writer out of the whole wretched lot of them.*

*-Moo tookoo tralalalala. Ad majoram Dei gloriam! Ich bin ein Austlander. Au revoir Mon Fere, mon Pere, mon Mere. There I go again, bloody Torettes Syndrome, I'm talking in tongues again. I must go to confession. No, I must go to the book club to get money. By God, here's a church I shall go in and confess my Sins.*

*-But first I shall go to the beach for a swim and hear the mermaids sing and watch the nymphs lift their skirts and expose themselves to me. Maybe I will masturbate. Perhaps it will be rather more expedient to go to a whorehouse.*

\*

'Well,' said Sylvie, 'I hope James comes in today, it's his fortieth birthday. I baked a cake. We are also expecting the first editions of his new book *The Greatest Book Ever Written*. I hope he comes. I spent my whole life's savings getting his book published. It's being proofread by God now. I hope He doesn't censor it, or ban it! He said He'd put it in the hands

of the train driver to bring to us as soon as He was done reading it. Oh, I do hope He finishes reading it today.'

'It's not the greatest book ever written. I wrote the greatest book ever written, only nobody's ever read it! Nobody's ever read anything I've ever written. And I asked you not to mention that man in my company. He's *inaccrochable*,' said Miss Stein.

We waited a long time and while we were waiting and talking, that unsuccessful rapist, Wyndham Lewis came in. He had on a long black raincoat, only it wasn't raining, and he lurked in the back looking at the books on the very top shelf that had plastic wrappers on them and he glared at us out of his beady eyes under his big, wide-brimmed black hat.

Sylvie got cross when she noticed that he had taken out a pair of scissors and was cutting the letters out of books and putting them in a bag. She told him to stop, so he sat down and sulked and started drawing a self-portrait.

Then Ezra came bounding in. He was my favourite. He liked my stories, he liked everybody's stories, he liked everybody. He was a very Christian fellow. He even liked Wyndham Lewis.

'Sorry I'm late,' he said, 'I was waiting for James' book at the station of the metro. A station of the metro, hm, has a nice ring to it? Amongst the crowd ... in a metro station. Anyway. It seems the book didn't arrive. God has a few objections to James' book, even though I liked it. Well I've only read the first two pages, but I liked those. The faces of the crowd at a metro station ... like petals.'

'Lilac petals?' I said.

'No, Ernest, just plain petals. You mustn't use adjectives anymore. This is a new wave.'

'Oh.'

'You must cut out all the adjectives, conjunctions, similes, metaphors, adverbs, prepositions, the whole lot.' Maybe that's what Wyndham Lewis was doing to Sylvie's books, I thought.

'That's a bunch of words to cut out,' I said. 'I know another American who even leaves out punctuation; he must be very good at this new wave?'

'Yes,' said Ezra.

'The apparitions, that's a good word do you not think, the apparitions of petals ... hm? I wonder if you can write a poem that's only two lines long?' said Ezra.

'Of course you cannot,' said Miss Stein. 'I know. I am an expert on literature and art; I write books about it all the time, only people do not read them.'

'If you can leave out adjectives and those other kind of words, maybe you can leave out the whole rest of stories, and poems, like an iceberg?' I said.

'Stop being *inacprochable*,' said Miss Stein.

'You may be onto something there. I'll go home tonight and write to my friend in London and see what he thinks about that idea. I don't think he'll agree though,' said Ezra.

Ezra's friend in London was Mr. Eliot. Ezra said he was a good poet. A great poet. Maybe the Greatest Poet in the Whole History of the World. Ezra took a collection at each book club meeting to buy Mr. Eliot some more coffee spoons so he could tunnel out of the bank where was being kept prisoner like that other American I knew who left out punctuation and couldn't even spell and wrote a novel by mistake once when he was in prison.

Or maybe Major Eliot (I sometimes got mixed up with all Ezra's friends and called Mr. Eliot, Major Eliot) was going to use the money to get hair replacement therapy for his head or take his trousers to the tailor because apparently they didn't fit so well anymore. Maybe that was because he also forgot to eat like the rest of us. Maybe that was also why his concentration span was too short and he kept forgetting what his poem was about and would

have to start again, only he forgot to cross out the other parts before he sent it to get published. It was all very confusing. I didn't understand things so good. I was only learning.

'Ladies and Gentlemen, I think we...'

'Me and Ezra and Major Eliot aren't gentlemen. Mr. Ford Maddox Ford says Americans can't be gentlemen,' I said.

'Oh dear. I'm sorry to hear that, Ernest, perhaps you'd like another drink?' said Sylvie.

'Don't mind if I do,' I said and drank a bottle of Scotch. 'When does Shakespeare come in?' I asked.

'No, you are not allowed to mention Shakespeare anymore. He's *passé*. Racist, sexist, colonialist, irrelevant and boring. As I was saying before I was interrupted,' said Sylvie, 'I think we should get started. I was hoping James would be joining us. I'm expecting lines around the block soon as people queue up to buy his book, the *Greatest Book Ever Written*. Although we may be changing the title, it seems catchy one-word titles are all the rage these days. It seems the book's been delayed, however, so has James. We'll have to sell them Ezra's friend's poem. We can tell them it's the Greatest Poem Ever written? Do you think we'll get away with it?'

'Never!' Said Miss Stein, standing up, 'I'm leaving! You'll not hear from me again. You're all *une generation perdue*. Shame on the lot of you. Goodbye.'

She went and her friend went too. So that was how it ended with Miss Stein. I went to visit her once after that. But while I was standing in the living room looking at the pictures and trying to make out what was what, I heard Miss Stein talking to her friend. She was begging and pleading and saying something about 'pussy'. I got scared because it sounded rude and I'm American and my mother raised me good and proper, so I ran away and didn't go visit her again.

*That was heavenly. Oh heaven in the sweet folds of woman. I will not repent. I will not serve. I shall get on a ship and go sailing around the world and take my book to the far corners of the globe. I shall set sail like that odd Greek fellow. The undeserving, unwashed heathen don't appreciate my genius on this miserable island!*

*-By gads, where am I again? Is this an island? I forget. Let me stop and try to remember. - Cannot. Not to worry. I'll leave this place, wherever the hell I am. I'll leave that crazy bitch wife of mine too, get my lawyer to send her a divorce letter while I'm gone and I'll get a new wife. That bastard Ernest does it all the time.*

*-I shall voyage forth and sample all the delights of the flesh in every dark and steamy corner of every den and dark and dingy den and oh, dear god, I shall have to go back to the whorehouse now.*

'We could sell them my poem, I've almost got it, just a few less words and it's done. It's the novelty factor they're after, after all. The longest book in the world ever, the shortest poem, whatever, they'll buy it. Does your printer work? I don't have the right driver for mine, can't get the bloody thing to print at all,' said Ezra.

'No, my printer's obsolete; you can't buy the cartridges for them anymore. We shall have to print it by hand. Or there's this new way, apparently, where you don't even need paper or anything, you just publish, like, in outer space, or something, and everybody in the world can read your stuff and they pay you too. You get rich instantly, only there's no cash. Or something like that, I'm not sure how it all works, exactly,' said Sylvie.

'Holy sh-t that's the way we'll do it!' said Ezra, 'Perfect for a new wave!'

I was getting dizzy, maybe because of forgetting to eat at lunch. And I didn't understand all this about poetry. I was just learning to be a writer and didn't understand about poetry and new waves.

'But Ezra,' said Sylvie, 'It's not really a poem is it? It's only two lines long.'

'And a title.'

'OK, two lines and a title. I just don't think people will buy it.'

'We'll sell the movie rights then!'

'By God, Ezra! I hadn't thought of that! We'll make a killing! OK, I'll publish it, but I want a proper contract. Fifty, fifty, not like that bastard Joyce. I've squandered my life's savings on that bastard and now his book's been banned by God.'

'Why is William Faulkner standing out there looking through the window?' I asked.

'Shame, he's shy. Just leave him alone, Ernest.'

'Shall we wave? Wave to William. Yoo-hoo, William, come on in and have a drink with us, don't be shy!'

'Look, you frightened him away, that wasn't very nice, Ernest.'

'Goddamn Americans are everywhere, you can't even turn around and there's another one staring you in the face. I have to go now and have lunch,' I said and left.

I walked down the *Rue Descartes* and up the *Rue St Germain* and all over the *Place Contretemps*, crossed the Rue Lemontea or something, stopped to piss on some statue of some geezer in a park, had seven scotch and sodas in *de Café of Maggots*, forgot to have lunch and decided to go home to my wife, but I couldn't remember where I lived, or whether I had a wife anymore. So I walked down the quay on the left bank of the Seine and I stopped at the booksellers stalls because I needed a few answers and always found them in books or booze.

‘Do you have any books in English?’ I asked the *proprietesse* with whom I had become friends. She was nice, like Sylvie. I was going to ask Sylvie one day to sell the movie rights to my stories and publish them in outer space, or to marry me. Maybe I would ask the *proprietesse* of the bookstall to marry me. The *proprietesse* at the bookstall didn’t know about good books in English.

‘Ow can you tell if it’s a good book in Eenglish?’ she asked me.

‘It gets banned by God.’

‘Ah.’

‘So how can you tell if it’s a good book in French?’ I asked.

‘Well, first there is the binding. All books in Eenglish are bound imperfectly, because the Eenglish are such cheap bastard. Then there are the picture. We, the French, had a revolution so we could have the good kind of picture in our book.’

‘I see,’ I said and I took a look at the pictures in one book and they were much nicer than the ones in Miss Stein’s house where you couldn’t see the good bits and the women were funny colours and funny shapes and their thighs were too fat and their arms too long. In these pictures you could see everything and the women were the right shape.

‘You mustn’t let Wyndham Lewis get hold of these books.’ I said.

‘Eh? Oo?’ said the *proprietesse*.

‘Wyndham Lewis? The unsuccessful rapist? Looks like a bullfrog? Carries scissors in his raincoat? Here’s a picture.’ I showed her the one Lewis had done in the bookshop before Sylvie had caught him at the back shelves again, molesting the pictures in her books and thrown him out.

‘Ah. I ‘av seen eem before. I weel watch out for eem.’

‘Do you have any English dictionaries?’

‘*Non.*’

'Oh. Do you know what *inaccrochable* means?'

'*Non*. Thees ees France. We do not speak Eenglish here and I do not have the English dictionary.'

'Oh. Do you have any French dictionaries?'

'*Non*. I have sold them all to the Americans.'

'Oh. Do you know what a *une generation perdue* is?'

'*Oui*. That is your generation. The whole meeserable lot of you.'

'Oh.' I said.

University of Cape Town

## FRENCH INTENSIVE

*Yes, he'd say again,  
she had been beautiful, he'd been in luck -  
of that there was no doubt. But this long after -  
it was years after - that which still lived on  
was not her eyes, her hair, the other loveliness.  
What remained in memory, all else grown indistinct -  
what he'd never forgotten, though it was long ago -  
was that she'd given herself to him, out of  
desire for him. – Stephen Watson*

Once upon a time you may meet a French assistant film director ten years your senior and she may return your affections and you may wind up entwined with her in the salt and sweat and sun and sex of a Cape Town summer and you won't expect much more than that when she leaves as suddenly as she arrived ten days earlier. But the taste of her may linger, and sometime in the year without her that follows, you may decide to pursue her to Paris. When that happens, there are a few things you may want to do, or not do, as the case may be:

Firstly, learn the language. You might want to pick up French Intensive in preparation for your *sojourn*. If you happen to be studying at university, the credit points will count towards your BA degree, and you've always wanted to learn French like everybody does for some reason. You will have a really good reason now. Your lover's English may be better than your French will ever be, no doubt about that, but there's something in your commitment to learning your lover's language that suggests, well, commitment. There's also something in the way she whispers, 'I wish you could understand French, there's so much I want to say to you that English simply doesn't have the words for,' that'll motivate you to new heights in linguistic pursuit.

Unfortunately, those aren't the words they'll teach you in French Intensive. They'll teach you about conjugating verbs that have nothing to do with what it is you hope your lover has in mind for you. You'll flounder under the weight of subject verb agreement, masculine and feminine nouns, definite and indefinite articles. You'll buckle under the embarrassment of pronunciation and the pressure of oral performance, and you'll land up with a vocabulary consisting of *un café sil vous plait* and *vous voulez a couche avec moi* which is the only thing anybody outside of France knows in French because they heard it all the time in that bloody song.

So, if you don't pay attention and don't do all your homework in French Intensive, not only will you fail the course and lose your credit points, but your pillow talk will also be less stimulating than you had hoped for when you eventually make it to Paris in the summertime. Also, you'll have difficulty comprehending what's going on when, on your first day in the City of Love, you're strolling arm-in-arm with your lover through her neighbourhood and a fierce-looking local starts gabbing in your face and gesticulating towards the camera in your hand. Perhaps he'd like his picture taken with me, you'll wonder, maybe he doesn't get to see people in khaki shorts and short white socks often? You'll start to understand, however, when he pulls out a knife and upgrades the volume and tone of his demands.

When faced with this scenario, you should defer further negotiations to your lover. There'll be things she'd like to say to this guy that they don't have words for in English either. Not only will your lover be gorgeous and glamorous and once star in a black-and-white French film called *Paris*, but she'll also *tune* the bastard trying to mug you in his *moer*, she'll tell him to stop being a prick and to fuck off and leave you alone. Or something like that; you'd know for sure if you'd only paid more attention in French 101. Maybe he will actually leave you alone, he'll threaten to kill you if he ever sees you again, but at least you'll keep your camera and your life for the time being.

Dress to kill. Not only will khaki shorts and short white socks attract knife-wielding muggers, but there are other side effects of not looking the part in the town that spawned Yves Saint Laurent. You may have deduced from prevailing campus fashion trends that wearing your T-shirt on the outside of your long-sleeve top is cool as hell, but it seems that they have better ideas about what's cool as hell in the fashion capital of the world. (Whoever thought up that stupid fashion trend should be made to parade his foolish ass around Charles De Gaul Airport, dressed like the sartorial dyslexic he is). Your fashion *faux pas* will be even worse if

your wardrobe consists of brightly-coloured surf-wear that you're sure is cool as hell. Your lover will take one look at you when you stroll through customs, and instead of jumping into your open arms, she'll ask you, 'Why are you dressed like you're arriving for a surfing contest?'

Dump the excess baggage. So you did manage to leave your surfboard at home, despite a prospective trip to Portugal which has some of the best surf in Europe, but you still land up taking a duffel as big as a body bag, full of shit you're never going to use. You won't need a wetsuit, for example. A diving mask, flippers? You're very unlikely to need those either. Six books, including a copy of *Anna Karenina* as thick as the King James? Nah.

Then there are the gifts for your lover, chosen for size so that there's room for things like wetsuits: Massage oil from Woolworths, an 'ocean scented' candle, a pair of 'silk' panties from Mr. Price. It's the thought that counts, hey? Think harder than that.

So, you end up dragging all this crap around fit to slip a disc, through the streets of London, for a start, and after you've had eight pints of Guinness you'll bump into a bloke who recoils in mock horror and says, 'Felt an arm and a leg in there, mate!' They are very witty in London. You'll soon lose your sense of humour when you're through dragging your body bag all over three cities for three weeks. In Paris, yes it's true, they don't have a sense of humour; try bumping your bag into a Parisian and she'll do some verbal damage the gist of which'll scar you worse than a switchblade.

It's also advisable to leave the other kind of excess baggage behind. You might have read about the new-age man in the *Cosmo* or *Marie Claire*, (yes, you should read the *Cosmo* and *Marie Claire*) who's not afraid to reveal his feelings, show his vulnerabilities and blab on about all his feelings and failings and unsuccessful relationships with women in the past and how he can't believe a gorgeous film star *smaaks* him. Save it for a shrink.

Leave your ego and unrealistic ambitions at home too. You may think you're Ernest Hemingway since you did a seminar on him at university and read *A Moveable Feast*, and you hatch plans to write your first novel at sidewalk cafes while your French wife goes out to make movies and money to support you. You'll discover soon enough, over two half-pints of beer (which you keep forgetting the French word for), at one of those sidewalk cafes, that your prospective wife will have other plans for the rest of her life that don't include you.

Take money. You might think you're pretty clever having financed your little *rendezvous amoureux* through a series of careful scams such as a plane ticket bought out of the proceeds of a student loan, a credit card fraudulently applied for on the Internet, three thousand French Francs borrowed to bribe the visa tyrants into believing you can support yourself in their outrageously expensive country and a further contribution towards your travel fund from your lover, earned perhaps by emotional blackmail. But the problem with going to an outrageously expensive country, or two, without any money (your Internet credit card won't work when you get there) is that you can't pay for anything.

It may sound wonderful to have somebody else pay for everything, but soon you'll begin to feel that you're perpetrating another scam, or you'll just feel like a whore. You may find yourself becoming overzealous in the sexual favours department which could prove very trying when you discover that your lover knows exactly where the alleged g-spot is, is adept at multiple orgasms and says things like, 'I could do *zees* all night!'

Do the driving. This has less to do with the misconception that women are bad drivers because they normally take the train in Paris, or ride bicycles, and more to do with the contention that men can't read maps. If you're visiting a country like Portugal, where they're

not so big on roads and maps in the first place, you're really going to ruin a friendship when your lover has to pull over to the side of the road, take the map from you, give it, and then you, a hard look, and turn the car around and drive in completely the opposite direction to the one in which you've been going for the last hundred kilometers.

Know your oats. If you're in Portugal, a country famous for its seafood, in a town famous for having been frequented by a famous Romantic poet, in a restaurant that has to be famous for charging a hundred thousand Escudos for a piece of fish, don't go and order a steak smothered in cheese, even if it happens to be a French cheese. That is not going to impress anyone (maybe you could take Portuguese 101 too so you'd know what to order that would impress someone.)

Trust me on the sunscreen. You might think your skin is as tough as the African sun is fierce, but there's something about a face the shade of *binnepoes* pink that tends to make your eagerly anticipated lovemaking trysts a painful experience.

And when you've made love for the last time on the last night with the person who holds your heart, and you lie awake knowing that you must leave the next day and may never feel the quietly sleeping shape of her beside you again, smile when the irony is not lost on you that the song playing on the radio right then is Billie Holiday's *It Was Just One of Those Things*.

## LYLE

**M**y friend Carl once fell in love with a girl called Lyle from East London. He was twenty-three and she was sixteen and small and commanded a body that could make a man ache so much with desire that he would wish he was dead rather than feel like that.

Carl had that feeling when he saw Lyle, but he thought to himself that a man might as well die trying to make love to a girl like that, so he went over to talk to her because he didn't know that she was only sixteen and it was probably illegal even just to talk to her.

When Carl got over to where Lyle was standing at the bar, he realized that he hadn't thought of anything to say to her because he'd been too busy thinking about dying. So when he stood in front of her and she raised a soft, perfect eyebrow, Carl said, "Whhaaa, eeere, er, um," which she didn't understand and she looked at him and took a sip of her cider.

Carl was very worried because he thought he might have lost his powers of speech, or his mind, so he took a sip of his beer and was relieved that he still seemed to have motor function control.

“Sorry?” said Lyle and she leaned forward just slightly, dislodging a strand of perfect, long, all-the-way-to-the-roots-blond hair from behind an ear. She was wearing pink panties, the rims of which ever-so-slightly peeked out above the waistline of her jeans.

“Weeeayr,” said Carl by accident because what he meant to say was, “Hello,” or something very witty.

Lyle leaned back a little and looked up at Carl, took another sip of her cider and walked away.

Carl was very disappointed in himself for the linguistic failure, but since he was at the bar he decided to order a double tequila in aid of recovery and he turned to the man next to him at the bar and said, “I wa, I waa, I waaa, I waant, I want to speak better.”

While Lyle went off to make other men ache with desire, Carl sat at the bar thinking about her. He had another double shot of tequila and thought he might go and try to talk to her again because she was the most beautiful girl he had ever seen in his whole life.

Our friend, Lewis, who is wont to mix his sporting metaphors, always says that a man has to keep swinging the bat when it comes to women, even if the ball keeps beating the outside edge. “Just got to keep stepping up to the plate and swinging the bat,” Lewis would say when the girls kept running away from him. Carl thought about that.

“Hello,” he said to the man next to him at the bar, who had not been impressed by the last outburst and was not warming to Carl’s advances now.

“Hello, hello, hello,” said Carl.

“Look, *boet*, I don’t know what your problem is, but don’t get any funny ideas, alright,” said the man and stood up and went away, shaking his head.

Satisfied that he could speak again, Carl lit out across the crowded dance floor in search of Lyle. It was school holidays, so the dance floor was packed with nearly-naked teenagers sweating and wriggling around and bumping up against each other and pretending to enjoy it.

When Carl found Lyle she was standing outside on the balcony looking out over the ocean. He rested his arms next to hers on the railing and said, "Hello."

Lyle looked at him and smiled, which he hadn't expected and it almost caused his heart to stop beating. She said, "Hi," and took another sip of her cider and waited to see if Carl would try to make strange noises at her again.

"Sorry about that, back there," said Carl.

Lyle smiled again and Carl thought that his heart was going to beat to death. No heart could take that much of a pounding and keep on functioning normally. He wondered if Lyle was falling in love with him too. It would take another thirty years for Carl to realize that women are not capable of loving men. Not really. And who can blame them. They love each other and they love their children, but they cannot love men. Not really.

"What's your name?" Carl asked.

"Lyle," said Lyle.

"That's a pretty name. As pretty as you are," said Carl by accident because what he meant to say was, "I love you," or something very witty.

"Oh," said Lyle and she blushed. It was the most adorable thing Carl had ever seen in his whole life and he got a lump in his throat and almost started crying.

"Whhhe. whyaaar," he started saying, so he looked away and hoped the moisture around the edges of his eyes would dry quickly.

"Where are you from?" he asked.

“East London,” said Lyle and it sounded like she said *Shundun*, because people from East London speak like that.

“Are you on holiday in Durban then?”

“Sort of. My boyfriend was surfing in the competition, you know, we came up for the weekend.”

“Oh,” said Carl and just then a boy about a head taller than he with hair as blonde as Lyle’s and much more of it than Carl had, stumbled across the balcony and wrapped a big, bare arm around Lyle’s head and kissed her on the top of it, “We’re going to Rudi’s now” he said. Lyle smiled sweetly up at her boyfriend, or she tried to, but it was hard with her face buried in his armpit like that, and she nodded and told the armpit, “OK.” The boy looked at Carl. He said, “Howzit, bru.”

“Howzit,” said Carl and the boy sloped off with Lyle’s head under his arm, back through the thronged orgy on the dance floor while Carl looked over the balcony railing and thought about jumping off, but it didn’t look high enough so he decided not to. Carl thought about Lyle every minute of every day for a week after that. He also went and checked out some higher buildings in the city. But after a while he decided that the gravity of his feelings did not merit such a dramatic response and he sought refuge in more mundane forms of relief from the symptoms of Love: masturbation, insomnia, tequila, long surfing sessions until it was too dark to see the shore, and forgetting to eat.

After a week, Carl had managed to convince himself that there was something in the way that Lyle had smiled, and that blush, that bespoke of the possibility of everlasting Love between them and he decided that it was their destiny to be together.

So he called up the editor of the local surfing magazine, whom he knew since he was starting to get some of his photographs published in the magazine. Lyle’s boyfriend had done well in the surfing contest that weekend, finishing in the top four with a performance that had

the surf industry bandying about the words “the next big thing” (again), so Carl suggested to the editor of the surfing magazine that he was planning a trip down the coast and would they be interested in a few photographs of the next-big-thing-surf-hero-boy? The editor made typically non-committal noises about not really commissioning work and not being able to pay much, but maybe they would have a look at something on spec if it was up to scratch. A profile and photos would be preferable, the editor said. Carl said he’d see what he could do and asked for Lyle’s boyfriend’s phone number.

He withdrew the last of his savings and with most of it he bought a 1981 Volkswagen from an Indian who gave him “special price for you” and he left early on a Thursday morning with his surfboard and without telling anyone where he was going.

He arrived in Jeffries Bay at sunset in time for a perfect four foot session at Supertubes which buoyed his heart and made him believe that there is a god and it is Love and Supertubes.

After a supper of peanut butter biscuits, Carl slept in his car in the parking lot and woke before dawn to a void of sound which signalled that Supertubes had gone flat. He slept on until the sun made an appearance and had a breakfast of peanut butter biscuits and then went to the Spar and bought a dozen red roses. He called the number he’d been given by the editor of the surfing magazine. There was no answer so he left a message. He said he was a talent scout and that a world-renowned fashion photographer had spotted Lyle during the surfing contest in Durban and was interested in her doing a screen test for a movie he was developing, and would she be interested? Carl said that he would be happening to be passing through East London that night and was Lyle interested, perhaps, in meeting at, say, Numbers nightclub? (It was the only place Carl knew of in East London). Then Carl set out to drive the twelve hours it took to happen to pass through East London.

He covered about ten of them before the engine of his specially-priced car blew up. The carburetor it was, or maybe it was the gearbox, nevertheless, something pretty necessary blew up and the car stopped going. Forward. So Carl drove about six kilometers in reverse until a sharp turn and a big ditch and the lack of adequate tail lighting convinced him of the folly of driving backwards the rest of the way to East London.

He called Rescue 911 from his cell phone and told them he'd accidentally driven backwards off the road into a ditch and required the services of a tow truck. When the person at Rescue 911 asked him where he was, he looked around and said, "About two hours from East London. There are some cows. And some bushes." He then called Lyle's boyfriend's number and left a message because there was no answer again. He said he'd been held up in an emergency meeting with one of the principal stars in the film project and would it be alright if they met the following night? He was terribly sorry, he said.

A tow truck driver called Carl on his cell phone and sounded half asleep or drunk, or both, and he asked what the problem was and Carl told him his camshaft or maybe it was the radiator had blown up and he'd therefore driven off the road backwards into a ditch. The tow truck driver said, "So, what am I supposed to do about it?"

"Shit, china," said Carl, "Are you a tow truck company? Well, then I expect you to come and tow my bloody car!" The tow truck driver had to agree that this sounded logical, however inconvenient at this time of the night, but it was likely to prove rather costly for Carl. He didn't use those exact words. Carl said that he didn't care about the cost and he gave the tow truck driver directions to the ditch. He told him about the cows. And then he tipped the front seat of the car back and fell asleep and woke up later when he felt the car wobble because a tow truck had driven passed at 150 kilometers an hour. He climbed out of the car and waited about twenty minutes until a tow truck drove passed in the opposite direction at

150 kilometers an hour. The tow truck found Carl on the third pass. He must have seen the cows. They were grazing close to the road edge. They said, "Moo," and looked at Carl.

The tow truck driver was wearing an oily, sleeveless tank top which barely covered his belly and a half-smoked cigarette hung from the corner of his mouth. "*Ja-sis my broe*," he said inspecting the car in the ditch, "how did you manage to do this?" Carl told him he had been trying to drive backwards to East London to see about a girl called Lyle whom he had met in Durban and the tow truck driver laughed like it was the funniest thing he had ever heard in his whole life. He must have felt bad for giving Carl a hard time on the telephone and was trying to make up for it. When he told Carl that it would cost about a thousand Rand, special price, to tow his car out of the ditch to East London, Carl laughed like it was the funniest thing he had ever heard in his whole life. Carl always laughs when he's desperate. The more dire the situation, the more hysterical the laughter, and all of us who know Carl know how dire he can arrange for things to get, sorry for you if you happen to be around when one of Carl's seemingly good ideas turns dire. And when he starts with the laughing, you know things are only going to get worse and you just want to punch his lights out. Carl told the tow truck driver that he could have the car. "Hey?" said the tow truck driver.

"Have it. Keep the fucking car?" offered Carl when he had finished laughing, "as long as I can get a lift to East London?"

Carl took his surfboard and his backpack and his bunch of red roses out of his ex-car and found a place for them in the tow truck, which was then attached to the car and the truck pulled it out of the ditch while the cows watched and ate the grass.

It was almost 3 A.M when they reached the outskirts of East London. Carl asked the tow truck driver to drop him off at the Star Stop and he took his surfboard and his backpack and bunch of roses and went to find a place to sleep because he was exhausted. He found a little depression on the lawn around the back of the Star Stop, behind some bushes, and he

used his surfboard cover as a mattress and climbed into his sleeping bag and fell asleep immediately to the distant and somehow comforting sound of the occasional car rushing by on the freeway.

Carl woke up wet. He looked up at the sky and he could see stars, so it probably wasn't raining, but the depression he was in was now a puddle and he was about to drown in it. Carl leopard-crawled in his sleeping bag to higher ground, steering around the pop-up lawn sprinklers, and he came to rest out of their range, close to the freeway. He lay shivering in the near-dawn, watching the stars disappear and listening to the steadily increasing hiss of traffic, only now it did not sound so comforting.

It suddenly occurred to Carl that he may have been overly hasty in his current course of action and he thought it would probably be a good idea to call the whole thing off and go home. He felt around in his flooded pockets and his sodden backpack for his cell phone, but he couldn't find it. He retraced his leopard-crawl, back through the maddening sprinklers and found his cell phone at the bottom of the puddle in the depression. The cell phone didn't work anymore. Carl took it apart as far as it seemed obvious to do so and he went to the Star Stop toilets and held the pieces under the hand dryer for an hour and when he put them together again his phone still didn't work anymore.

Carl decided to have something other than peanut butter biscuits to eat, and re-assess his options. He took a table at the Wimpy in the Star Stop and ordered a Farm-house Breakfast and bottomless black coffee and a newspaper and he sat for some hours and ate his breakfast and read the newspaper until he felt better and forgot to re-assess his options.

He arranged with the garage attendants to leave his surfboard and backpack in their *possie* for a small fee and he took his dog-eared red roses and walked up to the freeway and set about hitching a lift into town. No-one stopped for him because they thought he was a

rose-seller or a serial killer, both careers which rate fairly low in the estimation of the average South African motorist.

Carl got fairly disillusioned with Love and life in general and he trudged back to the Star Stop and accosted the nearest motorist who had stopped to fill up with petrol and he demanded a lift to East London, but the motorist said, "No thanks," and waved her hand at Carl and rolled up her window and looked the other way. Carl spotted a minibus taxi filling up and he went over and asked the driver how much it would cost to get to town and it didn't sound like so much to Carl even though he was nearly broke.

He asked the taxi driver to drop him at the beach and he sat on a bench with his roses and looked at the waves. There wasn't much swell, only one to two foot, under a dogging onshore. It was mid-afternoon and, like Adam Duritz sings, that's when it all hurts the most, so Carl found a beachfront coffee shop and ordered bottomless black coffee (which he never drank with sugar) and a newspaper and he wondered what he was going to do with his life. He didn't have much luck figuring it out, so he just sat in the coffee shop and the waitress was quite cute and he wondered if he was falling in Love with her too and there was something in the way she smiled and kept bringing him coffee refills.

It started getting dark and Carl noticed that the waitress had gone without saying goodbye and leaving her phone number and collecting the generous tip he was planning to give her. He had even planned to give her the roses and offer her a starring role in his alleged movie, if she wanted it.

Carl decided to get ready for his meeting with Lyle at Numbers, so he went to the nearest pharmacy and sprayed on some of his favourite brand of deodorant, Wild Spice, when no-one was watching, and on a whim he bought a box of three chocolate-flavoured condoms he'd once seen in an advert in a magazine in the CNA. He'd wondered what chocolate-flavoured condoms tasted like. He then went to a beachfront bar and ordered a double tequila

and wondered how he was going to get back to Durban because he didn't have much money left and he wondered if giving away his car had been rather impulsive, so he checked his cell phone to see if he had the tow truck driver's phone number, but his cell phone still didn't work anymore.

Carl got to Numbers very early. He was the first one in and he sat at the bar for four hours watching the door until he forgot to eat and he drank double tequilas instead. Numbers was one of those huge Hollywood-style night clubs, with a mezzanine level over-looking the dance floor which gradually flooded with nearly naked teenagers who began sweating and wriggling around and bumping up against each other and pretending to enjoy it.

Carl had given up his vigil by the door by then and decided that Lyle wasn't coming. He stood up and went to the railing overlooking the dance floor and he looked down, but it was too dark to see anyone and the strobe light interfered badly with his tequila-addled brain. When Carl looked up from the dance floor he saw Lyle across on the opposite side of the club, on the mezzanine level. She had her arms on the railing and her hair showered down over her creamy shoulders and she was looking down onto the dance floor like Carl had been doing. Carl knew it was Lyle by the way his heart started pounding like the first time he had met her. He threaded his way through the bodies between him and her, holding the bunch of roses aloft like the Statue of Liberty. It took him a long time to reach the other side where he had seen Lyle and when he got there she was gone. He looked out for Lyle a little more and then threaded his way back through the bodies because he thought he saw her down on the dance floor, but when he eventually got down there he knew it wasn't her because his heart wasn't beating in the same way anymore. So he turned around and started walking away and there was a girl coming towards him and it wasn't Lyle, but he gave this girl the bunch of ratty roses and the girl gasped and opened her mouth and eyes wide and placed her hand theatrically on her bosom and she looked down at the roses and buried her nose in them and

then she looked up again to better appraise her admirer with whom she had decided to try and fall in Love if needs be, but Carl had left the building by then.

University of Cape Town

## DANCING QUEEN

**I** once fell in love with a cheerleader named Tiffany from St Louis, Missouri. This was during the time that I worked as a leader on a summer camp in Bemidji, Minnesota, the most romantic place in the whole world. The summer camp that is; Bemidji is a pretty, but ordinary American college town, while the camp is set outside of the town, on a lake deep within the pine forests of the North Woods, about four hours drive from the border with Canada.

The boys' camp is on one side of the lake and the girls' is on the other, and if you are a camper, most of whom come from wealthy Jewish families in Chicago, all summer long you get to go canoeing, horse-riding, sailing, waterskiing, fishing, swimming, wind-surfing, climbing, bike-riding, play baseball and basketball and tennis and soccer, shoot guns and arrows, make pots, and other artefacts from clay, and a mess. And if you are a camp counsellor, which is what they called those of us who worked there, you get to do all of these things, as well as go down to a little bar called Squirrel's Nest at the end of a dirt track in the

woods where you can get drunk on Southern Comfort and play pool and dance and fall in love with cheerleaders.

When I met Tiffany, she was 19 and had long, brown hair and long, sun-sweetened legs and she would wear short, short denim shorts with frayed edges and she would dance the Macarena, because that was popular then. I never even really spoke to her before I fell in love with her; I just liked the look of her and the elegance with which she carried herself, unusual for such a young girl.

It is common practice among camp counsellors to rent motel rooms in the town for a night and have parties and see how many people can get drunk and fall over and sleep in one motel room. If you have enough people, it will cost you only about one dollar for a night out in a motel room. During one of those parties I sat on a double bed in a room with Tiffany and we watched MTV together while everybody else got drunk and fell down and things like that. Tiffany and I didn't speak much, just the occasional comment about what was on the MTV, and I think she might have been watching me very closely to see if I would try to make love to her. But I didn't try to make love to her then. I just sat there on the bed with her and drank MGD beer and watched the TV.

Some time around midnight the phone rang and someone answered it and listened and put the phone down and then told everybody in the motel room that Reception was going to call the police if we didn't stop having a party. In America you can call the police if there are more than twenty-seven people staying in a motel room which is only booked for four. So everybody ran out of the room like rioters dispersed by tear gas, because in the Land of the Free and the Home of the Brave, the mere sight of a policeman is enough to make you shit your pants. My new friends, Mark and Stanley from England and Jerry from Scotland, and I, didn't know this yet, so we stayed in the motel room with Tiffany and her three friends for a little longer. Then we went out back (as they say there) where there was an old, disused

railroad siding (those are everywhere in America, just like in the movies, especially out back behind single-storey, L-shaped motels with red neon signs that say: OTEL or MOT L). We hid behind some of the old train coaches on the railroad siding and smoked some cigarettes and talked about the girls back in the motel room and kept an eye out for the police. They never arrived, so we went back to the motel room and knocked on the door and one of the girls let us in. The girls were all in bed; two in one of the double beds and one on the floor and Tiffany alone in the other bed. Jerry tried to get in that bed with her and I patted him on the shoulder and jerked my head, and he nodded, because I was older and he knew that I was in love with Tiffany, so he shouldn't've even tried getting into bed with her like that. He went over to sleep on the floor and I got into the bed with Tiffany.

I could tell that she was awake and I just lay there in the bed with her and with my head and my body buzzing comfortably from the beer and a smile on my face. After a while I sidled up behind Tiffany, she was lying with her back to me, and I put my arm around her and snuggled up close to hold her. She lifted my arm into the air and she said, 'He-llo!' in a way that meant: 'What the hell do you think you are doing!' So I said, 'Er, sorry,' and I took my arm back and kept it to myself for the rest of the night and eventually drifted off to sleep.

That summer, I also fell in love with Veronica; she was Australian, and Victoria, who was Welsh, and Lucy, who was Scottish. Summer camp can be a very promiscuous place. It's nice, because if a woman there likes you, she'll tell you and she'll tell you she wants to make love to you. South African women are not like that. They won't tell you they want to make love to you, and even if they like you and want to, they'll make you bust your guts trying to get them to make love to you. But if you go to a summer camp, it is easy to make love to girls. Except cheerleaders. But, maybe, on the very last night of summer camp, you might

have a party at Squirrel's Nest where there is a keg of free beer and you can kiss all the girls you fell in love with that summer, even Tiffany.

After summer camp I was planning to drive across the United States with my new Australian friend, Mozzie the Aussie. He had bought a '78 Ford Lincoln towards the end of the camp and that night of the last party, after I had finished drinking Southern Comfort and kissing all the girls I was in love with, I drove a bunch of us in the Lincoln down to the P.A. The P.A stands for Public Access and it's a very popular place on summer camp. It's a parking lot near the lake where there is a small jetty and you can go there in your car with your girlfriend after you've been to Squirrel's Nest and you can make out like crazy in the back seat of your car, or even the front seat. (Tiffany and I would do this often many years later when I went back to the camp for another summer and she was there too).

On that night of the last party, I drove Mozzie's Lincoln with Tiffany sitting next to me on the front seat and I drove with one hand on the steering wheel and the other wrapped around Tiffany's shoulders and her head rested on one of my mine. When we got to the P.A, we sat on the jetty and I couldn't stop touching her smooth, brown legs and talking to her and seeing if I could kiss her. She wanted to know why all the boys wanted to kiss her and I can't remember what I said, but I know I told her everything I could to let me kiss her and I must have told her that she was gorgeous and that I was in love with her. And it was only when she was leaving, much later that night, when I went over to her among a group of her friends and they went on ahead of her, back to the girl's camp, and I said goodbye to her, that I got to put my arms around her and kiss her for a long time.

When I went back to summer camp all those years later, during the first party at Squirrel's Nest, after the first week of training (during which you are not allowed out of camp), I saw Tiffany again. She was there at Squirrel's Nest and she came over to me and said, 'Hey,

aren't you -?' which was my nickname at camp (everyone went by a nickname at camp) and I said, 'Yes! Aren't you - ?' Which was her nickname, and she said, 'Yeah!' So that was how we met again. We didn't talk much that night. I noticed she was dancing with a very good looking boy; he looked exactly like Bruce Willis. He was holding her around her waist and she had both her legs wrapped around his waist and was dancing like crazy with him around in circles like that.

That new summer I also fell in love with Erica, who was from England, and Veronica again because she was living in the States during that time and came up to the camp on the Fourth of July because she wanted to make love to me. So I was too busy then to fall in love with Tiffany again, but we sent each other a few notes via Intercamp Mail. Intercamp Mail is like e-mail, only better, because the notes come on real paper, sometimes with little hearts and arrows and things drawn on them, and you can keep them and read them when you get old (like about thirty) and nostalgic and want to remember those days when people were in love with you.

One day, on our day off, a group of us went up to Rutgers Resort on the lake in town where we often spent days off. There is a beach there and a swimming pool, a sauna and Jacuzzis (only they call them hot tubs in America). Tiffany was there that day and when I was in the hot tub she came over and she got into the hot tub with me and we talked and under the water one of her soft, brown legs was against mine in the bubbles. After that we went into the swimming pool and she came over to me and put her arms around my neck while we 'kidded' each other and she wrapped her legs around my waist and we kissed a few times, soft, quick kisses because we didn't want to make a big spectacle of ourselves. After that we went and had something to eat at Subway and then we went to watch a movie and that's pretty much how we spent the rest of that summer together, so I had to stop being in love with the other girls then.

Tiffany and I would go and buy ice-cream sundaes from Dairy Queen and sit on the benches on the jetties around the lake in town and make each other laugh and watch the sun set. Or we would just sit there holding on to each other and not say anything, or we would kiss. We would spend nights playing darts at Squirrel's Nest and then go and park at the P.A. in her car where I would put my hand in her pants and we would kiss, but we never made love all the way because she wanted to wait until she was married.

I had a wooden cabin on the lake all to myself that summer, except for the presence of my friend, Carl, who was also staying in the cabin (yes, Carl was there with me, but boy-oh-boy is that another story, a whole bunch of them), so some nights Tiffany would come back to our cabin and we would wrap ourselves in blankets on the couch in front of a log fire and make out, as they say there.

One time (they say it like that there), we went on a date to the State Fair and watched Carl ride a bull in the rodeo. I don't know how he talked them into letting him ride a bull. He dressed up in denim and wore a Stetson and a bandanna around his neck and sunglasses and when the bull came bounding out of the stall, Carl fell off so hard on his ass that he had to run for his life to get out of the ring before the bull gored him to death. He made me proud. While he was waiting to fall on his ass, the rodeo announcer said, 'Goddamn! This guy's from South Africa! South Africa? What the hell's he doin' here? Did the tour bus go and leave without him?'

There was a dancing competition at Squirrel's Nest one night and Tiffany entered and she danced so hard that the sweat was running off her svelte body. She was robbed, though. The so-called judges picked Daisy in first place because she was a little cuter maybe, and she had a southern accent and she wore a cowboy hat. Tiffany came second, but I thought that she should have won by a mile and I told her so when she was sitting on my lap later and I called her my dancing queen and she smiled and kept her arms around my shoulders.

On the last party of that summer, at Squirrel's Nest, while we were all busy getting as drunk as we possibly could on the free beer, more drunk than we have ever been in our whole lives (in Carl's case anyway), I was sitting with Tiffany and she said, 'I can't be with you tonight, it's over.'

I said, 'Wha ... wh... Weeaaaayr ... hey? Are you serious?'

And she said, 'Yes,' and she went to the bathroom (that's what they call a toilet there, but sometimes there actually are baths in the toilets in American bars, it's very weird) and I went to the bar where Carl was and he asked me why I looked like I'd just shat my pants. Tiffany came out of the bathroom and walked past us with a sad, side-long glance and went out through the door of Squirrel's Nest into the night.

There are three simple rules that you have to learn if you are a boy and you want to make love to girls. Number one: choose only those girls that choose you first. Number two: don't fall in love with them. And number three: when they tell you it's over; I need space; it's not you, it's me; or any combination/derivation thereof, simply walk away. Don't cry, don't beg, don't say, 'But I love you!' and fall down and go to pieces. Simply salvage whatever dignity you have left and stuff it in your backpack along with your toothbrush and anything else you might have left at her place, and turn around and walk out of the door and don't look back. Of course, when Tiffany told me that it was over that night and she walked out through that door, I ran after her.

I caught up with her at her car and I begged and I pleaded and almost cried and fell down and went to pieces and told her, 'But I love you!' Eventually she gave in and let me take her back to my cabin, while the party was only just beginning at Squirrel's Nest, and we got into my bed and she fell asleep. I now think that she was going off that night to kiss another boy by dint of some clandestine arrangement. Poor fucking bastard must have

wondered what happened to her. I hope he's still out there in the woods waiting for her, the  
*poes*.

Anyway, some time during my pledge of undying love, it seems I must have promised to go and live with Tiffany down in St Louis, Missouri. She must not have heard me say maybe, and just like in the song by Jack Johnson (which was pretty much the theme song at camp that summer), 'maybe pretty much always means no.' I'm sure I said maybe, but then again when you are not so sure at all about something, you'll say: 'I'm sure I said -?' If you were sure of something, you would say: 'I said - '

After summer camp ends, a few of us usually stay for some extra work. There's a week when ex-campers now grown up, or parents of current campers, come up to the North Woods and the camp is turned into something of a lakeside resort. After that, there's some painting and fixing to be done and preparation of the campus for the following summer. You earn good money this way and in your off time you get a private resort all to yourself and a few mates.

So while I was up there doing such, Tiffany and I swapped a few intimate e-mails, and soon fall (that's what they call autumn in America) crept in, a very beautiful time in the North Woods of Minnesota. The tree leaves turn gold and crimson and amber and families of deer, scared witlessly away by the chaos of the summer in full swing, now come right up to the paths and trails around camp. You can stop within metres of them and watch them grazing in the undergrowth. It begins to turn very cold, for soon the lake will freeze over and the locals will drive their cars across it for a short-cut into town. One by one, those of us still working then, now life-long friends, solidify plans and pack and drift away to get lost somewhere in America, sometimes never to be seen again. I set a departure date and I booked a Greyhound ticket to St Louis, Missouri and I told Tiffany I might be arriving on such-and-such date. I'm sure I said might.

But a few days before my intended departure, I changed my mind and decided to stay on for an extra week with Carl (who was going to go surfing in Peru with our new best American friend, Derek, who didn't know how to surf, but wanted to learn). Carl says I changed my mind about going to St Louis because I knew I wasn't going to get 'knobbed'. He said if I knew Tiffany would let me 'knob' her if I went to stay with her, I would definitely have gone. Whatever (as they say there). I don't credit Carl's theory much. Whatever my reason was, I didn't go, and I'm sure I sent Tiffany an e-mail to let her know that I wasn't coming anymore.

But when I checked my e-mail the day after I was allegedly supposed to have arrived in St Louis, Missouri, there was a message from Tiffany. It read: YOU ARE A BASTARD. I HATE YOU!!!! YOU BASTARD. I WAITED THREE HOURS FOR YOU AT THE BUS STATION AND YOU DIDN'T SHOW UP YOU BASTARD. YOUR (sic) A BASTARD JUST LIKE YOUR FRIEND JUST LIKE ALL MEN. I HATE YOU I HATE YOU I HATE YOU. YOU BASTARD, or something like that, I read it only once and deleted it immediately because it made me feel like such a ... bastard.

I phoned Tiffany on her mobile phone and she said, 'I don't want to speak to you.'

I said, 'But what have I done that's so terrible?' I was trying to find out if her reaction had anything to do with whether she had found out that I had also fallen in love with Katie (from Springfield, Ohio) after Tiffany had left camp.

'You know what you did,' said Tiffany. So, she must have heard about Katie.

'But, but,' I said, and Tiffany said, 'I don't want to speak to you.' I tried a different line of reasoning and I said, 'But I told you I might not be able to make it!'

'I don't want to speak to you,' Tiffany said, and eventually all I could say was, 'OK then, goodbye,' and I hung up the phone and that was how it ended with Tiffany.

Well, there was one more thing. Months later I landed up in Brighton, England and I sent Tiffany a postcard telling her how sorry I was that I didn't go and stay with her in St Louis, Missouri. I wrote down on that postcard the lyrics to a Counting Crows song, it was very apt. And maybe a month after that I received an e-mail back from her. It said: 'Hey! How are you!?? Everything's ok, I was just going through a bad patch back then. Everythings (sic) cool now. Thanks for the postcard, you really have such a good way with words, that's one of the things I liked so much about you!!!' etc, etc (in the Intercamp Mail I used to send Tiffany letters in which I would plagiarise poems I remembered from the Norton Anthology. She liked that). So I was glad that she didn't hate me anymore. I never really heard much from her again though. There was an e-mail close to a year later, when she told me that she was going back to summer camp, 'I hope I meet a cute guy!!!!' she wrote. Maybe I'll go back to summer camp again one day, and maybe she'll be there too.

## JOYCE

**W**e often go looking for waves to surf in Carl's car. It's the kind of car that makes you proud to be a surfer, cruising down Main Road with the boards sticking out from the windows. People on the pavement stop and give us a good look, they smile and carry on with their business with an air of reluctant admiration that says: these surfy guys are a different breed.

Carl's car is a nineteen-sixty-something Ford Anglia station wagon. The right-side front panel is made from surfboard fibre-glass and resin, painted with PVA; the back left-side brake light and indicator cap is fashioned from a cool drink bottle and the hatch-back door opens with the aid of a chisel which sulks on the floor under a pile of cigarette boxes, never-read newspapers and the wrappings of after-surf snacks.

Sometimes the brakes work, other times they only work on one side, so you have to counter-steer in the opposite direction to prevent from careening off into a ditch or one of those admiring pedestrians.

My sister came down on holiday from Durban once and she christened the car Joyce. My sister is an advertising yuppie, if she drives a Michaela or a Vivian, then Carl's car is definitely a Joyce.

Joyce's petrol gauge works about as well as her aircon and power steering; she runs permanently on empty and it's left to the occasional twenty buck top-ups and Carl's sound consumption to mileage calculations to keep her on the road, but then if you knew Carl, you'd know that the only thing sound about him are his Midnight Oil CDs.

He and I and Patman went looking for waves in the Cape Point Reserve this one time. Actually we go there all the time. The Reserve is the most underrated wave ground in Cape Town, and we hope it stays that way. Costs ten bucks a pop for you and your board to get through the gates, which keeps out the crowds, also keeps us hungry and Joyce perilously close to empty, but on any given day we're likely to be riding the best waves in Cape Town without having to contend with 73 body-boarders.

This day the surf was cooking for sure. We drove down to Black Rocks to check that out first, but there wasn't enough swell on the False Bay side, so we decided to head back and over to Extensions. We weren't even close when Carl's consumption to mileage estimation let us down. Badly.

We managed to free-wheel to the old Homestead Restaurant where Pat and Carl used to work before Progress (Pty) Ltd. opened up a Hyper mart mall on the point. I suppose at least now you can buy anything from a hamburger to a Hasselblad there for 50 bucks US.

We reckoned we'd probably need to siphon some petrol from a kind stranger. Usually in these situations you send people like Carl to the nearest petrol station with a two litre coke

bottle, his thumb and a stern reminder that he is an idiot. Our options were slightly more limited this time.

There were these nice looking gentlemen in suits nearby whom we approached. They were stretching their arms apart in the air and muttering under their breath: things like, north facing, plate glass and balance sheet. We'd pray curses on them later, for now we just wanted their petrol. Actually they were nice guys, said sure, all we'd need was a pipe, their car was nearby.

We scouted around the outside of the remains of the old restaurant, how hard could it be to find a short length of pipe? Hard. Carl started messing with the air conditioner and broke one of its pipes off, what he didn't realise was that the damn thing was still alive and it starting hissing and sighing its last breath, but just wouldn't die, started making noises probably not unlike the last thing the astronauts in the Space Shuttles ever heard. We retired a safe distance away to reassess our options.

Then I had a brain wave. We could rip out Joyce's windscreen-washer pipe. Like the ABS brakes and 16 valves, the windscreen washer was another of Joyce's prized working features. We took out the pipe and rummaged around in Joyce for an empty coke bottle. Carl got to be the one to suck a mouthful of petrol. Gee, both Patman and I wanted to be the one who got to suck on the pipe, but Carl insisted.

We probably knew that on a coke bottle's worth of petrol you could, at a push, make it out the gates and free-wheel to Simonstown; we went to Extensions instead to surf. Extensions is a great right-hander. The takeoff's over a reef, pretty heavy, nice drop and then the wave stacks up a like a point. You can ride it all the way in on good days. This was one. We surfed until only the cold drove us back to land.

Joyce drove us back about halfway out of the Reserve before she ran out of petrol again. It was about 7, starting to get dark and the rules on the pamphlet they give you at the

gate say you have to be out by sunset. A guy in a Toyota Corolla stopped to give us a hand. We whipped out our DIY siphoning kit, no problem, only take a minute. However, it seems that new cars have a zizzaggy pipe down into the petrol tank, anti-siphon technology (patent pending). The guy was really sorry he couldn't help, seemed like there was somewhere else he'd rather be, so we let him go. He said he'd see if he could send someone else to help us. We started pushing Joyce.

About half an hour later two guys in a Hiace came by and offered their help. Seems Hiaces are also up there with anti-siphon technology. It's easier these days to steal a whole car than it is to steal a sip of petrol from the tank. The Hiace guys drove us to some of their mates at the point who had a car; same problem, so they drove us back to Joyce and said cheers. We started pushing.

It started getting darker and we could see the trail of headlights on the main road leading out of the Reserve. We reckoned if we could push up to there, we could arrange a tow with someone going out. The twinkle of passing lights was so far away it might as well have come from the stars on Orion's Belt.

When we eventually got to the fork with the main road the darkness and silence were complete. Eventually as we prepared ourselves for a long, lonely night, one of the Reserve patrol vans spotted us and pulled up. They had none of that reluctant admiration thing going for us; our image tarnished by inconsiderate fellow surfers who sneak boards in without paying or drive down no-go roads looking for waves. The patrol guys gave us a bad vibe, told us we should've been out by sunset.

Right about when everybody's patience was sorely stretched, a Mitsubishi Star Wagon pulled up. The guy driving was a German holiday-maker, with his family in the back. He offered to help. The patrol guys were saying they'd take us in to Simonstown to buy petrol. The German guy said he'd make a plan. So we tried the siphon thing again to no avail.

no problem said the German guy, he whipped open his bonnet and set to work on his engine with a screw driver.

We chatted with him and his family about Africa, surfing, they told us funny stories about their travels, all the while the guy fiddled around with his screwdriver. The patrol guys were getting angry, saying we should get out and this wasn't cool and things like that. We ignored them.

The German guy asked for our windscreen-washer pipe and he fiddled with that and his engine and his screwdriver for a while. Then he asked for our coke bottle and started his car. He filled our bottle up five times over, enough to get Joyce safely back to Simonstown. What he'd done was rig his fuel pump to pump from his tank into our bottle.

Now, every time we go surfing with Carl, when Joyce pulls into the garage for twenty bucks, we cough up an extra ten each and then we drive off down Main Road and dig the people staring at us going, these surfy types are a different breed.

## NEW SWELL

**T**here's no swell today in J-Bay. We caught the tail-end of some on Saturday, but it wasn't sufficient to last until today, Election Day, and it must be that the great swell factory of the south has closed for the holiday so that the workers can go and vote. I can't. This trip coincides with some convenient study leave and I've decided to abandon my registered X in the cloudy Cape for the chance of some uncrowded surfing and warm water at Supertubes.

Perhaps this flat spell is punishment for the shirking of my civic duty and I've been sentenced to a waiting period on the couch in front of the TV 'til tomorrow maybe when the factory opens again and the workers get back to their weary job of churning out those waves from the great wave machines down south.

The TV says: "And now we cross to Alice in Alexandria, where the people are queuing round the block to make their voices heard in this, South Africa's miraculous second

democratic election ... Alice?" But Alice seems to be having trouble making her voice heard and she mouths something soundlessly into the wrong camera until the TV says, "Uh, we'll get back to that story. Freek?" But Freek appears temporarily unavailable, so we cut to someone in Sophiatown who greets us with a smile and a warm story of the patience and perseverance of my South African brothers and sisters who have chosen the queues and the ballot boxes instead of the bottom turn.

But, I don't feel bad. I remember five years ago when the rainbow nation was birthed, I was there to cast my vote. Well, I was in a tiny town up the Cape west coast where we sometimes go to surf and get away from the city for a little while. The birth of democracy in South Africa coincided with some convenient study leave, so we headed north for some uncrowded waves and communion with nature's simple pleasures. Today though, in J-Bay, I'm grateful that the pleasures are not so simple. I've scored a stylish digs and my chicken roasts in a Kelvinator instead of over some smoky flames. A warm north-easterly whispers outside my solid walls instead of a hurricane sporting with the guy ropes and flaps of my toy tent.

As my chicken roasts, I watch while a variety of faces on the TV tell me of this new election. I feel a little cheated because I'm missing it. Five years ago up on the west coast we voted in the little school hall on the other side of the river and it seemed to work out just fine, it doesn't seem right that I can't vote in J-Bay and my priorities have been put on trial like this.

But I still don't feel bad. I got the chance to feel the spirit of optimism that now wafts from the TV when I voted in up the coast. The workers in the wave factory were on holiday that trip too and there was no TV, so we were forced to resort to other distractions to keep ourselves entertained, and it was the pursuit of such distractions that gave us the opportunity to have a glimpse of what the New South Africa might be like.

We had a new addition to our veteran gang of campers that trip. His name was Corey, an Afrikaner from Wellington who used to surf but didn't have a board for this trip, so he substituted with a supply of his town's finest whiskey that would've kept a small navy drunk for a month. But it turned out that his supply was not even enough to get us through the first night and it soon became apparent that further agents of inebriation would have to be sought.

Carl ventured that such agents could possibly be acquired in the township on the way into the town. Corey didn't need much persuading that a *recce* over yonder could prove fortuitous. Chris and me, being of more sober habits and more inclined to sticking to conventional methods of intoxication, decided to stay and keep an eye on the flame-grilled chicken. After a considerably long time, when the chicken was finally cooked to nothing or perhaps we used it for firewood because we had no recollection of having eaten it, Carl and Corey still hadn't returned and we began to grow concerned for our colleagues. Actually it would probably be more accurate to say we began to grow sober and we thought we were missing out on one helluva party somewhere.

So we decided to mount a search party and we set off into the night in my Ford Cortina. We suffered a big delay owing to a navigational error which saw us mired in soft sand behind the Sonskyn Cafe. It was left to Chris' civil engineering training to get us unstuck. He dug under the wheels and used the car's rubber floor mats for traction. (I would come to put this ingenious technique to use one night on another J-Bay trip when we were stuck in similar circumstances in that parking patch at Supers before they built those houses there, but that's another story.)

Eventually we made it into the township. Our M.O was rather sketchy, but we calculated that if there was one helluva party going on somewhere, we'd be led there by the sound of revelry. The night, however, was as calm and quiet as a church on a Monday. I stopped the car and Chris and I tiptoed around the sleeping houses, creeping up to all the

lighted windows, listening for the sounds of our mates being tortured to death. If they were, they were being pretty magnanimous about it because we couldn't hear a thing. No screams of pain, not even a howl of anguish. This merely fueled our suspicions that we had missed out on something truly unique in terms of bonding with fellow South Africans from across the divide. Our mates were mixing it up with The Other on the eve of our country's reformation. We were proud of them. We retired to the tent disappointed that we had missed the party.

But it turns out that Corey and Carl's experimentation with cross-culturalism had nearly come to the horrible end that Chris and I had feared. Behind one of those lighted windows, while sharing the newfound warmth of multiracial camaraderie, and a fat spliff, it seems that the agent aiding the peace process had fallen through someone's fingers. Corey saw fit to chastise this mishap. "*Ay, hotnot, tel it op,*" he had said. Carl says he saw his life flash before him, and he waited for the terrible retribution which was sure to be meted out for such a politically incorrect statement. A silence fell over the room. In the hazy, ominous vacuum left by his words, perhaps Corey wondered if his attempt at humour had been somewhat miscalculated. Perhaps he searched for words in his fuddled brain to excuse what was obviously a linguistic oversight borne of the flawed ideology drummed into him by those responsible for his Wellington upbringing.

If ever there was a moment for the true spirit of reconciliation to be revealed in the heart of non-white South Africa, it was that moment. While Carl considered his demise and Corey his options, a smile spread across the face of the man whom Corey had so unfortunately addressed. Slowly his smile widened into a grin and his lips parted into a toothy chuckle. Corey ventured a hopeful chuckle and then a nervous laugh, perhaps a little too enthusiastically, but by then the chuckle had spread and one by one all assembled were trying it on for size. Carl joined in, terribly relieved at this opportunity to laugh in the face of

death. But that laugh was in the face of life. It spread until there was no way of stopping it and its happiness bubbled in everyone.

The next day we voted in the little school hall. It was the first time that we had ever voted in our country and it was the first time that Corey and Carl's new friends from the township had ever voted too. I admit that I was swayed rather too easily by Carl's conviction that the Soccer Party was the answer to South Africa's problems. But judging from the experience of the night before, Carl couldn't've been far off in his belief that any political party advocating a good spliff as a successful medium of *samelewing* had to be on the right track.

The surf was still flat that day so our new friends came down to the campsite after the voting and we played a game of cricket and *braaied* a snoek that one of them had caught. We never saw those guys again, but as I watch the TV now in J-Bay, I can remember the swell of optimism which rolled in that afternoon. As surfers, we're always waiting for swell. It's elusive, like that optimism which we felt there on the west coast and I can't say I've felt it often since, but maybe I can feel it again now, sitting here watching the election on TV in J-Bay, waiting for a new swell.

## DURBAN POISON

One of the most ambitious surfing trips we ever attempted was in the summer of 1992. We were one year out of school and the sweet freedom of drivers licences, of-age ID's and Christmas holidays was ours to savour.

Our plan was to head for Durban from Cape Town and surf everywhere in-between. My folks had moved up to Durban and my Grandparents lived on the South Coast, so we had ample accommodation options up there. On the way up we'd camp out. Our carriage was the Soltau family Peugeot, a silver beast that strictly speaking had no business driving to Durban, but it's a good thing cars have no say in these matters.

My travelling companions were the brothers Soltau: Fred an aspirant lawyer, with a mane of tangled, curly blonde hair worthy of Samson or any hard-core surfer and sure to afford us respect at any spot given to heavy localism. Chris, the strong silent one, with brooding good looks sure to earn us attention in any spot given to available young women, so we hoped, for surely such attention was an integral part of any surf trip of this nature.

The swell was tiny in False Bay when we left. We skirted Koeel Bay and decided to take a look at Hawston, where we found a good 3-4 foot hollow wave. Got my first tube there, and as we drifted back past the shanty houses and cardboard shacks to which hardened fishermen returned, I considered myself lucky to have escaped from the harsh reality of life for those few hours we were in the water, and I looked forward to the next time, the next surf, when I would be able to tap into that feeling again.

We headed inland for a bit of stylish accommodation on our first night out. We stayed in a Boland *dorp* where family of Fred and Chris had a little cottage. From there we headed East and found the coast again, scanning the little bays and inlets for some epic secret spot that we would be the first to surf and get to name.

Mossel Bay was where the harsh reality of being on the road like Jack Kerouac hit us hard, like a shot of Jack Daniels at 6 am. Actually it was more like the bottle of Three Ships Cane or something that did us in. We arrived late in the afternoon in Mossel Bay and there wasn't much swell about, so we pulled into the campground and set about getting settled for our first night in the wild. Things all went a little awry from there. I tripped over a speed bump and lopped the end of my big toe off in an injury that required minor surgery when we eventually reached Durban. Next, Fred reversed the car into a tree and put a pretty serious buckle in the bumper. And this before we had even touched the stock in our amateur bar in the boot.

Only thing to do under the circumstances was to get started on the stock in the amateur bar in the boot. The beers were finished promptly, the sun had set and somehow the tent had erected itself. My toe was comfortably anesthetized and Fred's imagination had been drawn from the punishment awaiting his mom's car's return. That left us with the matter of the bottle of Cane. The accompanying bottle of Coke had long since been consumed and we were stumped for a mixer, then Chris produced a can of Clifton. It was the most disgusting

cocktail. I can still remember how horrible Cane and Clifton tastes, don't ever try it. We soldiered on regardless, determined to push our adolescent freedom to the edges.

The rest of the evening becomes a bit of blur after that. Memories drift in and out of recollection like disjointed scenes of an unedited super8 movie projected onto a crumbling wall. In some scenes I can see us scaling a barbed-wire fence and rolling down a steep grassy bank, running to the top again and rolling down until we were so dizzy, then running around on the beach like one-winged flies trapped in a can of coke. In another scene we were hitching into town and off-duty policewomen picked us up. We were looking for some action and she said she'd take us to this raging party she was heading for. It looked like a cool place when we got there, lots of nice people dancing and drinking and enjoying themselves. We felt right at home, although we stood for ages at the bar without the barman serving us. Unperturbed, we took up seats at a beautifully decorated table, someone had even gone to the trouble of writing little name tags for us and the table was festooned with delectable munchies. We tucked in heartily. Then this very nice lady in a hat with flowers on it came over and introduced herself to us. She said she was delighted that we had come to celebrate her daughter's wedding, but that unfortunately we had not been catered for and would it be too much trouble if we were to leave? We obliged graciously. I fell down the stairs on the way out and stubbed my toe again, but the pain was absorbed somewhere deep in that part of the brain reserved for those warm feelings towards your fellow man and nice ladies in hats with flowers on them.

We didn't surf the next day, there may have been surf, but I don't remember. Maybe we stayed for another night in Mossels, I don't remember that either. Nevertheless before long we were on the road again, chasing, chasing. We arrived in East London and kept right on going, we had the smell of the 'Kei in our nostrils now and we wanted to get there soon,

we wanted to spend the rest of our budget of days like Robinson Crusoe amongst the savages, surfing perfect blue points and sampling the delights of the Kei's finest export.

We went off-road just outside East London, our Peugeot holding up magnificently over dongas and potholes the size of cows. Eventually we reached Morgan Bay, a place without a postcard where we could begin to wean ourselves of civilization. Happily Morgan Bay still had one of the cornerstones of civilization, a fully stocked bar. However, and I guess somewhat mercifully, our budget prevented us from further liver damage and we spent our days hiking along the beach and scouting for those secret surf spots we were determined to find for ourselves.

After a few days at Morgan Bay we drove onto the Kei River ferry and hoped our way over to the other side. Armed with a bag of sweets to throw out to the kids that ran to the road to wave us past, we headed for Butterworth. How we made it on those roads, I still don't know. Hardly a word passed between us as we crawled along, each of us absorbed in silent prayer. We reached Butterworth on those prayers and had our first run-in with authorities. We were stopped at a routine roadblock, but it went pretty well. They simply checked Fred's driver's licence and the car's licence disk and waved us through.

The next encounter with third world bureaucracy was in Umtata where we had to apply for a permit to camp at Coffee Bay. We spent hours wondering empty corridors searching for non-existent offices in the Botha Sichau Building before eventually securing our permit and making the trek back towards Coffee Bay.

We did uncover that Robinson Crusoe existence there. The point was the most electric blue every day we surfed it and the local savages sat and watched us from the beach as we surfed. We met one of those savages whose name was Roger or James or something as unlikely. He was 9 years old, wore surfer baggies and T-shirt and was constantly as stoned as a rock garden. We decided that we didn't want to take him up on his offer to sell us some of

his dope, we had become to be a little paranoid about border patrols and Butterworth policemen and somehow it just didn't right getting stoned when we could have been surfing.

We stayed for days at Coffee Bay, surfing, chilling, hiking around the area, battling giant mosquitoes. They were the meanest kamikaze son-of-a-bitch mosquitoes I've ever seen. Fred and Chris took to smearing themselves with garlic to keep the beasts at bay, I just couldn't resort to such a primeval remedy and spent the nights at least in the assurance that I was safe from vampires with my companions nearby, but I swore I'd deny knowing these guys once we were back anywhere near where there might be girls again.

Eventually we left Coffee Bay and made for Port Edward. I'd been there about 10 years before and remembered camping down near the river. We crossed the suspension bridge back into our beloved homeland, but couldn't find a turn-off to take us down to the river's edge. So after a while we turned around, thinking we'd missed the turning. We were now heading back towards the Kei again. Pretty soon we realized there obviously wasn't a turn-off and we were about to reach the border post again. Fred was driving and he pulled off to the roadside and swung a U-turn. Before he hit second gear again, we saw, off to the side, in the bushes, a figure. He was barreling towards the road ahead of us. He was dressed in cammo with a Port Jackson bush for a hat and he came to a halt in the road in front of us with his right hand resting on the 9 mil on his hip and his left hand raised like a hail Hitler salute.

I for one, *kaked* myself, and I know Fred and Chris were not far off in their reactions. We pictured ourselves thrown away into rotten prisons like that guy in *Midnight Express*. The Rambo in our headlights was sure to find the kilo of coke which had materialized in the cubby hole, the haul of dope in the boot, the RPGs in the surfboard covers. He approached Fred's window with that smug, *jy's nou busted* routine.

"Good evening sir, why are you turning around from the Border Post?" he said. I could sense the subtext of Fred's reply: because the idiot moron in the back said that this was the way to the campsite.

"Uh, 'cos, ah, we were looking for the road to the campsite?" Fred ventured hopefully.

"Would you all step out of the vehicle," said Rambo. Oh jeez, I hope we don't get gang raped in prison, I thought. "Would you open the trunk of your vehicle please." As the lid was lifted, Rambo could barely contain his delight at beholding two fully stuffed black rubbish bags. "Open up those bags please," he was an awfully polite paratrooper. Fark, I wonder what they'll feed us in prison. Rambo was so chuffed with himself. In his eyes you could see the thoughts of the headline, the promotion. Fred opened one bag, then the other. We were as relieved as Rambo was disappointed to discover that the bags were stuffed with our soggy wetsuits. He checked twice. Then he let us go and we drove off towards Port Edward looking for a sign that said campsite, or, bar/*kroeg*.

## CAR GUARD

**M**y friend Carl always pays the car guard. He has to; the windows of his car don't wind up anymore and his radio face doesn't come off and fit into a fancy case and sometimes he forgets his cell phone on the front seat, and he never locks the doors. There's not much point in locking the doors if you can't close the windows. But every time we get back to the car, his radio is still there and his cell phone too and even the car is still there and he'll say, "See?" and look at me and hand over five Rand to the car guard.

Mostly we park in the parking lot outside the Keg. There's a spot right in front of the door with our name on it. Well, it's not really our name, it says Reserved, which is none of our names actually, but Reserved hardly ever parks there, so we do. We call it our rock star parking place. You need to have a parking place like that when you go to the Keg for a beer because it's really hard to find your car when you leave if you park too far away. Some nights it's so hard to find your car that your friend Carl even has to go and look for it in the

bushes across the street. He doesn't try that hard though to find this car, mostly he just sits down and rolls a joint and waits for his car to come to him. We have to go and try to find him then, and it's hard enough trying to find where Carl forgets his car, let alone trying to find where he forgets himself.

Some nights we stop and chat to the car guard. He knows us now. Sometimes he helps us look for Carl's car in the bushes, which is pretty strange, come to think of it, because he's always there to help us park and must have a good idea where we leave our car on those rare occasions when Reserved parks in the place with his name on it.

Those nights when the car guard comes over and helps us wait for our car in the bushes are usually the best nights. We roll a fat joint and pass it between us and tell funny stories that we can never remember the next morning except that they were the funniest thing you ever heard in your whole life and we can never remember our car guard's name which is why we call him, Car Guard. Sometimes he tell us stories that are not the funniest thing that you ever heard in your life and you can't remember those stories either, or whether he's from Nigeria, or the Congo. We seem to have a great deal of trouble remembering things these days.

One night we went to the Keg for a beer and parked in our rock star spot and we saw the car guard trying to help a guy in a big four-by-four find parking. The car guard was waving the four-by-four driver over to a space nearby the door, but the guy drove past to go and find his own spot instead. He climbs out of the four-by-four and the car guard walks over and offers a security contract with a gesture of thumb and pinkie waved in front of his eyes. The four-by-four driver accepts the deal with a reluctant nod and says, "Ja, look nicely after my car hey, chief," and he hands over a R2 coin and swaggers towards the entrance, pulling up belted Chinos that have lost the battle to contain his belly.

It was one of those nights when, at the end, we had to go and look for Carl and his car in the bushes. It must have been especially one of those nights because we had rock star parking and we still had to go and look in the bushes. While we were there telling funny stories and falling over and talking to the car guard, we saw the guy from the four-by-four come out of the Keg, this time with more of a stagger than a swagger. Actually, it was a stobble what he was doing, that's like a mixture between stumbling and wobbling, and he did it over in the direction of his four-by-four and he must have stobbed passed it because he came to the end of the parking lot and hadn't found it yet.

We watched as he went back towards the Keg, attempting a saunter this time, and he must have missed his four-by-four again because he reached the door of the Keg and stopped and looked around and shook his head and pulled at his Chinos and said, "*Nooit, fok.*" He set off again with an air of feigned sobriety which didn't help him find his four-by-four because he still reached the end of the parking lot without finding it and he stopped and pulled at his pants with some force and said, "*Nooit! Fok!*"

We had stopped our funny stories then because this was funnier to watch instead. We wondered if he'd have another go across the parking lot, and the funny thing was, we couldn't see his four-by-four either. The car guard was watching more closely than we were, only he didn't seem as amused as we. He didn't look worried though, he was just watching, smoking the stub of the joint and when it was finished he dropped it on the ground and stood on it with one takkie that had no shoelace.

"Where's his car gone, do you reckon?" Carl asked the car guard.

He just stood there looking out over the street at the parking lot and the man wandering around holding up his pants with one hand. A young guy and a pretty girl came out of the pub, she was laughing at something the guy had said and was holding onto his arm. They reached their car, which was still there, and the guy unlocked the door for the girl and

opened it and he said something else that made her laugh as she got in. When the guy walked over towards his door, he nearly tripped over the four-by-four guy's arse sticking up in the air as he was leaning over and inspecting the number plate of a *bakkie* that looked a little bit like his four-by-four. He jumped up and said, "*Fok* it! I can't find my *fokken* car!", but the other guy with the girlfriend didn't seem to care, he just shrugged his shoulders and climbed into his car and started the engine and reversed so that the four-by-four guy who couldn't find his car with his arse in the air had to scamper out of the way.

"Don't know. Somebody must of come stole it," says the car guard to Carl and he walks off towards the parking lot, rotating his sawn-off baseball bat with rusty screws half-screwed into the tip and he becomes invisible in the darkness except for his luminous yellow and orange traffic-cop vest reflecting the street-light.

He walks over and the guy who had lost his four-by-four turns and sees him and says, "Where's my bloody car! Where's my *fokken* car! I gave you money to watch my car! What the *fok*! Where's it gone, it was here in this spot, here!" He's waving his arms around so much that it's hard to tell exactly which spot had allegedly contained his four-by-four. The car guard just looks at him and shrugs his shoulders and looks around and tries to see if perhaps he can see the supposed four-by-four, but he just shrugs his shoulders again and says, "Don't know. Maybe somebody come stole it."

"What the *fok*! What you mean somebody stole it! You're the car guard. I gave you money to watch my *fokken* car, and you're telling me somebody stole it!" The guy is waving his arms around so much that he nearly doesn't catch his pants in time when they try to fall down again. The car guard shrugs again and reaches into his pocket and from a handful of change on his palm he takes a R2 coin and holds it out for the four-by-four guy who just stands there holding up his pants with his mouth wide open.

## THE TROUBLE ON THE RAILWAY LINE

**T**here is a tiny town on the Cape west coast; a place without a postcard where we sometimes go to surf and get away from the city for a little while. We first started going there when we were about fourteen years old and our dads would take us. We would sleep on the beach and listen to the shooting stars sing across the sky and the waves pound on the shore and in the morning we would wake up and go and surf the biggest waves we had ever seen in our whole lives.

Then, the campsite wasn't as well formed as it is now. It was nothing more than a puddle of gravel next to the beach with a few shrubs struggling to carry on living and a broken-down toilet block with a brack water shower. The caretaker of the campsite, we used to call him Engelbrecht. We thought that this was his name because all the other establishments in the town are owned by Engelbrecht. There are signs above the doors of the bottle store, the hotel (two stars), the "supermarket", the butchery and one of the two *kafees*; the signs say: EIENAAR – P. J. ENGELBRECHT.

We only found out later that the caretaker of the campsite's name is actually *Meneer* Jordaan. The campsite is proper now. The shrubs are fully fledged hedges separating the camping spots, there are brick-built braai places and a block of hot water showers where the water is fresh and *Meneer* Jordaan even has an office on the campsite and an assistant to do all the work.

*Meneer* Jordaan (we call him just Jordaan actually) occasionally drives around the campsite in his *bakkie* and collects the rent from the campers. Often he doesn't and we stay for free, or we stay a night and then leave really early the next morning so we don't have to pay. Jordaan has got to know us though. He might even have noticed us growing up and coming like we do every year now in our own cars, sometimes with our girlfriends.

The Cape west coast is a very different place from other places in the world. It is our favourite place in the whole world, but there are some strange people living there and sometimes odd things happen there. Like the time there was the trouble on the railway line. Jordaan told us about it one night. He came to collect the rent that night so we couldn't run away the next morning without paying again. We set a record that night. We drank twelve bottles of Tassies wine between three of us. Somewhere between the eighth and the twelfth bottle, Jordaan came to collect the rent, so we offered him a mug of Tassies, and he sat down around the fire with us and told us stories and that's when I heard about the time there was the trouble on the railway line.

The railway line, there where we go to surf and drink twelve bottles of Tassies in one night, goes all the way from Sishen way up in the north down to Saldahna Bay in the south. The trains that run on that railway line must be the longest trains in the world. They carry the iron ore from the mines at Sishen to the steel plants at Saldahna. Some of the people who live in that town, it's their job to look after the railway line. They have to keep the tracks serviced

and dig ditches and things and generally see to it that the trains are kept running smoothly so that the iron ore can make it safely from Sishen to Saldanha to be made into Mercedes-Benzes and pots and pans and useful things like that.

The boss of that railway gang, his name was Heyns, Jordaan told us. He's dead now, but when he was still alive, it was his job to stand and drink brandy and Coke from his old khaki-clad army canteen and watch the black men dig ditches and things and shout at them and tell them to work harder. Jordaan used to work for the South African Railways too and help Heyns do that job, but he didn't like it much. He was Heyns' underling until he was retrenched when they started with the Affirmative Action and the BEE. Then Jordaan took up the job as the caretaker of the campsite.

The trouble on the railway line happened late one Thursday night when it was Heyns' turn to be on call if there were any problems. There were seldom problems on the railway line, but you still had to be on call. Sometimes there were malfunctions with the booms where the cars could cross, and you would have to go out and fix the booms. Sometimes a flock of sheep or some cows would stray onto the rails and be turned into mince-meat. Then someone had to go out and pick up the pieces. That was the worst job, Jordaan told us while he drank another mug of Tassies. The wind was getting up then as it does in the night, tossing the flames of our fire this way and that. It was the south easterly, and a cold front had just passed, so we knew that the waves would be good the next morning.

There is no way in hell those trains could stop or even slow down if there is anything on the line, Jordaan told us. When a cow or a flock of sheep would get hit, sometimes you could get lucky and find yourself a prime piece of beef or mutton to take home for the braai or the pot, but usually when the animals got hit, all that was left was a pile of snot.

On that Thursday night when there was the trouble, most of the Railways men were down at the hotel bar where they went nearly every night to drink beer and avoid going home to their fat wives until they were properly drunk. Now, Jordaan told us, also there that night at the hotel was Koos Zverina, who owned a farm on the outskirts of the town, near the *koppie* where the railway line went into the tunnel.

Koos Zverina's wife was not fat. Her name was Katrina, but she liked to be called Kathy. In fact, Zverina was the envy of the men in the town because he had the prettiest wife in the whole town. Zverina liked his wife very much, even though he didn't hurry home to her on most nights. Instead, he sat at the hotel bar with the other men and drank beer until he was properly drunk like the rest of them. All the men in the town wished they could make love to Zverina's wife, but no-one ever dared try; they knew Zverina was a hard man and would deal harshly with any man who tried to make love to his wife.

That night of the trouble on the railway line, Jordaan told us, Zverina decided to go home early, probably because he was missing his wife. So he said goodnight to the men, stood up and walked out of the bar. Heyns made a joke then about how he wished it was he who was the one going home to make love to Zverina's pretty wife. He stood up and made a humping motion with his hips, his arms splayed out in front of him and his beer sloshing out of the tankard all over the place. He thought Zverina hadn't heard him because he had walked out of the door. All the men in the bar laughed out loud. But Zverina had heard Heyns. He was not so amused. He came back into the bar and gave Heyns a look which made him sit right down again and shut up and gulp his beer.

Now, Jordaan told us, unbeknownst to everyone, especially Zverina, Old Van Tonder's boy, Mikey Van Tonder, had been banging Zverina's wife for months already. Mostly on those nights while Zverina was out getting properly drunk with the Railways men down at the hotel bar. Old Van Tonder's boy was right then bumping uglies with Zverina's

wife while Zverina got into his *bakkie* and drove off home only half drunk because he was missing his wife so much.

Old Van Tonder's boy was nineteen and he was a big boy; tall and fit and built like the rugby football flank forward he was. In fact, he was off to the university soon to take up a sports scholarship and play for the First Team. All of the men had no doubts that Mikey would make the provincial side and probably play for the Springboks one day. But all that was before the trouble.

Kathy and Mikey liked to put the wireless up really loud while they were making love. Kathy was worried about the neighbours hearing them make love, even though the nearest neighbour was Old Van Tonder whose farm was quite far away. And the thing about the wireless being up so loud like that, was that Kathy and Mikey didn't hear Zverina coming home that night. They were blissfully unaware of his homecoming until he walked into the master bedroom and found his wife's pretty legs sticking up in the air with Old Van Tonder's boy making love between them for all he was worth.

Apparently Zverina didn't say anything; he just walked out of the bedroom again. By the time he came back with the doubled-barreled shotgun, Kathy had managed to get Mikey out through the window and running away as fast as he could off towards the *koppie*. All he got away with was his *veldskoel* shoes. We heard shots from the hotel bar, Jordaan told us. Two of them: bam, bam. We all stopped and listened to see if there would be any more shots. But they had stopped. It's not unusual to hear shotgun shots around here, Jordaan told us; the farmers sometimes have to shoot the wild dogs and lynxes that prey on their livestock. The men in the hotel bar that night went back to drinking their beer like us drinking our Tassies around the fire and listening to Jordaan's story and the men didn't think any more about those shotgun shots.

A call came through to Heyns at about 3 o'clock the next morning, Jordaan told us. Heyns was still drunk, so he was not impressed at being awoken and told that there was some trouble on the railway line. It was the big boss, the area supervisor, who called him. He told Heyns that a driver of one of the trains had got to Saldahna and said that he had seen something outside their town. He wasn't sure what he'd seen, but there may have been some problem on the line, maybe a road kill, the big boss had said. Road kill was what they called it when the cows got changed into snot. It was standard procedure that when there had been any cows changed into snot, someone had to go out and investigate right away. You couldn't wait until morning. So Heyns had to get up out of bed and go and check it out.

When Jordaan went in to the office the next morning, he told us, he found Heyns asleep at his desk. He tried not to awaken Heyns because he knew that he would be grumpy and start complaining about the affirmative action again, which was always his favourite thing to complain about. Sure enough, when Heyns woke up, he grumbled about his hangover and having to get up at 3 that morning to see to the road kill incident, and he was just about to get going off about the BEE, when suddenly he smiled.

"He says to me," Jordaan told us that night around the fire, "Heyns says to me, 'I did get me a prime piece of meat for my troubles!' And he goes over to the locker we had in the office and takes out this big chunk of something wrapped in newspaper. There were some dark spots of blood soaked through the newspaper. It was a bloody big piece of meat."

"I told him, I says," Jordaan told us, I says to Heyns, "*Ja*, that's a nice piece of meat, that is. Did you find any more up there? And Heyns says to me, he says, 'What more? You know what happens when those *fokken* trains hit an animal. This is all there was left,' and he puts the chunk of cow, or pig maybe, back in the locker. I told him maybe he should take it home and put it in the fridge, but he says, 'No,' he says, 'I'm going to knock off early today anyway, take it home for Sally (who was his wife) to roast it up *lekker* for dinner.'"

Jordaan was getting really excited about his story then and he was onto his third mug of Tassies. “So the *domfok*,” Jordaan told us, “knocks off early that afternoon and takes the piece of road kill home and gets his wife to put it in the oven, then he goes to the bar to get drunk and he invites everyone at the bar over for a feast that night after they have finished getting drunk. The whole time I’m thinking, what part of the animal did that chunk of meat come from? And I’m thinking, I wonder if there’s anything left, and I’m thinking, there must have been some other cows, or whatever it was? Maybe they escaped from Zverina’s farm up there? If nothing else, I thought I should go and see if Zverina was missing any of his stock. So, after work, I decided to go and stop by the tunnel near the *koppie*, and take a look around myself.”

“It was getting dark by the time I got up there,” Jordaan told us. “I had to get a torch out of my *bakkie* and I started looking around, looking some distance on either side of the tracks, because often the splatter pattern is fairly wide. I started looking about a hundred meters from the tunnel entrance and worked my way towards it. I didn’t find anything for quite a while, and I was about to give up because it was completely dark by then, when I saw what looked like a shoe lying just near the tunnel entrance. I went over to check it out. It was a *veldskoel*. I shone my torch on it. I looked closer and I saw that it still had a foot inside it. There was nothing attached to the foot though, the rest of the leg was gone. Off. Just a bloody foot left in a *veldskoel*.”

“I ran back to my *bakkie* as fast as I could and I drove as fast as I could to the bar, but when I got there everyone had already gone and left for Heyns’ place. I knew it would take me another ten minutes or something to get to Heyns’ place, so I rather called him on the telephone, from the one in the bar. His wife, Sally answers and I says to her, I says, *Tannie* Sally, have you started eating yet? And she says, ‘We finished already. *Shjoe*, but that leg of

pork was nice!’ She says. And I says to her, *Tannie* Sally, I says,” Jordaan told us, “let me speak to *Meneer* Heyns, there is something I have to tell him.”

University of Cape Town

## MOWBRAY, CAPE TOWN

“*Aaisch*, what am I going to do now, my bru?” Jerome Jacobs walked out of the HI-FI Corporation and found himself in the rather unfortunate position of having lost a Hiace-load of “psychologically challenged” patients en-route to Valkenberg Psychiatric Hospital for observation.

“*Aaisch*, now I’m going to get in big *kak*.” Jerome removed his hand from his head where it had come to rest the moment he had made the disconcerting discovery.

The Hiace was still parked on the pavement where he had left it in his haste to get into the shop, its occupants, however, were absent. Jerome turned to his friend Henry Holland who was hidden behind a big box containing a 74cm Flat Screen television set that Jerome had just bought on Hire Purchase. Henry was obliged to put down the box and pay some attention to the abandoned vehicle parked on the pavement. “*Big kak*, my bru!” said Jerome.

Having no vehicle of his own, Jerome had seen fit to use a driving errand assigned to him by his employers to buy the 74cm Flat Screen television set and transport it home. His

friend Henry Holland worked for HI-FI Corporation on a commission basis. Most of Henry Holland's friends had 74 cm Flat Screen television sets. Some even had two.

"I don't know, my bru, I don't reckon it's a good idea," Jerome had argued against Henry's suggestion that Jerome use his work vehicle for the errand. "Some of these *ous* I have to take to Valkenberg are pretty *mal*. There's one *ou* who killed his mother with scissors. He should be in Pollsmoor, but he stabbed himself too, in the head, he's been in hospital for months. He doesn't talk anymore, just stares into space, but I don't know about him though, he looks dangerous, like he knows what's going on, but just pretends like he's crazy."

"What about the others?"

"Well, my boss says they're OK mostly. There's two girl's got depression, there's an old lady who's got no family and keeps coming in the hospital, I think she's homeless, but she's also just crazy. There's another *ou* who tried to kill himself because his boyfriend left him."

"His boyfriend?"

"*Ja*, He is a *moffie*."

"How'd he try to kill himself?"

"He took *klomp* sleeping pills, slept for a week, but he didn't die. He cried for a week when he woke up, now he just sits all day and doesn't talk to anyone. Shame."

"They'll be OK for two minutes. You just park on the pavement and run in and I'll have everything ready."

"I don't know, my bru." Jerome had reached a comfortable stage in his career. He enjoyed his job, to a certain degree, at least he wasn't stuck in an office, he liked to say, and his bosses trusted him. This was a major accomplishment for a boy with a defective education and experience in nothing much really except the after-dark automotive accessory

redistribution industry; a career which had ended abruptly with a stay in Pollsmoor Prison. Not having a predisposition to major-league organised crime, however, Jerome had stayed on the right side of the fence, so to speak. After serving his sentence and completing the probation, he had landed a job as a delivery driver for the civil service, working his way up from inanimate objects to human cargo.

“Oh shit, I’m in big shit now.” Jerome surveyed the throngs of people moving in every direction for signs of depression or stab wounds inflicted by scissors. He hadn’t really taken a good look at the crew placed under his care. One older woman, two girls, two men; he’d simply arrived at the hospital and they had been ushered into his Hiace by a stern matron who had said, “They’re all medicated and shouldn’t be any problem,” and Jerome had said, “OK, lady,” and signed the forms and driven off in the direction of his friend’s TV shop.

Henry Holland was one usually able to make a plan within moments of being presented with a problem, but, by his silence, he seemed to concur with Jerome’s scatological diagnosis. He walked around to the back of the Hiace and opened the door and went and picked up his big branded box and put it into the Hiace and slammed the door shut.

“I knew I shouldn’t have listened to you!” Stumped for a solution, Jerome decided to launch a guilt re-distributing campaign.

“Umff, well, ah.” For the first time in his life, Henry Holland was surprised to find himself at a loss for words.

“*Shoe, aai*, but it’s hot, *né?*” While Henry was busy surprising himself, a lady laden with shopping bags bumbled past them both, opened the Hiace door and clambered into the front passenger seat, and most of the driver’s seat too while she was at it. She freed a handkerchief from between her bosoms and used it to mop the sweat from her forehead and she said, “*Shoe, aai!*”

Jerome weighed her up with a glance and looked back down at the pavement, "Sorry lady, this is not a taxi ... *Oooof!*" he said.

The lady fixed two bright, wide eyeballs on Jerome who was having trouble breathing owing to an elbow in the solar plexus from Henry. The lady in the front seat said, "Sorry *boetie*, this is not what?"

"This is not so hot, mama, it's going to be thirty-five tomorrow!", finished Henry Holland in his friend's stead and slapped him on the back as he buckled over and gulped for air. Behind them a *doek*-wearing girl with a white handbag strung over her shoulder climbed into the Hiace and slipped back into the second row of seats without much fuss and she was followed closely by a goateed man with long-hair and a big tattoo of something on his chest which showed through the holes in his vest.

"Where's this taxi going, *boetie*?" said the fat lady in the front.

"Mowbray, Cape Town," said Henry Holland and with a deep breath he added, "Mowbray, Cape Town!" for the benefit of the public at large.

"*Ja*, good, I'm going to town, *né*."

It was only many months later, after a committee had been appointed to look into the matter, and Jerome Jacobs had moved on to greater heights in the delivery industry, that authorities were willing to admit that a certain administrative error had taken place at some point that day. Steps were initiated to have the psychological status of the individuals in question re-evaluated. Quite where the error originated was never conclusively established. Evidence given by witnesses concurred with Jerome Jacob's insistence that the persons delivered to Valkenberg Hospital that day were the "craziest bunch of *mallies*" he had ever transported. He had pulled up from great speed at the gates of the mental health facility amid much

confusion: “They don’t even know their own names!” Jerome declared to the guard at the gate, “and one of them jumped out of the Hiace somewhere in Mowbray and ran away!”

The lady in front, Mildred Mahlatsi, had managed to wedge her considerable frame in the open passenger window and her wails and waving arms and ululations were enough to warrant the attention of all the orderlies on duty. Shamiela and Trudy took refuge in hysteria, which took months of heavy sedation to cure, and the tattooed Rodney, who had tried to make a dash for it, was apprehended a block from the hospital gates by Lillington, one of the security guards on duty. Rodney later made a full confession when probed with regard to issues of drug dependence and he responded well to counselling, but, as with the others, continued to manifest disturbing symptoms of confusion and disorientation which warranted a lengthy stay in the hospital and extensive psychological correction until the administrative error was admitted.

## EX-CON

All the trouble started for Jimmy Large the day he went home from work and found that his wife had run away with the furniture. "All she left me was the ring in the bathtub," he told us the next day at work.

"Och shame man," we said.

"Bitch," he said.

We all knew that she had run away with more than the furniture. She'd been banging Butch Hancock for months, but none of us had the heart to tell Jimmy Large about it, the poor bastard. He loved his wife far more than any of us loved ours, and we didn't blame him because we also loved his wife far more than we loved any of ours. Some of us, like Butch Hancock, had managed to love Jimmy Large's wife so many times that we were positively jealous of the bugger.

Sure enough, the next day Jimmy Large came to tell us that his wife had phoned to tell him she'd run away with Butch Hancock and the furniture. And the kids. That was the

worst part, he said. Jimmy Large sat at his desk staring at the little framed photos of his daughters and we all left him alone because we could see he was pretty cut up about the whole thing.

“Och sorry man,” we said and patted him on the back and went back to our desks and looked at our pictures of our children and felt sorry for Jimmy Large.

“The prick,” he said and took a two-hour lunch break and when he came back he was drunk and sat at his desk looking at the pictures of his little daughters.

“Uh, Jimmy?” said the boss, he had gone over to Jimmy’s desk to have a word.

“Motherfucker,” said Jimmy and got up and went back to have some more lunch at the bar across the road.

Then the letter came from the lawyer. It told Jimmy Large that he had to appear in court because he was being sued by his wife for maintenance. He raised the letter in the air and shouted at us that his wife was suing him for maintenance. “The bitch is suing me for maintenance, can you believe this shit!” We couldn’t believe it. “She runs away with the furniture and the Mercedes and Butch Hancock and now she expects me to pay maintenance! Pah! She’s got another think coming if she expects to get a red cent out of me, the bitch!”

“Er, Jimmy,” said the boss because he heard all the shouting from his office and he came out the door, but Jimmy had already gone to lunch by then.

So Jimmy Large went to court and lost and the judge ordered him to pay maintenance. It was the first time in his life that he’d had to wear a tie. “Can you believe this shit!” he told us at work the next day. “She takes everything I have, everything, and now I have to give her money. She runs off with that son-of-a-bitch Butch Hancock and now I have to pay for it!”

We shook our heads and said, "This is terrible, we can't believe this." Jimmy Large sat at his desk and we left him alone and when we went home we told our wives how terrible this thing was that happened to Jimmy Large and we tried harder to love our wives when we got into bed with them, but they said, "What's got into you tonight?"

The next morning we found Jimmy Large asleep at his desk. He said it was the only furniture he had left. The boss said, "Jimmy!" But he had already got up to go and wash in the toilets. When we went in to see if he needed anything, it was very sad to see him there in the gents with his shirt off and his gut sagging over the basin, and he was washing his armpits and trying to shave with the plastic Bic razor and saying, "I can't believe this shit."

He said he wasn't going to pay his wife, ex-wife, a red cent, "That cock-sucking whore bitch of an ex-wife isn't going to get a red cent out of me," he said.

Then, one day, the police came. Jimmy Large was sitting at his desk and they came in and Mrs. MacDonald, the receptionist, showed them through to the boss' office and she looked at Jimmy and we all peeped over our cubicles to see what the police were doing here.

The boss came out of his office with the police and said, "Ah, Jimmy?" and nodded his head towards where Jimmy was pretending to type something on his computer. The police helped him put some things in a box and led him away. They called it Non-Payment of Maintenance like it was a disease he had caught and they were taking him to hospital for it. The boss said that they had had a warrant and there was nothing he could do, but he'd keep Jimmy's job open for him. No-one in the country could do that job with the computer like Jimmy Large could.

They sentenced Jimmy Large and sent him to prison for three months and when he came back to work he didn't look too well. His head was shaven down to a number 1 and the skin

was gray and taut on his face, his cheeks sunken. We said, "It's great to have you back, Jimmy, what was it like in prison?" But he refused to talk about it and we asked him if he would pay the maintenance now. He didn't shout like last time, but he said, "I told you before, I'm not giving that bitch a cent, and that's that."

We told him, "They'll just put you back in prison again, Jimmy. Is it worth it? Just pay her and be done with it, man."

"I'm not going back to prison ever again," he said.

"Ah, so you'll pay the maintenance then?" we asked.

"No, I won't pay the maintenance and that's that." Jimmy Large said something about making some contacts on the "inside" who were going to organise some things for him; they knew some people who knew people, so that he wouldn't have to pay maintenance ever again, something about not having to work ever again too, that things were about to look up "big-time" for him, the good life, he said. He didn't say anything more about it after that, just sat at his desk and took his things out of the box and put them back in his drawers and went along back to programming on the computer.

A few weeks later Jimmy Large didn't come to work ever again. We were worried and the boss phoned him at home, but there was no answer. His wife must have taken the telephone too. We wondered if he had got put back in jail.

A few months after that we got this envelope in the post. It was stamped from South America somewhere, Rio or something; there was no address on the back. Inside was a photo of Jimmy Large, tanned as a berry, holding up this massive barracuda or something, all smiles, his arm around Ronald Biggs, you know, the Great Train Robber, Ronnie Biggs, someone had read about him, making a living selling T-shirts and charging tourists \$100 to play poker

with him at this bar down there in Cuba. On the back of the photo it said, “Wish you were here? - Jimmy,” and we pinned it up on the notice-board, next to the fire escape instructions.

University of Cape Town

## PLATTIE PLATPOOT

**I**t's a funny thing, where stories come from. My dad began his career as a preacher by telling stories about Plattie Platpoot to the Sunday School children at Holy Trinity Church in Pietermaritzburg. If you listened really hard to those stories they would help you get to heaven, even if you forgot the moral at the end because you weren't paying attention. Your age-eleven religious radio was tuned in to Danielle De Pietro. She was the first girl you fell in love with. She was twelve and you never missed a Sunday at church.

My dad, apart from being God's right-hand man, was also a part-time pilot. He decided one holiday to fly us down the South Coast in his favourite hired plane, Foxtrot Echo Juliet, to visit my Grandparents. We spent every holiday with my Grandparents; they had a house near the beach. I think we got lost on the way flying there, because it took us three hours to get there instead of two which is what it is supposed to take when you drive, but we didn't mind, it was a pretty special thing to have your dad fly you away on holiday.

The landing strip in the tiny town where my Grandparents lived was a patch of grass reclaimed from the ocean. It was not a very long landing strip, in fact it was just about big enough to have a picnic on if you got tired of the wind blowing sand into your sandwich on the beach, and as my dad was bringing Foxtrot Echo Juliet in on final approach, he noticed that a family of holiday-makers had decided to do exactly that. A plane doesn't have a hooter. And it's called *final* approach for a good reason.

My dad set a good example and stuck to the seventh commandment and all he said was, "Oh dear," and from where I was sitting it looked like we would be joining the holiday-makers for lunch. They seemed quite thrilled at the prospect, all the little ones waving merrily at us, and the mom holding her straw hat down on her head and offering up her ham sandwich at us. I think maybe only the dad had some inkling that things were not as they should be, because he stood up, perhaps to judge the angle and the distance between us and them better. This was a bad idea because we nearly used his head to land on instead of the ground behind him.

My dad jammed on FEJ's emergency breaks and we skidded along what was left of the landing strip, the plane yawing from side to side, and we came to a stop with one wing grazing on the hedge at the edge of the landing strip before it became beach again. A suitcase fell off the overhead rack and landed on my little sister's head but she was too terrified to cry. We looked back and the little ones were not waving anymore, the dad had his hand on his head and the mom had misplaced her ham sandwich and they were all staring at our aero plane like it was a spaceship from Mars.

So one Sunday at Sunday School my dad told us a story about the time Plattie Platpoot was flying his aero plane to heaven and the engines cut out. As I recall, no reasons were given for the engine failure. It's only later you learn that, like God, technology doesn't have to give

you a reason when it fails you. Plattie Platpoot must have had more faith than Hansie, because his plane didn't fall out of the sky and crash in a fireball against the mountains. The mountains must have moved, because Plattie managed to glide his plane down to earth and pick out a nice big patch of ground where they didn't allow picnics and he executed a perfect landing.

"Now boys and girls," my dad told us in his story, "grown-ups believe that you can fix a thing that's broken just by looking at it. If you don't believe me, watch what your mom or dad does next time the car breaks down. They'll get out of the car and open the bonnet and stare at the engine for a long time. Then they'll close the bonnet and get back in the car and try to start it again. And then they'll get very cross when the car still won't work."

It seems Plattie Platpoot was a regular grown-up, because he did the same thing with the aero plane engines, and he couldn't get them to work either. So he took out a screwdriver, or maybe it was a ratchet set, or maybe he had a spare can of petrol (because that's a leading cause of engine failure) and he fixed the engines. And he climbed back into the cockpit and pressed the starter buttons for the left engine.

"Njum. Njum, njum. Njum-njum. Njum njum njum. Njumnjumnjumnjumnjum," the left engine started.

"And he pressed the starter buttons for the right engine, Njum. Njum, njum. Njum-njum. Njum njum njum. Njumnjumnjumnjumnjum, the right engine started."

And my dad told us in his story then that Plattie Platpoot taxied to the end of the nice big piece of land and he turned the plane around and opened up the throttles and zoomed down the runway and pulled back on the stick and drew up, up into the sky, back on his way to heaven.

## DARRINGTON

**T**he caretaker of our block of flats ... his name is Darrington, only the landlord insists on calling him by his African name as if the gesture will exempt him from apartheid crimes or something.

When I moved in, in January, and I met Darrington, I wasn't sure what to call him because the landlord had said his name was S'Tembiso, but when I met him on the stairs he said, pleased to meet you, I am Darrington.

I was a little confused and I said, I thought your name was S'Tembiso?

Yes, that is my name, but my Christian name is Darrington, he said.

Which do you prefer being called, Darrington, or S'Tembiso? I asked him.

You can call me Darrington, he said.

He comes from Malawi, so sometimes in autumn when the north-easter is blowing and the ocean is flat and calm and the water so clear that you can see the shapes of rocks beneath the surface, Darrington says, the lake is beautiful today.

Our building looks out over the Bay and I have a flat on the first floor with a view of the ocean. The mornings are the best time of the day. The sun rises over the mountains on the other side of the Bay and shines through the gaps in my curtains. There's even a palm tree outside my bedroom window.

Only, I'm usually asleep when the sun shines through the gaps in my curtains. I find it hard to wake up in the mornings. I think it's better to stay in bed until it is at least mid-day, that way it's not so hard to get out of bed, especially in winter. I may have a job by winter, so I'll have to get up when the sun rises, or maybe while it's still dark and go to work and that'll probably kill me, which will be OK because then I'd have a really good excuse not to get up in the mornings.

Darrington doesn't have to go to work, he's always already at work. Mostly he doesn't get up in the morning either, but the landlord doesn't know that because he lives in Johannesburg and only comes down once a year on holiday. Darrington gets up early then. I know because I once woke up early by accident and decided to go for a walk down to the beach and when I was on the road I could see Darrington setting the table for breakfast for the landlord and his wife, out on the patio. The landlord and his wife have the top floor flat with a patio. I had lunch with them once up there and there's a little silver bell on the table to ring so Darrington knows when to come and take away the plates and bring the coffee. I didn't know what to call him then either, so I didn't call him by name, as if by doing so I would betray the fact that he preferred to be called by his Christian name rather than his African name.

Other than setting the table for breakfast when the landlord and his wife come down on holiday, Darrington looks after the building and sweeps up the leaves and I suppose if there was a lawn he would mow it, but there's not, so he doesn't have to do that. He waters the pot plants and washes the windows and brings me my post.

Some days I leave my key for him and he comes in and cleans my flat, but I really prefer that he doesn't do that. It drives me nearly crazy when I come home and things are not exactly where I left them. I like the flat being tidy and I consider myself a tidy person and don't need anybody cleaning up after me. And I especially don't like anybody moving my stuff around.

Some afternoons when I get tired of looking for a job and I decide to go for a walk to the beach, or to buy bread or the newspaper on Wednesdays when it has the Job Shop, I meet Darrington in the driveway where he may be sweeping the leaves from one corner to another and I say, how are you? Sometimes we try and say more than that to each other, but it's usually nothing more than, the weather is nice today, hey, or, the ocean is rough today. Or I tell him I'm going to the beach and he should come down if he wants to. He rests on the end of his broomstick and looks out over the ocean and says, maybe, but he never comes.

I invited him over for dinner one night and I made one of my usual dishes of fried meat mixed with some cook-in-sauce that comes in a packet and tastes like shit. Darrington didn't say it tasted like shit, but he didn't say, mmm! This is good! Like you're supposed to say when someone invites you over for dinner even if it tastes like shit. He said, have you been saved by Jesus? instead.

Well, yes, I told him and it wasn't a lie because I had been saved by Jesus once at a church camp when I was eleven. We all got saved at that camp and there was lots of joy and weeping and hugging. But I soon discovered that I had to choose between being saved and another kind of joy and weeping and hugging that I discovered one day with a girlfriend, and

no matter how hard I tried to get it around my conscience, the two kinds refused to be reconciled.

I could tell from the look Darrington gave me that he didn't believe that I was saved by Jesus, but then it may have been the cook-in-sauce that made him have that kind of look.

His doubts were probably confirmed one morning after a night during which I was availed of some of that other kind of joy and weeping and hugging. Well, my friend Carl was the one who had attempted to be availed of it; he met a girl at the bar near the beach where we often go for a few beers and he invited her over to my place for a few more beers. He shouldn't really have done that because she had had far too many beers already, which probably explains how she could have decided to go back to someone else's friend's flat. My other friend, Lewis, also came back with us.

The girl's name was Kerry and she was from England and was staying at the backpackers near the beach. (Everywhere was near the beach. That's what happens when you live in a coastal town). My friend Carl decided it was time for him to go home when Sherry wasn't sounding very much like she spoke English anymore and then she fell off her chair. So Carl raised his hands and said, boys, I'm going home and he left, which was a pretty low thing to do in my opinion because he had invited Karyn over and didn't seem too concerned anymore about how she was going to get home or about her well-being in general.

Lewis helped her back onto her chair when she fell off it again, and before too long she seemed to regain her powers of speech and she and Lewis struck up a friendly conversation during which he was obliged to help her back onto her chair a few more times. Soon he was compelled to use both arms and most of his body to help her back onto her chair and I could see that he had the situation well in hand so I decided to go to bed.

I took off my shirt and lay down on top of my duvet and after a little while I heard Kerry go to the toilet, for which she had to pass through my bedroom because my flat is a

bachelor flat and only has a lounge and a bedroom and an *en suite* bathroom. When she came out of the bathroom she slipped onto the bed with me and said, you're a wicked man, which was probably true because I had wanted her to come to bed with me and she had.

She said, shh, let's just sleep, but I had a better idea and I kissed her on the mouth and took off her shirt and kissed her breasts and it looked like she didn't feel like sleeping anymore. There is a moment that comes when you kiss a woman and take off her shirt and kiss her breasts and especially if you kiss her neck in the right way. It may come with a sigh, or there may be no perceptible sign of it, but you will know when it arrives and she has given herself to you and you can carry on and lick the inside of her thighs and kiss her pussy if you feel like it and she'll say, I want you inside me and so you'll go ahead and put yourself inside her.

The next morning when we woke up, Kerry said, fooking 'ell, what happened to me last night? And she looked across at the open drawer of my bedside cabinet, at the open box of condoms and she said, ah, fooking 'ell, and she must have remembered what had happened.

I offered to take her back to the backpackers and she said OK. On the way out we passed Darrington who was sweeping the leaves from one step to another and I said, hi, Darrington, how are you? And he just looked at Kerry who was having difficulty walking down the stairs. She said, fooking 'ell a few times and puked cloudy yellow liquid all over Darrington's steps and his leaves and he looked at me with the look he had the night I invited him over for dinner, only this time I don't think it was the cook-in-sauce that made him have that kind of look. I could tell from his look this time that he didn't believe I was saved by Jesus.

## CHASTITY

**T**he caretaker of our block of flats, Darrington ... his wife's name is Chastity. I sublet my flat to a friend once and went away on holiday for a few months because I still couldn't find a job in Cape Town, and when I came back, Chastity was sweeping the leaves off the stairs. I was surprised, because that was usually Darrington's job.

Are you Darrington's replacement? I asked her. I wondered if Darrington had gone and had himself fired like the last caretaker, Solly. Our landlord liked to say that Solly had succumbed to Bacchus and Aphrodite simultaneously and had in so doing proven himself to be a most untrustworthy type of caretaker.

No, I am Darrington's wife, Chastity, said the new lady sweeping the stairs. She was also from Malawi, like Darrington. She always wore a brightly-coloured kikoi, or a turban, or I think it may be called a kanga, or a tablecloth, or whatever they call them in Malawi, around her head and she was young, about eighteen years old I guessed, and she was very

slim and pretty.

I was happy for Darrington to have his wife join him. I felt sorry for him being an immigrant labourer in this country and having to leave his wife and two children back home. I sometimes asked him about his family and said how sad it was that he had to leave them behind to find work. Yes, it is so, he would say, and he would look sad. He looked sad most of the time before Chastity came to stay with him. When I saw him after that, he looked happy, for a time.

Darrington and Chastity's room on the side of our block of flats was very tiny. It contained a single bed and a small table, two plastic chairs and a TV and a two-plate electric cooker and not much else. After Chastity arrived, I didn't see that much of Darrington any more. He let his wife sweep the leaves off the stairs and, like I, he didn't wake up in the mornings any more.

One afternoon, in passing on the stairs, I stopped to chat with Darrington. I said, it's a nice day, isn't it?

Yes, it is, Darrington said, and then I said, Darrington, does the landlord know your wife is here living with you?

Yes, he said. No. But I am to tell him this Saturday. Darrington spoke to the landlord every Saturday on the telephone. The landlord lived in Johannesburg where he was semi-retired and did very important things with business to make very, very large amounts of money.

That would be a good idea, I said. I think he should know.

Life settled back into its usual rhythms then. I would sit at my desk and pretend to write my novel, and on Wednesdays I would walk down to Hennie's Supermarket and buy the *Argus* with the Job Shop and stop for a coffee at H's.

With winter approaching, it was the time of the year when the mountains across the

bay are very clear at twilight. The sun setting away on the Atlantic lends some light across the oceans and it graces the mountains for a moment with a beauty so intense it can make you ache, especially when you are in love with the waitress at H's. You can't bring yourself to go home alone again, but you also can't bring yourself to tell the waitress that you are in love with her. You just want the light on the mountains to last forever, or at least to have someone you love share it with you. You begin to wonder if a life lived alone is really a life lived at all. The moment of the light on the mountains seems to escape because it is not shared. It has no frame of reference to fix it in time and place, except perhaps memory, which is a most unreliable chronicler of life. It's like that old saying about the tree in the forest that falls and if no-one is there to see it fall, did it really fall, and did it make any sound? Or something like that. It's enough to make you want to ask the waitress for a double tequila, and perhaps another, as many as it takes to fall over and forget about the sunlight on the mountains and going to bed alone again.

Darrington and Chastity kept to themselves pretty much. I would see one or the other, usually Chastity, sweeping the leaves from one corner of the driveway to another and say, hello, how are you? But we didn't say much more than that, until one morning when I woke up early by accident. I was making a pot of coffee and wondering what to do with my life, when Chastity appeared at my door. She looked abashed and I could tell that she wanted to talk about something, but wasn't sure how to go about it. So I invited her in, and I invited her to sit on my sleeper-couch because she wasn't sure what to do once she was inside.

I sat down in my rocking chair, next to Chastity. Is something wrong? I asked her.

It is not happy in our household, she said.

What's wrong? I asked.

It is a problem with Darrington. He is saying that he does not love me any more.

Oh?

No. He says he will take another girlfriend. And I do not know what to do.

Do you want to stay with him?

Chastity shrugged and I didn't know what to say next, being unaccustomed to consulting on marital crises.

Do you want me to speak to him? I eventually asked.

No, I do not think that is a good idea, Chastity answered.

Well, maybe you should speak to him. He has a responsibility towards you. Do you have any family in South Africa you might be able to go to if things go bad?

I have a relative in Johannesburg.

Do you have some money, maybe you could go to your relative?

I am pregnant, said Chastity. I have no money.

Oh.

Yes.

How many months pregnant?

Three.

Do you want to go back to Malawi, maybe?

I do not know. I would have to get the money. It is too much. Darrington does not have it.

It was a Sunday morning in April, one of those rare, perfect days in Cape Town when you can't see the mountains across the bay in such detail because of the bromide brown smog hanging over the ocean. Darrington was at church. He went religiously every Sunday, but Chastity did not.

I don't know what you should do, Chastity. Maybe you should just wait a while and see if this passes?

Maybe. We sat for a long time with nothing to say to each other until Chastity stood to leave.

Thank you, she said.

Well, I don't know if I've helped you, Chastity. If you want me to do anything, just let me know. I don't mind talking to Darrington for you, whatever. I'm just not sure that I can give you any money, though.

OK.

I saw Chastity off at my door and she went around the corner to her room to boil a Sunday chicken for Darrington, while I carried on with the pot of coffee and wondered what to do with my day. I decided to do the same thing I had done yesterday: worry about tomorrow.

I didn't see much of Chastity and Darrington for months after that. Darrington, especially, kept to himself and we exchanged pleasantries when we passed each other on the stairs sometimes. When I'd see Chastity sweeping the leaves, I'd ask her if everything was OK, and she would say, yes. I didn't notice any new girlfriends on the premises, the ebb and flow of marital bliss seemed to resume in the tiny room of Darrington and Chastity and their unborn child made its presence felt in the shape of Chastity's swollen belly.

It was a Saturday late morning in spring when Darrington came to tell me that something was wrong with Chastity. I was making a pot of coffee and my door was open, as it usually is so I can see the weather, and Darrington walked in and he looked worried. He said, Chastity is sick, she needs to go to the hospital.

OK, I said. What's wrong?

It is the baby.

I put on a shirt and followed Darrington to his room. Chastity was standing in the

doorway, breathing heavily. Her face was ashen and she was sweating profusely. It did look like she needed to go to hospital.

What's wrong? I asked her, as if it wasn't obvious.

She did not answer. Darrington was standing to one side, unsure of what to do with himself. It occurred to me that this was probably not going to be a very good day.

I helped Chastity up the stairs and into the front seat of my car. She was quiet, but obviously in a great deal of pain. Darrington got into the back, but then climbed out again and went to his room. He returned with a printed card of some sort. It is her card for the outpatients, he said. I tried to think of something reassuring to say to Chastity on the way to the hospital, but I couldn't. Darrington was silent. I asked, how many months is it now?

Eight, Darrington replied.

It took ten minutes to reach the hospital. Darrington directed me towards the outpatients building where Chastity had had her check-ups, but the doors to the outpatients wing were closed. I took out my cell phone and called Rescue 911 while I drove with one hand towards another section of the hospital grounds. An operator answered my call and I asked for the telephone number of the hospital we were at. The operator said, the number follows. have a nice day. I didn't remember the number because people don't know how to remember telephone numbers anymore. That's why they invented cellular phones.

I found the emergency room and parked and helped Chastity out of the car. She struggled to walk into the reception area. Darrington followed. There were a few people seated on wooden benches on the sides of the reception area and you always wonder, like when you go to visit the doctor and you look at the people waiting, what's wrong with these people, they look OK to me? You would have to think that there was much more wrong with these people waiting in the hospital than the ones you see in the doctor's waiting room, things as wrong as whatever was wrong with Chastity.

We were not in a position, it seemed to me, to wait, so I led us to the window of a cubicle like the ones at toll booths and said to the lady behind the glass, what's the procedure? I've brought this woman, she's pregnant and she's an outpatient here, but the outpatients is closed and there's something wrong.

How many months pregnant? said the woman in the cubicle that had a hole in the glass so low you had to bend down to speak through it.

I told her, eight.

Take her through to the emergency room, through there, said the toll booth lady and she pointed down a corridor adjacent to the waiting room, the sister will see her. Do you have her outpatients card? I handed it over from Darrington and then Chastity followed me down the corridor.

It was not immediately obvious to whom I should address our concerns about Chastity's health. I found a doorway and looked through and a matronly-looking woman with epaulettes on her shoulders was inside and she looked like the kind of person equipped to deal with pregnancy crises, so I said, excuse me, I have a patient here who needs urgent attention? That seemed like the right thing to say.

I'll be with you in a minute, said the matronly-looking lady assertively.

The way Chastity was moaning, albeit quietly, and standing with her legs apart like that with her hand on her belly, it didn't seem to me that we had a minute, and I said as much to the lady. So she came out, impatiently, and she said, what seems to be the problem? I pointed to Chastity and said, Chastity is eight months pregnant and something is wrong. The sister put her hand on Chastity's stomach and then she looked at me and said, find a wheelchair and take her up to the Maternity Ward.

I said OK, and wandered off and Chastity followed. I had my instructions, but they seemed a little vague under the circumstances and I must not have displayed the requisite

level of urgency because I heard the sister shout down the corridor after me, quickly now! This, at least, confirmed that we did indeed have a medical emergency on our hands, so I picked up my pace and, on re-entering the reception area, I accosted a man in a blue apron and demanded a wheelchair. He seemed to comprehend the urgency of the situation, so he covered the twelve paces over to where the wheelchairs were parked and brought one over as quickly as he could. I asked him where the Maternity Ward was and he said, first floor, as he punched the button for the lift which was another six paces from where the wheelchairs were parked. I was about to claim that I needed a little more to go on, when the lift door opened and a small lady with a pink apron and a bucket and a mop greeted us and I said, do you know how to get to the Maternity Ward?

Ja, she said.

I said, good, take us there.

She pushed the button for the first floor and with one glance took in this unlikely trio sharing her lift. She put her hand on Chastity's shoulder and she said, is it your first one, sissy?

Chastity said, mmm, between groans and clenched teeth, and I looked at Darrington as I tried to add up certain things that didn't add up all of a sudden. Darrington's face was completely blank and he did not look at me.

The lift door pinged open and the cleaning lady pushed the button to hold it open, she leaned out into the new corridor as I pushed Chastity in the wheelchair, and she pointed down the longest passage I have ever seen in my whole life and said, down to the end, then right, good luck, sissy!

I pushed the wheelchair with Chastity in it down the deserted corridor as fast as it seemed dignified to do without breaking into a run. The linoleum flooring was missing in patches and the wheels of the wheelchair went kachunk, ssssh, kachunk, ssssh, over the rough

patches like that child riding his tricycle down the hallway in *The Shining* and I felt as if I were in a movie too. The wheels squeaked unspeakably and our footsteps echoed and I still could not think of anything consoling to say to Chastity to try and mask the emptiness we all knew we were feeling.

The Maternity Ward was where the cleaning lady said it would be. Finding a person of necessary standing to deal with our crisis was a little more problematic. The reception desk was abandoned and the procedure for admitting an eight-month pregnant woman with complications was not apparent.

I said, hello, to the ward in general, which had no effect.

I said, hello! again, and a nurse in a maroon uniform clutching a handful of bloody medical waste towards which I chose not to pay too much attention, appeared from one of the rooms.

I explained our situation again, and the nurse did the hand on the belly trick and then told Chastity to stand up out of the wheelchair. She did, with much difficulty and my help, while the nurse went into another room and returned with an opaque jug.

We'll need to take a urine sample, she said, and it became suddenly clear to me that this situation had now entered exclusively into the female domain. Darrington and I had become redundant, our purpose served, alienated and estranged by the unknowably feminine air that pervaded the Maternity Ward, the brusqueness of the nurse and something else, some other deeply-felt sense I couldn't quite put my finger on.

Chastity hobbled towards the bathroom to which the nurse had directed her, and Darrington and I floundered, unsure where to look. The nurse moved towards another room. We'll need to prepare a bed for her, she said.

You stay here with her, I said to Darrington. I had noticed an open door to the outside world at the other end of the Maternity Ward. As I made my way towards the light coming

through that door, I had a moment to think about something that had occurred to me when we'd entered the hospital; I couldn't find a trace of that "hospital smell". The last time I'd been in hospital proper was when I six years old for a hernia operation and if I remember nothing about that experience, it would be that hospital smell. It must have taken all these years of R & D to eliminate.

I sat outside the open door which had a huge sign on it: KEEP THIS DOOR CLOSED AT ALL TIMES. This seemed like good advice, given the bloody feminine traumas underway inside. It was a sunny day and while I sat outside wondering what was going to happen next, I became aware of the sounds of a woman giving birth. I heard the midwife instruct, push ... push, and I heard soft groaning and grunting noises. There was something so ordinary about these sounds that I wondered about their significance, or if I was really hearing them. This was not how it's supposed to be. I've seen women giving birth on TV, there's supposed to be screaming and gnashing of teeth, wailing, that sort of thing. The sounds stopped in two minutes and as I watched through the open door that was supposed to be kept closed at all times, I saw Chastity walk slowly, hunched over, out of the delivery room and off down the corridor and she disappeared into another room. This seemed ill-advised under the circumstances, if what I thought I had just heard had in fact occurred, but, no doubt, Chastity had her instructions.

Darrington emerged from the gloom inside. It is a boy, he told me, as if announcing the time of day.

Wow! Congratulations, Darrington, I said and I just could not summon the requisite excitement which the occasion seemed to call for.

You're a father now. Again, I added.

Yes, said Darrington.

We stood there unsure of what to say next and I knew what that feeling was that I

couldn't put my finger on when we had first wheeled into the Maternity Ward and found the midwife: guilt. To what extent, I wondered, was this "bundle of joy", this wonder and trauma perpetrated on the female body attended to by lashings of male guilt? Of course sex must be pleasurable for women, if they make love to men who respect their pleasure, but I would guess that many men don't, and the consequences of a few seconds of male pleasure are this suffering of the nature Chastity had just endured. Somehow, that's what the midwife had made me feel. I felt like a rapist when I wheeled Chastity into the Maternity Ward. Maybe I felt that way all of my own accord, with no help from the midwife. Maybe Darrington felt that way too.

Have you made provisions for the baby? I asked Darrington. Does the boss know that Chastity is ... was pregnant? I added.

Chastity and the baby are to stay with my cousin in Masiphumelele, Darrington answered, not meeting my eye. No, he does not know. I ask you that this can remain a secret between us.

I was quiet for a while. OK, I replied, but I think you should tell Mr. S. This is not something you can keep a secret.

Darrington did not answer. After a while he said, will you take me back to the flats? I have to fetch some things for the baby and Chastity.

Is everything OK with them? I asked.

Yes, they are fine. The baby is premature, but it is alright.

We walked around the outside of the hospital buildings towards my car and I thought to ask, what is the child's name?

Hardon, said Darrington.

Hayden? I echoed, trying to make allowance for Darrington's accent.

Yes, Hardon, he said, making allowance for mine.

How do you spell that?

H-a-r-d-o-n, replied Darrington, and I kept quiet, not having the heart to suggest that that was probably not the best name for a boy in South Africa.

As we drove out of the hospital grounds, I asked Darrington what he needed to collect for the baby. He was rather vague. A blanket, he said, clothes. I asked whether he had these things already. He said, no, some things, maybe not everything.

I don't mind getting some things you need, I said.

We drove to the nearest Pep Stores and went in and I suggested to Darrington that we ask a sales assistant for what we might need. I approached a lady in a blue apron who was putting some clothes on rails and said, hello, we are looking for some clothes for a baby?

How old is it? Asked the sales assistant.

It is a brand new one, not an old one, said Darrington.

The sales assistant looked at him, and looked at me to check whether I was laughing, so she could. I wasn't, but I had a smile on my face.

About twenty minutes old, I said through my smile.

The saleslady took us over to a rack near the door which had new baby clothes on it. I picked out the smallest "baby-gro" I could find. It said "0-3 months" on the label. We also picked out a tiny beanie, some booties, a packet of Hampers, and a small, woolly blanket. I paid with my credit card and we left and as we were pulling out of the parking lot outside of the Pep Stores, Darrington said, I have forgotten something. I stopped and he went back into the Pep Stores and came out a few minutes later with the biggest bag of "sanitary pads" I have ever seen in my whole life.

We drove back to the hospital and I waited in the car while Darrington went inside to deliver our purchases to Chastity and the baby. He came back to the car a short while later and he said, we can go home now. I asked whether he didn't need to stay at the hospital and

how long Chastity would be in the hospital.

No, I can go now. Chastity will stay for a few days in the hospital, Darrington answered.

We drove back to our block of flats in silence.

Let me know when Chastity is ready to come home, I told Darrington as we got out of my car. I'll take you to fetch her.

OK, said Darrington.

He went back to his room and I went back to my flat and a short while later I heard him sweeping the leaves on the driveway.

University of Cape Town

## HARDON

**T**he caretakers of our block of flats, Darrington and Chastity ... they had a son by accident and named him Hardon. They come from Malawi where maybe that is a good name for a boy, although I didn't think it was such a good name.

I was there when Hardon was born. I took Chastity to the hospital, although I didn't meet her baby until she brought him home from the hospital and she came around to my flat to introduce Hardon to me. Hardon was wrapped in a woolly blanket and it was the first time I had seen such a new-born baby. His eyes were closed because he was sleeping, or maybe ignoring the world, because he was born one month premature, so he wasn't really ready for the world.

He looks very wise, I said to Chastity. His tiny, tiny face was laced with intricate wrinkles.

Yes, she said and she smiled and looked at her son as if it was the first time she had seen him.

We stood for a little while together admiring wise-looking Hardon. Let me know if you need help with anything, I told Chastity.

OK, she said, thank you. She took Hardon back to her tiny room around the corner which she shared with her husband. It really did not seem big enough now for a family. They had only a single bed and Darrington had taken to sleeping on the concrete floor in order to make space for Hardon on the bed next to Chastity. I know because the steps look down into Chastity and Darrington's room and one morning their curtains were open and I saw Darrington lying on the floor. It was unusual, because he was usually up by that time sweeping the leaves or sometimes washing the windows. Chastity was standing at the two-plate cooker making a meal and Hardon was lying on the bed, he looked asleep, wrapped in his blanket. He was one week old by then.

The next afternoon when I came home from a job interview, I saw a car that I did not recognize parked in the driveway. When I walked past Darrington and Chastity's room, the door was open and I could see that they had visitors. I thought I would pop in and say hello. I looked in through the open door. The room was crowded. Chastity was sitting on the bed, suckling Hardon. Darrington sat on one of the two plastic garden chairs in the room, alongside a visitor. The other visitor stood. Nobody was saying anything and they seemed embarrassed by my sudden presence. Darrington was staring at a wall.

Hello, I said, and to Chastity, how's the baby?

He is fine, she said.

One of the visitors, the one who was sitting next to Darrington, stood up to greet me. I recognized him; Darrington had introduced us on a visit in the past, but I couldn't remember his name. He was also from Malawi and worked as a caretaker of a million dollar house down the road from us while the owners were away living in London. He remembered my name. He shook my hand and said, how are you?

I'm fine, thanks, and you? I said.

I am well. It is good to see you again, he said.

Yes, and you, I said.

This is my brother John. I turned and shook the other visitor's hand. He nodded, he said, hi. He held a bunch of keys in his left hand, he must be the owner of the car, I thought.

Darrington had not said a word, or altered his gaze from the wall. I said, hi, Darrington. He didn't respond, and I looked at the others in the room for clarity, but none was forthcoming. After a moment's silence Darrington looked at me and said, sorry? Darrington has a slightly Malawian flavoured bry, so it sounded like he said, solly?

How are you? I said.

I am fine, said Darrington and he returned his attention to the wall.

Good, I said, and I made to leave. I stepped outside the room and the visitor sitting next to Darrington followed me out.

I'm sorry, I said, I know we've met, what's your name again?

Gift, he said.

Ah, yes, Gift. Is everything OK with Darrington and Chastity? I asked.

Darrington does not appear so well, said Gift.

What's wrong?

We are not so sure. Chastity called us to come and please visit him. She said he has been acting strangely and maybe we can talk to him.

Oh? How has he been acting?

Well, you can see, he is not talking so much and Chastity says sometimes he does not get up. Sometimes he is talking to himself also.

Mm, I said.

Maybe you can keep an eye on him, Gift suggested.

OK, sure. What's your phone number? I asked, and took out my cell phone. Gift gave me his cell phone number and I typed it into my phone and said goodbye to Gift and went to my flat to check my messages on my home phone. I was hoping that they would call already about the job.

The next day when I came home from another day of pretending to look for a job, Chastity came to tell me that Gift and John had taken Darrington to hospital. Chastity held her silent baby wrapped in his blanket and she said, Darrington has gone sick in his brain.

Hey? I said.

He was not moving. He was just lying down and would not talk to me. I did phone Gift to come and help. They have taken him to hospital.

Aaaisch, I said. What can we do?

Chastity lifted her shoulders. She swayed Hardon gently up and down as if to soothe him after the news of this disaster.

Maybe I can take you to visit him, tomorrow? I offered.

Yes. OK. Thanks, Chastity said.

We waited to see if there was anything else to say to each other, but there wasn't, so Chastity said, goodbye, and she went back to her room with Hardon resting on her shoulder.

I decided to phone the hospital and see what I could make of the situation. When I eventually talked to the right person, she was called Sister Venter. She sounded Irish. She sounded like a lovely lady. I pictured a beautiful, Irish Florence Nightingale who had misplaced her country of birth and her maiden name and was now ministering to sick in the brain Africans. I asked her what she could tell me about Darrington's affliction. I heard papers rustling.

What is ye relationship with the patient? She asked.

Um, I am a neighbour, I said, a friend.

Were you one of those who brought him in? Asked sister Venter.

No, I said.

Well. His friends broot him in then, carried him in apparently, as he was incapacitated. He was sedated and I see the doctor who attended to him has written oon his repoort that he seems to be suffering from psychoosis.

Hey? I said. I thought only people in movies suffered from that.

He's sleeping noo. But we will see if his coondition improves in the moorning.

Is this going to cost him a lot? I asked.

Is he emplooyed? Asked Sister Venter.

Yes, he works as a caretaker of a property in S.

Well, it wo' ne coost too mooch. It'll be a percentage of what he earns, it is affoordable.

OK. Thanks, I said. I'll call again and see how he is tomorrow.

Before I had a chance to call Sister Venter the next day, Darrington's coondition must have improved because he ran away from the hospital during the night. Chastity came to find me and she told me, Darrington is here.

Here? Back home?

Yes, he has run away from the hospital.

I went to investigate and found Darrington lying on the floor of his room wrapped in a blanket. He did not smell very good, like he hadn't bathed for a long time.

Darrington? I said. What's going on, my man?

I just need to sleep, please. I am fine, he said.

Why did you run away from the hospital?

I do not want to go to hospital.

If you are sick, it's maybe the best place, they can help you.

I am not sick. I just want to sleep.

Come, Darrington, I'm taking you back to hospital.

No, please, just leave me alone.

Come, Darrington. I leaned over and lifted one of his arms, but the rest of him stayed on the floor.

Chastity was standing outside, holding Hardon. I heard someone arrive and greet her. It was Gift. Chastity must have phoned him. He joined me inside.

Ay, come my brother, he said to Darrington. Gift bent down and lifted Darrington under both arms to his feet. Darrington's pants were undone. He held them up and didn't resist Gift. Gift helped him into a chair, and began putting his shoes on for him.

You must go back to hospital. You can't run away like this, it is against the law, Gift told Darrington. Darrington said nothing, he allowed Gift to put his shoes on. Gift led Darrington out of the door and down the stairs while I went ahead and opened my car. Gift deposited Darrington into the passenger seat and pulled the safety belt across his chest and buckled him in.

It is the best thing, Gift said to me, Chastity cannot look after Darrington and the baby.

I said, yes, I agree.

I started the car. Gift moved off back to see about Chastity, and Darrington said to me, please, please do not take me back to hospital. Please, I cannot be there. I thought you are my friend; you cannot take me back there.

The car idled and I looked out of my window at the ocean.

What's happening to you? I asked.

Sometimes a person does things that are wrong.

What do you mean?

I have done things. Wrong things.

What have you done?

Well, I have taken things from the master's flat while he is away. Our landlord lived in Johannesburg and only came down sometimes with his wife on holidays.

What sort of things?

Things. Like food.

I sat for a while trying to make sense of Darrington's confession, which didn't seem that psychosis-inducing to me.

That's probably going to be OK, Darrington, I said. We have to go back to the hospital though. They need to make the decision on whether you can be discharged, a person can't run away from hospitals, it is against the law, Gift is right.

Darrington said nothing and I reversed the car up the driveway and turned off in the direction of the hospital. It was the same hospital we had taken Chastity to when she gave birth to Hardon.

I walked in through the Emergency Room entrance with Darrington in tow and I asked the man behind the bullet-proof glass in the reception kiosk where the male ward was.

Second floor, he said. We took the steps.

Half-way up, Darrington stopped. Please, he said, please, just take me home, I am fine. I do not need to be here.

Darrington, I said, the doctors will make a decision about that. We just need to go and talk to them. I walked up the last flight of stairs, afraid that Darrington was going to make a dash for it. He followed, however.

I walked into the male ward and there was a fat lady with two warts on her face and she was wearing a white nurse's uniform with maroon epaulettes, I asked her, hello, I'm looking for Sister Venter?

That's me, she said.

Oh, I said. She spied Darrington in the corridor.

Ye! She said to him. And ye! Where did ye disappear to?

I went home, said Darrington, still holding his pants up with one hand.

Well! Said Sister Venter, and 'oo said ye could goo hoom? Darrington said nothing.

Where doose he live? Sister Venter asked me.

In S, I said.

Ye walked all the way froom 'ere to S! She said to Darrington. Darrington said nothing.

Coom on, let's get ye back te bed! said Sister Venter. I looked at her and I looked quickly around the male ward, preferring not to take in too much detail. All of the beds were full. A pretty, young female doctor was attending to a man with a head swathed in bloodied bandages. That's mostly what I saw. I could empathise all of a sudden with Darrington's insistence on not wanting to be in the hospital, except maybe for the presence of the pretty doctor.

No, said Darrington to Sister Venter.

What? What ye mean, ne? Said Sister Venter.

I will run away again, said Darrington.

We stood in the corridor outside the male ward and Sister Venter said, we have ne finished with ye treatment. We still can'noo say what's wroong with ye and what happened. We need ye to stay `ere for a few moor days.

No, said Darrington. I am better now. There is nothing wrong with me. I have done some bad things, that is all. God is looking after me now. He will forgive me. I can go home.

Sister Venter glanced at me, well, we can' ne foorce ye to stay, she said to Darrington. It's for ye oown good, but there's noothing we can do if ye run away again. Ye are just wasting oor time. Darrington said nothing and Sister Venter stomped back into the male ward to see about a voice bleating, Nurse? Nurse!

Darrington, you really are complicating everybody's lives, I said. Chastity can't look after you and the baby, and I don't have time to bring you back and forth from hospital. If I take you back now, you better sort your shit out, I said.

Darrington said nothing and Sister Venter returned from the male ward. If he wo' ne stay, then we'll discharge him, we can' noo foorce him to stay. She must have decided not to argue with God. Coom aalong, she said. She walked us to the end of the corridor and started rifling around in some drawers in the administration station at the end of the corridor. Where dooes he keep those discharge foorms? She mumbled to herself. The ward supervisor's ne 'ere, she told me, where dooes he poot those tings? She said, as if I'd know, as she looked in in-trays and out-trays and under ashtrays serving as paperweights because it's probably frowned upon to smoke in hospitals. She picked up a telephone which she found under a pile of papers and she punched in an extension number. Miriam? She bellowed, where dooes Leonard keep his discharge foorms? Where is Leonard? She added. Ooh, I see. Doo ye knooow where the foorms are? Ooh. Ookee. Tanks. If you see Leonard, tell him I need him here te see te a patient. Och, she said as she hung up and I wondered if she was Scottish and not Irish. Just write down his name and address and phoon number, etcetera, and I'll soort it oot later. She handed me a stray piece of paper which didn't seem to be serving any important function and she wobbled back from around the counter with a glare at Darrington and went off down the corridor to attend to her sick and maimed charges.

I looked at the piece of paper and then watched Sister Venter disappear and I said to Darrington, let's get the fuck out of here. I put the piece of paper back on a pile of others and we left the hospital.

I dropped Darrington back at the flats and walked down into the village to have coffee at H's. I stayed there for a long time drinking coffee and smiling when the waitress brought me a refill and wondering if I should tell her that I was in love with her. I read the newspaper and a copy of the *Cosmopolitan* which was two months old. There was an article on Manic Depression which is not supposed to be called that anymore, it's called Bipolar Disorder now. I wondered if Darrington had that. I wondered if I did too and whether I would go sick in the brain like him.

There were no jobs for me in the newspaper. There never were; I wasn't qualified for any type of job. When people would ask me what I 'did' I would tell them, sometimes I water the garden and I'm a writer, and they would say, oh? And secretly roll their eyes, or say, really? I always wanted to be a writer, I write things, you know, just for myself, like a journal, you know, it's not very good, I wouldn't show anyone, but I always felt since I was little that I had a novel in me. And I would say, really? And roll my eyes secretly.

I read the other articles in the *Cosmopolitan* about finding the perfect mate and getting multiple orgasms and I wondered whether human beings were actually meant to be monogamous. I thought that perhaps it is against human nature to stay with one partner for life? For whatever reason that monogamy became the precedent for conducting sexual relationships (probably because of Christianity, I thought) maybe it was no longer supposed to be like that and we still went along with it because magazine like the *Cosmopolitan* and the TV adverts and soap operas and Mel Gibson movies tell us that that is what we are supposed to believe. That's why we get so disappointed when love affairs end. They just end,

that's what happens, they are supposed to and it's got nothing to do with failure. But we rally against our inclinations to move on to the next one, we mourn, we perceive failure. We are led to believe that we have failed in love because we don't drive a Mercedes or have a million dollar haircut or use Zitgo cream or because we don't wear the right kind of sunglasses. We are sold the allure of sexual success if only we'd drive a better car, wear the right kind of jeans, get bigger boobs.

I thought about these things and it made me feel like having a tequila, but I couldn't afford tequila because I only had enough money left to buy some mince and spaghetti and I was nearing the end of my overdraft. I thought really hard about that tequila because I could always have three or four and forget to eat like I sometimes did. But I decided to buy food instead. I went to Hennie's Supermarket and I said, hi to Hennie from Hennie's and bought enough mince and spaghetti for Darrington and Chastity too.

When I got back to the flats, I stopped in at Darrington and Chastity's room. Things did not look good. Chastity was sitting on the bed holding Hardon. She was just sitting there and Darrington was lying on the floor, talking to himself in a ceaseless, whispered litany which I could not understand at all.

Darrington? I said. Chastity looked at me and said nothing. Is this what happened before? I asked Chastity. She nodded. I watched Darrington. He just lay there talking to himself. Darrington, what the hell's wrong with you? I said loudly. I thought maybe I could treat him with some shock therapy, like shouting at him. He stopped talking to himself, but he didn't look at me, he said, sorry?

What's going on, my man? I shouted. Darrington said nothing for a while, then began talking to himself again.

Have you had something to eat? I asked Chastity.

She shook her head. I do not have the power to cook, she said.

OK, I said, I will cook for you and Darrington. I'll come and call you when the food is ready. Chastity nodded. She was looking intently at the baby on her lap.

I went back to my flat and cooked the mince and spaghetti and then I went to call Darrington and Chastity. Darrington said, I am not hungry.

I said, Darrington, come and have something to eat, you must, it will make you feel better. I went over to him on the floor and lifted one arm, but the rest of him stayed on the floor. Come on, Darrington, I said.

Chastity said something sternly to him in a language I did not understand and Darrington said nothing. I tugged some more on his arm. After a while he stood up. Good, I said, come on, I'll see you at my place. I went ahead and laid the table. I put the spaghetti I'd made into a bowl and put it on the table with plates and things.

It took a little while for Darrington and Chastity and Hardon to come for dinner. We sat at the table and I dished up for Chastity, but Darrington said, I am not hungry, so I didn't dish up for him yet. Chastity picked at her food and ate a few mouthfuls and said nothing, and then she began suckling her baby. She took out one breast and fed Hardon a nipple and I didn't know where to look really. I tried to talk to Darrington, to give him some more psychotherapy, only this time I didn't shout.

You should have something to eat, I told him, it will make you feel better.

I am not hungry, Darrington said.

What *is* wrong with you? I asked.

I think maybe I am sick, said Darrington.

Yes, you must be, but we can get help for you. That's what they were trying to do at the hospital.

I do not want to go to hospital. I just want to go to sleep and I will feel better.

You are a father now, I said, you have a responsibility to Chastity and your son. They need you to be strong.

I can have some food now, said Darrington.

Good, I said and I dished up a full plate for him and he ate a few mouthfuls. Maybe my spaghetti bolognese was terrible. I used ostrich mince because it was cheaper than other mince.

Chastity had finished feeding Hardon and she lifted him up and inspected his face very closely. It seemed a strange gesture and I said, is everything OK?

He is breathing, like this, said Chastity, and she made short, shallow breaths through her nose. I went over to her side of the table and saw it was so. Hardon's eyes were still closed and he looked like he was struggling to breathe. Maybe that's how babies are supposed to breathe? I said. He looks alright to me.

Chastity shrugged, maybe, she said.

Darrington had begun talking to himself again. I went back to my chair and finished my food and couldn't think of anything more to say. Chastity sat quietly rocking Hardon in her arms and Darrington talked and talked to himself. After a while Chastity said, thank you for the food, it is time for us to go.

You are welcome, Chastity, I said. Maybe things will be better in the morning, I looked at Darrington. When Chastity stood up, he stood up, and balancing her baby against one shoulder, Chastity took Darrington by a wrist and he followed her out through my door and they went to their room. I took the dishes off the table and put them in the sink and wondered what to do next. I put on a CD and sat down on my sleeper couch. Then I went to bed.

Chastity woke me the next morning. She was banging on my bedroom window. Something is wrong, she said. I could see her through a gap in my curtains. She was holding Hardon in her arms. I woke up in a panic and wrapped my duvet around me because I sleep naked and I went to the door and opened it. Chastity was waiting for me there. Something is wrong with my baby! She said. Hardon was loosely wrapped in his blanket and when I opened it there was blood bubbling out of his mouth and nose and his face was covered in blood. I said, oh no, no, no! And I ran back into my room to get dressed.

Chastity was waiting for me when I got to their room. I went in and Darrington was lying on the floor again, talking to himself feverishly. Come, Darrington, I said, you need to come with to the hospital, hurry. Darrington didn't argue, he stood up and followed, still talking and talking to himself.

When we arrived at the hospital and I knew what to do by then. I skipped the receptionist and walked down the emergency room corridor and the first person I came across was the sister on duty, only he was a man. He was wearing blue plastic gloves and was on his way to do something else when we walked in. He stopped because he could see we were distressed and looked at us sternly and I said, this lady gave birth about a week ago, the baby was premature and there's something wrong, he's bleeding. The sister looked into the bundle in Chastity arms, he opened the blanket and he saw the blood. Hardon's tiny arms were waving in the air and he was now moaning softly.

This does not look good, said the sister, which was a stupid thing to say because we knew that already. Take him through there, he indicated a door and we went through into a small room. There was an operating table in the middle and the sister, following us in said, put him down. Chastity did, and the sister opened the blanket and there was blood all over Hardon's tiny body now. Doctor, said the sister, please come and look at this. Then I noticed the doctor who was attending to a man lying on a trolley in the corner. The man was going,

aaai, aaai, and I noticed he had a 3 inch stainless steel nail sticking all the way through his thumb. With him was the same pretty female doctor who I had seen in Darrington's ward when we had tried to take him back there. She was tall and young and gorgeous in a Gwyneth Paltrow kind of way, the kind of girl I fell in love with all the time. She came over and bent over Hardon and then I walked out of that room.

Darrington was standing outside, whispering to himself. Come, Darrington, I said and he followed me back to the waiting room. I went outside and sat on a wooden bench just outside the doors because there was no-one waiting there. I told Darrington to sit down next to me and he did and we waited and waited and Darrington talked and talked to himself.

We waited a long time and no-one came to tell us anything. An ambulance pulled up in front of the entrance and waited too. After a while the driver's assistant got out and walked off a little distance to make a call on his cell phone. He spoke for a long time, glancing occasionally over at the hospital doors where Darrington and I were sitting. Darrington stood up and started clapping his hands and stamping his foot and he sang, I've got the love of Jesus, love of Jesus, in my heart, in my heart, I've got the...

Sit down, Darrington, I said, and he did.

We had waited for about an hour when I decided that maybe Darrington would be better off back in the male ward, he seemed psychotic enough to me. So I said, come Darrington and he followed me and I happened upon the sister. Can you let us know what's going on? I asked.

The doctor will talk to you just now, he said, and it occurs to me that throughout this whole situation, it was only the women who behaved honourably. Only the women showed any grace and compassion.

OK, but this man is the father of the baby, I said to the sister, indicating Darrington. He was admitted here a few days ago for psychiatric observation, but he ran away. I think he

should be re-admitted. The sister looked at him and I said, I can't do anything about that now, you can speak to the doctor, and he walked away. I went back to sit on the bench outside and Darrington did too.

We waited and eventually the pretty doctor came outside and sat down next to Darrington. He was whispering away to himself and she watched him for a little while. What's his name? She asked me. I told her and she said, Darrington? He did not respond. She put a hand on his arm and she said, Darrington, are you praying?

Yes, said Darrington and he responded immediately and looked at the pretty doctor and stopped praying.

What are you praying for? Asked the doctor.

I am praying for God to look after my baby and my wife, said Darrington.

That's very good, said the doctor. I'm sure He is. Your baby is very sick, but he is OK for now. He has a problem with his lungs, but we have put him on oxygen and I think he's going to be alright. The ambulance is waiting to take him to Red Cross Hospital where they have a special place to take care of him. We are just getting him ready.

Thank you, said Darrington.

It's going to be alright, said the doctor and she patted Darrington's arm where she had her hand and she stood up. We are going to ask you to come in and talk to us just now, she told Darrington, OK?

OK, said Darrington and the doctor nodded and looked at me briefly and smiled weakly and went back inside the hospital.

We waited some more and Darrington started praying again and after a while the sister came out to fetch him. Come, he said and scooped his hand in the air at Darrington. Darrington stood up, but he didn't go anywhere, so the Sister took him by the wrist and walked him away into the hospital while I watched.

I stood up and walked away from the doors into the open and carried on waiting. While I was doing that, a police van pulled up outside the emergency room main entrance and two plain-clothes policemen climbed out. One was thin and short with ginger hair and a ginger moustache and a nine-millimeter pistol holstered high up on his hip and the other was fat and must have been wearing his gun under the sloppy gray jacket he had on and he also had takkies on.

They opened the back of the van and pulled out a man. He was wearing a sack with holes cut for his head and arms and he also had on raggy pants. His hair was dreadlocked and dirty like the rest of him and he had big, bulgy eyes that each looked in opposite directions. I recognised him. He used to hang around S. all the time. He would sit on the benches near the beach and do nothing and I think he slept up on the mountain at night. I felt like I knew him well. I never saw him begging, I never heard him speak; it didn't look like he could. He was black and the short, ginger-haired policeman said, *kom fokker*, as he pulled the man out of the police van.

The policemen took him inside to talk to the receptionist behind the bullet-proof glass and I went inside too and sat on one of the benches near the door so I could see what would happen.

The ginger policeman said, good morning to the receptionist and was very polite. He said, we need a psychologist to talk to this man, we need a psychology evaluation. He says his name's Mandela, he's mal.

*Wat's jou naam?* The policeman turned and asked the man who just glared back at him with one eye while the other eye glared at the fat policeman. I wondered what he had done to get picked up by the police. I couldn't hear what the receptionist said, because of the glass. The ginger policeman leaned closer to the hole that you talk through and said, *ja?* Alright *goed. Dankie.*

*Ons moet net wag*, he told his partner in crime-fighting who nodded and looked at the man they had caught and he demanded again of him, what is your name? The man glared at him some more with one eye and still said nothing. The policemen just stood there with the man for a while. Then the fat one came and sat down with the rest of us who were waiting and watching. The ginger policeman stood with the man with the sack on and watched him closely. I looked at the policeman's gun and wondered if he had ever shot anyone.

After a while I lost interest in them and went back outside. The ambulance was still waiting. The driver and her assistant were sitting in the ambulance with the doors open and we were all waiting and then I heard an announcement come over the hospital's PA system. It said: code blue, emergency room, code blue, all available doctors to the emergency room. I watched through the glass of the hospital doors and two doctors came running down the corridor towards me and then turned off down the emergency room corridor to where Hardon was dying. The doctor in front was an older woman and behind her was a man and they were wearing white coats and stethoscopes around their necks that bounced as they ran. I felt a pressure in my head, and the rushing in my veins was the sound of my heart breaking.