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# What Hidden Lies

A Novel

by

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

Faculty of the Humanities  
University of Cape Town  
2011

## **Compulsory Declaration**

This work has not been previously submitted in whole, or 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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# WHAT HIDDEN LIES

## Abstract

'What Hidden Lies' can be read as a straightforward genre novel conforming to the conventions of the murder mystery form, with a tightly constructed plot involving a police investigation, a range of suspects, planted clues, red herrings and a surprise ending. But the novel also seeks to use this accessible literary form to examine deeper issues, such as the formative influences of time and place upon the characters, especially as they pertain to the historical legacy of crime, dispossession of land and racial identity.

The plot, narrated from multiple perspectives, covers the investigation of a murder and its effects upon three very different Cape Town communities, white, black and coloured, showing how unaddressed or hidden lies from the past, continue to impact and reverberate in the present.

Persy Jonas is a young, coloured detective struggling to prove herself among her male colleagues. Her private life is in disarray and she suffers from increasingly debilitating nightmares that have plagued her since childhood. Her partner, the philosophical Dizu Calata, is one of the few people she trusts.

Retired white criminal psychologist Marge Labuschagne is attempting to put her life back together and find some sort of peace after a career spent working with violent criminals has shattered her marriage and driven her family apart.

When she finds the body of an ex patient washed up on the beach she realises that she has information about him that would interest the police. Unfortunately she gets off to a bad start with the young investigating officer, Detective Persy Jonas, who she assumes is purely political window dressing. To Persy, intent on solving the case, the older woman is an arrogant old racist out to undermine her.

For both women the stakes are high. For Persy, it's a chance to prove herself as a detective and bring her bitter enemy Sean Dollery, a childhood friend turned township thug, to justice. For Marge it's the chance to redeem herself after a past error of judgment caused the death of an innocent man.

Initially the two women work at cross-purposes, each convinced that they have the key to the case. Only after they join forces do they get some answers. But the closer they get to the killer, the more the threat of violence intensifies. Then another body turns up dead.

The women's partnership is tested to the limit when Marge realises that Persy has kept vital information from her. As they are increasingly drawn into a dangerous web of lies and violence, the cause of Persy's nightmares is revealed, and Marge finally discovers the truth about the case that has haunted her for twenty years.

A tense psychological mystery set in a remote seaside village outside Cape Town 'What Hidden Lies' reveals the shadow side of a beautiful country still haunted by a violent past.

**WHAT HIDDEN LIES**

By

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The voice came again. Thin, but carrying, as piercing as a bird's, and getting closer. "You go on," she said and turned back along the path. He walked on quickly, hearing her raised voice through the trees, "*Voetsek!* Go home! Stop following me!"

There was silence, followed by a howl of outrage, and then a wailing cry.

She came racing past him. "Come, let's go!"

He set off after her, struggling to catch up with the thin brown legs flashing in and out of his sight, just out of reach. He was bigger, but she was faster, at everything. Quick to learn things that would take him a long time, that sometimes he would never learn, no matter how many times she explained them.

The voice followed them, an anguished cry of abandonment and fury, growing fainter as they ran on through the tunnel of trees.

They slowed to a quick walking pace. No need to talk. Enough to be with her, and away from his father, free to roam. He got scared up here sometimes, but would never tell. She would laugh. Her eyes, with their naked open look, would challenge him, and she would use her sharp elbows on him and ask in her mocking way, "Why are you afraid? Why?"

He couldn't tell her that he was always afraid. Of the black trees with their shiny leathery leaves. Of the mountain above them and the unnatural silence in the milkwoods where their footfalls made no sound. She was afraid of nothing; she only saw what was light and bright in the world. She expected something of

him, he knew that. And he would do whatever she asked, no matter how frightened he was. He had learned to hide his fear, from his father, who would thrash him at the first sign of it.

They emerged from the tunnel of trees and skirted the open mine, past the big machine, silent and resting, unseen by the driver eating his lunch under the trees. The back of the house came into view. They looked down at the tops of the palm trees and the corrugated iron roof. They took the terrace steps two at a time. At the back of the house he found the window and lifted it up for her and they both crawled in. They went through the kitchen and up the stairs to their special place. He inhaled the familiar smells of dust, damp wood and sea. Fine beads of moisture had gathered in the nape of her neck, under the braid. She smiled at him and he saw dust motes like a halo around her head. They went over to the window and looked down at the road to make sure he had not followed them ... and then the roar started, and the earth began to move ...

They walked home without speaking. His throat was choked up with something hard and hurting, with words that could never be said. Back home questions would be asked, but he would never say a word and neither would she. That way they could pretend it had been a game. That they'd imagined it.

And in this way he knew they were bound together, in their sharing in the secret of the game, and that these ties would bind them more strongly than love.

## One

Ocean View appeared at the end of Kommetjie Road, sprawled across the low rises and shallow dips of the rocky outcrops that stretched away from the sea towards Misty Cliffs and Scarborough. Detective Constable Persy Jonas had heard it described as ‘Mediterranean’, maybe because of the brightly painted cottages climbing the rocky hillside against the backdrop of the blue Atlantic. But there was nothing exotic about it – it was like any other township, with its mushrooming shacks and littered streets, thin dogs and rusted car wrecks. She turned into Protea Drive, heading east into the section known as ‘Lapland’ and pulled up at the bottom of Carnation Street. As she climbed out of the air-conditioned cab of the Nissan bakkie the weight of the dry heat struck her like a blow. It was still early morning; it would reach the thirties later. The stench of garbage and rotting kelp, by-products of the spring tide, rose up from the Kom. A couple of young men stood smoking beneath the ineffective shade of a scrappy gum tree; the contrast between the blaring white light and the shade made black pits of their eyes. Small time dealers, *hoekstaanders*, waiting for drop offs. If she searched them they would have nothing, everything stashed away in a hole somewhere, or stuffed under someone’s sink. She felt their eyes on her back as she climbed the rutted track to Sean Dollery’s house. Dollery, moving up into big time *tik* dealing, probably manufacturing from one of the houses further up in Ghost Town. It was the third time this week she’d been round looking for him. He’d been adept at hiding from the time he was a kid. Being a Sunday she might

get lucky, catch him sleeping off his Saturday night. She wanted his case out of the way, not only so she could move on and process the petty thefts and vandalism cases building up on her desk. It was more personal than that.

Twenty Carnation Road was an ash brick block with two lace-curtained windows and a door that sat crooked on its hinges between them, a disgruntled, sullen face. On the corrugated iron roof, like a rakish hat, sat a TV satellite dish. Going on sixty per cent unemployment here, but no shortage of satellite dishes. Certainly not for the Sean Dollerys of this world, coining it from others' misery. She had a visceral hatred for his type that transcended past loyalties. He was scum, pulling the community down. As kids they'd roamed these incongruously named streets – Daisy, Petunia, Carnation, scrabbling in the dust for bits of scrap, anything to be turned into a diversion. The only place of beauty she remembered from her childhood was the church on the hill, St. Norbert's. Frangipani in the vases in the vestry, the scratch of her lace-stiff white dress against the back of her thighs. Her first Holy Communion. Poppa there, hair slicked down and proud in the front pew, craning to catch her walk to the altar, eyes shining like brown berries. On the opposite side of the aisle, Charlene Dollery gazing on the angelic face of Sean, her only son, apple of her eye.

By the time Persy returned from Police College, Sean had succumbed to the thug life, like so many of their peers, fucking up the coloured community, bringing everyone down to their slave mentality level.

Sean's pit bulls started up as she neared the house – chained in the back, baying for blood. They would not be around long, bound as they were for illegal

dogfights. Down in dug out pits covered in corrugated iron, blank-eyed men stripped to the waist and sweating, watching the dogs tear bloody gobbets out of each other. Couldn't stop it – it was just another addiction to violence and pain and oblivion.

She banged on the door.

No answer. Not that she was expecting one. But she caught the twitch of the lace. She banged harder.

“SAPS! Open up!”

Bolts and locks were reluctantly undone. A puffy-eyed barefoot girl stood in the doorway, heavy breasts distorting the Playboy logo on her nightie. A fat baby was slung on her cocked hip, its face a glazed donut of dried snot.

“Where's Sean?” Persy spoke in Afrikaans.

“Working.”

Persy absorbed this blatant lie, delivered without a blink. “*Ja*, and where's this ‘work’?”

The girl was silent but said ‘fuck you’ with her closed up bruised-looking face. The baby tugged at her breast. She swatted his fat hand like a fly, making a sucking noise of disapproval.

“Charlene here?”

“She's there by the German.”

Sean's mother, Charlene Dollery, worked as a domestic for Klaus Schneider, a wealthy German ‘swallow’ who spent half the year in Kommetjie and half in Hamburg.

An older child started whining inside the house, a woman's voice snapped at him to shut up. Charlene, off work this Sunday but not accepting house calls. Not from the police, anyway.

“Tell Sean he must come talk to me. Or else we're going to fetch him and take him to the station. Understand?”

The door slammed in her face – sounds of bolts being shot.

Time to check out the tin and wooden shack round the back. Her hand went to her weapon. Just in case. Ocean View had been a quiet area when Persy was growing up – now it was as dangerous as any other township. Especially for a cop.

The plywood door of the shack had been jimmied a few times and was tightly secured with a couple of heavy chains and padlocks, leaving gaps between the door and frame through which Persy spotted a spray-painting gun and the rear end of Dollery's Golf. Out of action, by the look of it. She felt exposed, wired tension in her neck like she was holding it too tight – as if someone was watching her; probably Sean had her in his sights. It was just a matter of time with her and Sean.

The dogs started up again with hysterical barking, banging their bodies on the tin and barbed wire partition. Half starved probably, or coming down off tik. Sometimes they were fed tik – crystal meth – to bring them to boiling point before a fight. A yelp and silence. Someone was in the back there with them. Had given them a well-aimed kick.

A sound like a gunshot cracked above her head – she dropped like a stone, weapon out, heart jackhammering against her ribs. Keeping down, she scuttled sideways beneath a narrow overhang. It offered her some protection, but her arse was out there for the shooter. No vest either. Stupid, stupid, thinking this a routine call. She pressed her back to the wall, ears ringing with the strain of listening while the dogs went frantic. Whoever was on the roof had a heavy tread, and was thumping around up there – the dogs going mad, slathering and banging themselves against the gate, amped for a fight. Thank God they were chained or she would be torn to shreds. The shuffling stopped. A heavy grunt. Silence. Somehow worse than the noise. Had someone taken the dogs inside?

Her hair stood up on her neck like a brush and the saliva dried in her mouth. Hugging the corrugated iron side she inched towards the back of the shack, hoping for the advantage of surprise. Out of nowhere a dark blur dropped to the ground in front of her, wielding some sort of weapon. She stared into close set red eyes, teeth bared below, displaying long yellow fangs.

A baboon. Alpha male by the look of him. His weapon a half eaten butternut. Her relief was momentary. A rogue male could be dangerous and unpredictable. He'd caught her female scent – she'd have to be aggressive to keep him at bay. She waved her arms, yelling, baring her teeth back at him. He screeched, then turned and disappeared around the side of the shack. She could hear him clambering up the side, the gunshot sound again as he landed on the tin sheeting. He leapt onto the Dollery house, loping along the roof, not taking his eyes off Persy, mocking her.

He reached the satellite dish and hunched down over his pumpkin, slashing at it with teeth that could tear out a human throat in a second. He must have been foraging in the township bins, risking getting shot or poisoned by the locals. She watched him, calming down, feeling her heartbeat return to normal. He was disconcertingly human, but without any moral sense apart from the will to survive. Not unlike your average criminal. She holstered her weapon. Mhlabeni would have pissed himself if he'd seen this. Her so-called colleague, always looking for ways to put her down.

She would share the story with Calata, but no one else at the station.

Never give the bastards the ammunition.

Sean Dollery watched Persy get into the Nissan and rumble down the road. He'd seen her with the baboon – checking her out from his window, not had time to dress yet – still in his CKs. He'd had to control his laughter in case she heard him. Stupid little bitch. Coming to his place so early, harassing him. Who the fuck did she think she was? Sean hated it that she knew so much about him, where he lived, where his Ma worked, the whole history of their shared past. Fuck her, she mustn't come and hang around *Die Blokke*, using her contacts around Lapland and Ghost Town, interfering with his freedom of movement, fucking up his business. He wanted her off his back – she seemed to think she could just walk free, that no one would touch her, because she'd once been one of them. Not any more. The sell-out bitch thought she was so high and mighty now that she was a detective, shaking the township dust off her feet, above him in some way. It was

Poppa who gave her these ideas, killing himself on the boats to send her to that church school with those stuck up snotty bitches in their kilts while the rest of them rotted in the breeze block with its broken windows and dusty playground filled with broken bottles and used condoms.

They had grown up together in Ocean View. He had played in the street with her, walked her to Sunday school where they had Jesus, Mary and Joseph stuffed down their throats. He pushed away the memory of the two of them sheltering under the black milkwoods, he crying his eyes out from one of his pa's beatings. Pushed away the light strong feel of her thin arm around him, comforting him. He didn't want to go soft thinking about how she'd had her fair share of grief and loss – just her and Poppa left in the house after her mother went. Sean's Ma loved Poppa; everyone respected him, even the thugs. He'd been an institution in Ocean View. But he was on his way out, dying in some home somewhere. It was a new generation in Lapland now – harder, tik heads and high flyers moving in, past loyalties dying out with the old Ocean View. He was not sentimental about it, couldn't afford to be. He popped on DSTV. Base MTV. Kanye West in his fur coat, half naked bitches slathering over him. *Heartless, how could you be so heartless?* Sean looked covetously at the Mercedes and the diamonds. One day.

## Two

The morning had begun badly for Marge Labuschagne. She'd woken fuzzy-headed and dry-mouthed after drinking a third of a bottle of scotch and watching too much bad TV the night before. Without family routines to give rhythm and meaning to the weekends, Saturday nights were particularly interminable. Bongo hadn't helped her mood, scratching on the door at some ungodly hour, his whining building to a crescendo of excited yelps in anticipation of a walk, forcing her out of bed and out of the house.

Her caregiving years had finally ended a couple of years ago, and now she was saddled with the responsibility of a hyperactive young male German shepherd. What had Will been thinking, arriving with the puppy in his arms?

"But he's protection, Ma. And he'll be company for you."

The world according to Will; self-interest posing as philanthropy. She chided herself for being uncharitable about her son. He probably worried about her, alone in the house, no real security to speak of. The sadder, more bitter thought was that Bongo had been given to her to compensate for Will's extended absences and sporadic phone calls. Today however, he was coming home for a couple of days, so let her be grateful for small mercies and not dwell on his infrequent contact. If she got Bongo's walk in early she'd be home in time to make lunch and clean the place up a bit. As usual, it looked like a pit.

She followed the dog as he bounded through the gate, averting her eyes from the overgrown garden and neglected swimming pool. Her fitful sleep had been

haunted by savage images of its green slimy water awash in toads. She'd better get out there with the chlorine and the leaf sweeper. Suburban inertia must be overcome, appearances kept up. As it was, her neighbours thought her eccentric at best, stark raving mad at worst. She knew herself to be the subject of gossip in the area, and not only because of her poor house maintenance. There was also a lot of speculation about her former profession with its murky criminal connotations, her 'friendship' with Ivor Reitz and her struggling private practice.

The sight of the irrigation system going full blast in the garden opposite did not improve her mood. The Tinklers, wasting water as usual in spite of the municipal restrictions. Their Ridgebacks, Gigi and Bella, trapped behind the electric fence, snarled and salivated like lunatics at the sight of Bongo trotting past. Stupidest dogs on the planet in Marge's opinion. Like their owners. George was a fool, but Fiona Tinkler was also a scandalmonger of the worst kind. She was one of those people who obsessed over gory stories and relished passing on news of crime or violence. She'd scavenged information about Marge from somewhere, found out that she'd been a criminal psychologist and never stopped asking questions about it, as if it were possible to discern the darkest impulses of the murderous heart. The exception always proved the rule in Marge's experience. She'd learned the futility of assuming patterns in criminal behavior with the one unsolved case that remained with her, daily. Twenty years ago now, but it had been the beginning of her disenchantment with her job. These days she confined herself to her private practice and the anguished navel-gazing of the middle classes. Even if it was a slow death.

Just past the Red Herring, the local watering hole, she came upon Asha de Groot's Maserati blocking the road, jutting out of the driveway of his hundred and fifty year old, multi-million rand conversion known as The Old School House. De Groot was an object of some interest in the valley due to his mysteriously acquired wealth, something to do with IT or carbon trading. He must have returned home in the early hours too incapacitated to manoeuvre the car through the security gates. Marge derived some satisfaction from watching Bongo lift his leg on one of the expensive tyres. June de Groot was in the garden, with her two strangely pale, etiolated children, watching their pet tortoise make its laborious way across the lawn. Marge had dubbed her 'Loon' and dismissed her as a 'muesli muncher', one of those people who don't believe in eating a decent meal. She also dressed her two children in homemade looking clothes and made them wear laughably large sunhats. When they'd first moved in, Marge, moved by an untypical fit of neighbourliness brought on by a mixture of boredom and curiosity, had taken over the remains of a chocolate cake as a housewarming gift, only for June to react as if the cake was spiked, thrusting it back into Marge's hands, "Oh I'm sorry, but we don't eat sugar!" Then she'd promptly whipped out what looked like stiff green paper sticks from the pocket of her Quaker-like apron and handed them to the children, who looked on the verge of tears. "Japanese seaweed," she'd explained. "Full of iron."

Since then Marge had given June a wide berth.

Marge raised her hand in perfunctory greeting. The Loon looked startled, but Orlanda, the little girl, ran to the fence to pet Bongo.

Further on, Marge broke into a light jog, Bongo panting beside her. The fresh air and sharp scent of the sea cleared her head. Screeching cicadas got louder as they neared the beach, muting the sound of the sea. Another house had been torn down in Beach Road. The original wooden bungalows that had been built as holiday homes were being upgraded into more ostentatious solid structures. Newcomers to the area seemed hell-bent on destroying the tranquil ambience with their incessant renovating. Electric fences, metal shutters and fake porticoes were proliferating – which was why it was so important to be active in the Noordhoek Action Group, she reminded herself, even though it meant sitting through interminable boring meetings, putting up with the annoyances and irritations of one's neighbours.

The mass of Chapman's Peak reared ahead, towering above the thick bush on the south side of the mountain, which was still in deep shadow. The staccato cry of a sparrowhawk broke through the boom of the sea. She scanned the sandier sections of the mountain covered in the olive and lime green buchus just come into flower, hoping for a sight of the bird. Towering above the bush were the eleven distinctive narrow palms of Bellevue, the first holiday house built in Noordhoek. Now derelict and falling to pieces, but still with the best views in the valley, from Long Beach to the lighthouse at Slangkoppunt beyond Kommetjie. According to the local estate agent, Renuncia Campher, some titled European idiot owned it. It was the kind of tall story Renuncia tended to come up with when she was in her cups, courtesy of the Red Herring's happy hour.

Marge reached the boardwalk and unclipped Bongo's leash. He tore off along the bleached wooden planks that led through the dunes, heading for the beach. Not yet eight, but sweat already breaking out on the back of her neck and under her arms. The white sky merged with the mirror-like mass of the sea, blinding in its brightness. Salt spray and the herby scent of mountain fynbos filled her nostrils, and with it an exhilarating sense of expansion. There was no land south of this point, only miles of ocean until the pole. Every day of the long winter after her divorce she had trudged the eighteen kilometres of beach from Noordhoek to Kommetjie and back, howling into the icy wind that came straight off the Antarctic. It was only now in these last few months that she'd felt herself coming back to life. Still, every day she fought feelings of loneliness and obsolescence. Both boys gone from the house. Even the cats were self-sufficient. Only Bongo, now a speck on the shoreline, seemed to need her. She whistled and he took off, racing through the shallows, splashing and skittering, tongue flapping, fur flying. He needed a young owner, someone with energy for play. She slowed down to catch her breath. The damn fags would kill her if her liver didn't give out first. She gave herself over to the pleasure of the view. Long Beach, covered in a subtle haze of ocean spray, glittered and sparkled under the ever-changing parabola of the sky.

Out of the haze, two ghost-like riders appeared, heading for the dunes and the bridle path that would take them up to the common where they would walk the horses and cool them down. Marge recognized Ivor Reitz and his groom, Petrus.

Every morning they took the horses as far as *The Kakapo*, a rusted metal wreck of an old steamer, half buried in the sand about eight kilometers from Kommetjie.

She raised a hand in greeting and Petrus waved back in his usual reticent way. The light sparked off the metal on his bridle. Ivor rode on oblivious. Her throat tightened. She was probably being oversensitive. He'd just not seen her. He was far too polite not to acknowledge her if he had.

She'd met Ivor through the Noordhoek Action Group. He was one of the more efficient members, and took on many of the onerous tasks, meeting developers and the heads of different city council departments. He was as passionate about protecting the environment as she was, but was practiced at keeping cool in the face of bureaucratic stonewalling and had more patience with the influx of newcomers into the valley than she did. She tended to be hotheaded and combative. Together they made a good team.

The horses broke into a brief canter, sand flying up about their feet, Ivor ahead, Petrus a way behind, his horse slowing to a trot and then walking.

Bongo's dark shape reached the black rocks at the north end of the beach and disappeared. She called him, even knowing he was unlikely to hear her over the crash of the ocean. She scanned the rocks, feeling the first twinges of anxiety. A dog could easily get into difficulties, even in the shallow swells. She set off towards the rocks, calling and whistling. A memory of the suede-like softness of his large upright ears and black muzzle came to her and with it a frisson of dread as she imagined the house without him. Then she heard the echo of his excited yelps coming from further along the beach. He popped up among the rocks, ears

pricked, tail up, slipping on the wet surface. She called again, but his head went down, intent on some discovery. A dead seal or an otter, probably. Something disgusting and smelly, the scent of which would hang around him for days. She reached the rock pools and clambered over the rocks, still calling. She found him sniffing out a bright jumble of plastic, a long frill of orange and green strips draped over the rock and floating in a pool. The tail of a kite. Torn from a child's grip by the strong winds. Its waving fronds fluctuated with each incoming swell of water, like a plastic anemone.

“Bongo – here boy!”

It was not the kite he was after.

A running shoe bobbed in the water nearby, with bunched denim fabric wedged between the rocks. She peered short-sightedly; she had left her glasses at home. There appeared to be a mauve coloured sock between the denim and the shoe. She tried to get closer, but slipped and grazed her ankle on the barnacles. She hardly felt the pain, because she now saw that what she had taken for a sock was the flesh of an exposed ankle tethered by the running shoe to the rocks. The sea pounded threateningly. Black shiny mussels covering the rocks showed every scallop with hallucinatory sharpness. She moved slowly around to get a better view. Bongo stood stock still, watching her.

Close up she saw that the ankle was part of a leg, and the leg was attached to an obscenely bloated human puppet that bobbed face up in the water, limbs spread-eagled like a starfish. Its pose of abandonment to the sky was grotesquely peaceful, as though it were enjoying this final freedom from the vagaries of life.

She drew closer. A large wound, white and gaping like an exotic flower, disfigured the one side of the head. Despite the battered face, bloated and disfigured, Marge recognised Andrew Sherwood at once.

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## Three

George Tinkler struggled with the Ridgebacks on their leashes as they got near to the beach. Gigi stopped and had a crap right in the damn car park. Luckily no one was around to see. The sign on the green bin faced him accusingly, DOG POO HERE PLEASE!!!! Why the hell should he use a poop scoop when the whole bloody beach was full of dog shit? He had never seen anyone pick up it up in the fifteen years he'd lived in Noordhoek.

Morgana Reitz jogged past and onto the boardwalk ahead of him, her miniature Yorkie tucked under her arm like a furry handbag. She didn't bother to say good morning, but at least he could admire the view. Perky little ponytail sticking out of the hole in the back of the baseball cap which seemed to be there exactly for that purpose. Fantastic body, tight arse, and as for her tits! She was in good shape though she couldn't be shy of forty. All George could say was lucky old Ivor. Why the hell he looked so bloody miserable when he had that in his bed was a mystery. So she was spoilt and silly. She certainly raised the hackles of most of the local females. Fiona, for one, was always going on about how if she herself spent thousands on Botox and breast enhancement surgery, she could also look like a porn star. George kept his mouth shut, but he couldn't imagine Fiona's stolid, Wellington clad form as anything like a porn star's – except maybe for the most perverse of voyeurs.

He was speculating idly about Morgana's charms, not without accompanying sexual stirrings, when he spotted the damn stupid German Shepherd belonging to

that psychologist woman, Marge Labuschagne, which meant she couldn't be far behind. She was an odd bird, rude and superior, and he didn't care to bump into her. Too late, here she was, moving towards him at quite a speed, almost running, and looking flustered. Puffing away, a few kilos overweight, the greying, badly cut hair all awry. As he came within earshot, she gasped out loudly.

“Got a cell phone on you?”

The urgency in her voice made him hand it over without question.

Fumblingly, she punched in the numbers, her hands trembling.

She barked into the mouthpiece. “Fish Hoek police station? I'm calling from Noordhoek Beach. I want to report a dead body.”

As George said later when relaying the story to Fiona over dinner: “She seemed quite cut up, I must say.”

“Oh, she's a queer fish that one,” said Fiona, helping herself to another generous serving of the macaroni cheese. “You'd think she'd be used to that kind of thing. Must have dealt with hundreds of gory things like that, line of business she was in.”

## Four

Commander Paul Titus and most of the detectives and uniformed police from the station were out on the Flats, fighting runaway fires near Monwabisi Beach. Visagie and Fynn were on leave. Mhlabeni, a senior detective, but awaiting a disciplinary hearing, had been on duty the whole weekend and would want to get home.

That left Persy, the least experienced detective in Serious and Violent Crimes, to go check out the body on Noordhoek beach. She gave instructions for the medics and forensics to go to Noordhoek and then dialed Titus's dedicated number, known only to the investigators on his team. He answered on the first ring. Persy wondered if she steeled himself every time his phone rang. Probably not. After all, he believed it was his God-given mission to fight crime and therefore nothing was beyond him. He relished pitting himself against the impossible, his fast brain grappling with the logistics.

"A woman just called in, said she found a man's body washed up on the beach in Noordhoek."

"Bloody day trippers," Titus groaned.

She knew what he meant. In the summer a staggering number of holidaymakers and tourists got injured or drowned. They poured into Cape Town, mistaking it for a benignly beautiful playground, wandering up into the mountains or out to sea with no inkling of the treacherous weather, the sudden changes of

temperature, the deadly currents. It annoyed the hell out of the already overstretched rescue services.

“Seems not. The woman who phoned in recognised him – so he’s probably a local. Phumeza said she’s a – psycho something or other, says she’s worked with the police before.”

“Sounds like a useful witness.”

Persy disagreed. She hated psychological bullshit. It was a complete waste of time. Often as not some bastard walked free because some shrink used his shitty childhood as ‘extenuating circumstances’.

“Where’s Mhlabeni?”

“Just come off his night shift.”

Persy sensed hesitation on Titus’ side. It was probably an accidental drowning, but there could be complications.

“I can handle it, sir.”

“Ok. Take Mhlabeni with you. And call the medics.”

“Done. ”

“Get print unit, photographers. And forensics.”

“On their way, sir.”

“Good. Don’t let anyone touch anything and get as many statements as you can from witnesses.”

Persy rang off. Chances were it was a routine call. Accidental drowning. Still, she would never have got to go out on this case if a more senior detective

had been around. She called Phumeza. “Tell Mhlabeni to get ready. The chief wants him to ride with me to Noordhoek.”

Mhlabeni. Sullen and intransigent at the best of times, after years of being overlooked for promotion. Recently demoted after some altercation with his wife’s shebeen license. Likely to be only temporary. At this point, however, he was virtually at the same level of command as Persy. He would not take kindly to her giving the orders – nor having to work the extra time.

Fourteen hours on duty by now, dreaming of his fat wife and his warm bed. He was going to hate her, more than he usually did. Shit, it would have been great to have Dizu rather than Mhlabeni, but Detective Constable Dizu Calata was only due back tomorrow from a *bosberaad* in Pretoria. A morale booster on how to deal with the black community’s suspicion of the SAPS. A waste of taxpayer’s money if ever there was one.

Persy pulled into the yard at the back of Fish Hoek station. The station covered 1200 square miles of coastline, mountain and valley, much of which fell under the protection of the Table Mountain National Park. It meant a lot of driving. Cars on call out could be gone for several hours. It was lucky that she’d claimed the Nissan bakkie to take to Ocean View.

Mhlabeni hefted his bulk into the driver’s seat, sweating profusely and reeking of stale alcohol. He was seriously overweight, and ate non-stop. His particular addiction was fried chicken. A diabetic on a time bomb. His polyester shirt stuck to his fat rolls, making it impossible for his skin to breathe. Persy wore a light cotton T-shirt, lightweight combat pants and Puma trainers, hand me

downs from Ferial, her cousin Donny's girlfriend, who was nearly as small as she was. Size eight. A child's size. Could be why no one took her seriously.

"What's the story?" Mhlabeni grunted. Pissed off.

"Some guy washed up on the Noordhoek end of Long Beach. Sounds like accidental drowning."

"So for this I must give up my Sunday *pomp* with my wife and a good sleep. For a *dronkgat* who drowned taking a skinny-dip."

Persy shrugged. He was probably right about that. "Don't worry, it's my case. Titus just wants you along in case there's a complication."

Mhlabeni cursed under his breath as he started up the bakkie.

\*

By the time Marge spotted the orange bibs of the medics bobbing along the beach, a stretcher strung between them, followed by the cops, she was decidedly queasy, and her heart was pounding alarmingly. It felt like hours since she'd phoned Fish Hoek station. Her hangover was worsening in the blistering heat. As the small group got closer, she spotted the fat black detective in plainclothes. He was huffing and sweating, seriously out of shape. His sidekick was an undersized coloured youth with short dreads and spectacles.

She trudged across the sand to meet them. "Detective Jonas? I'm Marge Labuschagne."

The fat cop looked blank. She caught a sharp whiff of alcohol.

"I found the body," she explained.

His sidekick stepped up and said, rather rudely. "You can speak to me."

Marge was momentarily taken aback by the affrontery of the boy, who's voice, by the sound of it, had not even broken. "And who are you?"

Large brown eyes blinked at her from behind rimless glasses. "I'm Detective Persy Jonas. This is my colleague, Detective Mhlabeni."

At that point Marge realised that Detective Jonas was a girl. A girl who looked barely old enough to vote. A light ribbon of sweat ran down her nose from her hairline, so that her spectacles kept slipping down her nose. She pushed them up in a nervous gesture. "Where's the body, ma'am?"

The fat black cop whistled between his teeth as he and the girl stared down at the body.

"You'd better get on with it," Marge said. "The tide's coming in."

The girl looked up and pointedly scoured the rocks, as if doubting the wisdom of this warning. Marge was thirsty and the skin on her face felt tight. Sunburn. She was becoming more irritable by the minute. "Did the station tell you that I knew him? His name is Andrew Sherwood. It looks as if he was murdered."

The girl crouched down next to the body, took plastic gloves from her pocket and snapped them on. "Don't worry about it, ma'am. That's our job."

Officious little cow! Patronising her as if she were just any member of the public. "I don't know if you happened to notice, but he's got a bloody great gash on his head –"

"Did you touch him, ma'am?"

“Don’t be ridiculous – of course not! I’m familiar with police procedure. I’m a trained criminal psychologist.”

“Are you on this case in an official capacity, ma’am?”

“No, but – ”

“Then I’d like you to move away from the area, please. Sergeant Mhlabeni will take your statement in a minute.”

Marge felt a flash of heat move over her neck and up her face. She refused to be treated like a rubbernecking fool. “Excuse me, but I thought I could be of some assistance – ”

The girl was busy instructing the hapless fat cop. “Let’s get that tape up.”

The cop glowered back. Jonas was asking for a mutiny at this rate.

“Who is your Commander?” Marge asked with a certain imperiousness.

The girl’s eyes remained fixed on the fat cop who looked in danger of breaking his neck on the slippery rocks. “Captain Titus.”

“I know Titus. I shall have a word with him about this.”

The girl’s face stiffened with forced politeness. “You do that, ma’am. Meanwhile, please move away and let us get on with our jobs.”

Marge knew there was a chronic shortage of detectives, but honestly, talk about scraping the barrel! It was affirmative action of course. And Detective Jonas could certainly tick off a lot of the blocks.

Black. Sort of.

Female. Ditto.

Apartheid in reverse. Marge was aware of falling back on her innate prejudice but was too annoyed to care. How had a mere girl like this made detective? The usual political connections, no doubt. A family member high up in SAPS. Not that Titus would ever be party to nepotism. Not unless he'd changed radically since she'd last worked with him.

Marge and Paul Titus had met on the infamous Cupido case. A clear memory of it flooded back, as if the twenty years since had not passed. Titus beside her, crouched in the oppressively low ceilinged and squalid little room, listening intently while Marge interviewed the mother and grandfather of a missing four-year-old, Clyde Cupido. Their cottage must have been close by, but in those days Noordhoek had been nothing but dunes and bush among which were hidden rundown worker's cottages, rented out to coloured tenant farmers who eked out a living growing vegetables or flowers. She'd been, in that wintry June, a fast rising young criminal profiler, and Paul Titus a newly made detective with a promising career.

Marge had tried to assure Beverley Cupido that they were pursuing every lead in the search for her son. The woman listened, stony faced. Reeking of alcohol. Behind her, on the cheap sideboard, the framed photos were all of Clyde, a round-faced angelic-looking child. The grandfather stood silently listening, his big hands fisted into his thighs as if willing himself to stay upright. At one point her small daughter had slipped like a shadow into the room and went and put her arms around her mother, but was roughly pushed away. The grandfather had taken the little girl by the arm and said, "Come, mommy's not well." And taken her away.

Marge explained about the sort of person most likely to take a child, and Beverly Cupido said she knew someone like that. White, young. He did odd jobs, was some kind of handyman. He was a weirdo - a *moegoe*. He liked kids and they liked him. He couldn't speak to adults though. He hung out with the street kids; bought them chips and cokes, and she'd heard that he took them to his flat. He lived with his mother, above Tex's Fish and Chip shop, where Beverley worked. He always made a fuss of Clyde, when he came into the shop to buy, but he never looked her in the eye. Yes, Clyde knew him – and might have gone off with him if he'd promised him sweets, or a canned drink.

It was the first time Marge had heard the name that continued to haunt her.

Theo Kruger.

\*

Will was surprised to find the house empty and no sign of his mother or Bongo. Her small second hand sedan was parked in the road. She never put it in the garage. It was going to rust away at this rate. When he'd lived at home he'd left a window above his desk slightly ajar for air. After six months his computer had packed up. The Dial a Nerd guy had checked it out and then recommended a dust off, to get rid of what he described as "scrotum flakes". But when he opened it up he found that nearly every component of the computer was rusted through. The nerd was disgusted. "That's sea air for you dude, totally toxic for electronics."

Will thought the sea air was toxic for people too, ate away at their brains, made them content to just sit and turn into vegetables. He hadn't been able to wait to go to varsity and get the hell out of Noordhoek.

He made his way around the side of the house, noting the weeds overtaking the vegetable garden. Every time he came home the house seemed more rundown. His old dagga plants behind the compost heap had wilted. He picked himself a couple of cherry tomatoes, enjoying the hot sweetness bursting in his mouth. A phone was ringing somewhere in the house. He peered through the French windows into his mother's study. The usual chaos, books everywhere, cats snoozing on the sofas. God knows what her patients made of it. She had nagged him and Matt and Dad about the mess for years, but now that she lived alone it was clear that she was as disorganized as they were. Ah, well. It was great that she sat here all day with her cats and Bongo and her garden. Instead of messing around with dangerous criminals.

As a child he'd overheard his parent's discussing her job when they'd imagined him out of earshot. He still had nightmares about some of her cases. He'd been relieved when she'd given up on criminal work and opened a private practice in Noordhoek, working from home. Even if it bored her. It was a decision taken too late for his older brother, Matt. His mother had worked criminal cases throughout his early childhood and he'd borne the brunt of her absences and dark moods. He'd left the country as soon as he could, went off to study at Bristol, and never been back. He'd once said to Will, about their mother, "She wallows in crime and violence. I'm not going to spend the rest of my life doing the same."

As if Mom was somehow to blame for the horrific crime rate, the senseless barbaric violence in the country.

But that was Matt. So much like Dad. Always blaming someone else for the things that went wrong in his life. Will didn't get on with his brother, could not be in the same room with him for more than ten minutes without a slanging match. As for Dad – well, maybe one day he'd forgive him for being an abandoning shit.

Will got back on his motorbike – looked like Mom had forgotten their arrangement; the old thing was getting forgetful these days. He would see if he could connect with someone at the Red Herring, have a beer, maybe a spliff, and then if she wasn't back, head off home to Woodstock.

\*

An hour and a half later Marge, raw-skinned and dehydrated, was still waiting for Mhlabeni to take her statement. Forensics had arrived and a small crowd had gathered around the crime scene tape. It never ceased to amaze her how people reveled in other's misfortunes, no matter how tragic or brutal. She recognised Gregory Crane, the seedy lawyer turned property developer and self-made guru, among the onlookers. Marge knew him from the Noordhoek Action Group meetings, which she suspected he attended just to snoop around. He was wearing one of his usual 'costumes' – a puffy white shirt tucked into tight jeans, white panama hat shading his eyes. Another one of his many personas. This one suggested a man of deep but tragic sensitivities. Gustav von Aschenbach, from *Death in Venice*, maybe. What a creep! She longed to get home to a double espresso and recover her wits. She was more shaken up than she'd realised. And

she was fretting about Will. If he found her gone he might just take off, using the excuse that he thought she had forgotten their arrangement. Will, her last boy, her *laatlammetjie*, now flown the coop, back home on one of his rare lightning quick visits. A quick meal and then he would be off again to play drums on Clifton beach or at some rave out in the boondocks. Then back to his flat in Woodstock. Thirty kilometres or more from Noordhoek, the other side of the Peninsula. As far away from his mother as possible. It could be worse. He could have moved to Bristol, like his older brother. Bongo whimpered and pulled on his lead, panting in the heat and in dire need of water. She had given him the last drops from her water bottle, and had to get him home or at least to the ablution block near the boardwalk where there was an outside tap; but there was no telling how much longer it would take the police to get round to taking her statement. She put Bongo on the leash and went over to where Mhlabeni was bumbling around, attempting to do crowd control.

“Detective? I must go, I have an important engagement.”

He made a rude, shooing motion. “Can’t you see I’m busy? Jonas can attend to you when she’s finished.”

The nerve of it, expecting her to wait on him! Well bugger that for a lark. She was not going to stick around indefinitely to fry to a crisp in the sun.

“In that case, I’m at number twenty two Keurboom Road if you want my statement.”

Ignoring his sullen glare, she set off across the hot sand. The sun reflected off the white beach, crushing her head and sucking out all detail, leaving a blinding,

unbounded sense of light and space. At the ablution block next to the boardwalk, a dog lover had made a drinking bowl from a cut off paint tin, and left it under the tap. Bongo lapped thirstily at the water. Marge turned on the tap, made a cup of her hands and drank. The water was warm and brackish, but what a relief! She splashed her face, feeling again the burning tautness of her skin.

She looked up to see Gregory Crane passing by on the boardwalk. As she reached the parking lot, he roared past her in a brand new Mercedes. Must be a gift from his benefactor, Asha de Groot. Now there were a pair of strange bedfellows. They appeared to be in business together, though she could not imagine what they had in common. She made her way back to the house, hurrying now, nauseous, head throbbing, filled with a nagging anxiety. She wanted to be home when Will arrived.

Back at the house she paused in the cool dim hallway, momentarily blinded after the burning light outside.

No sign of Will.

She went through to the kitchen and poured a glass of water, gulping it down, leaning up against the sink for support. The shock of finding Sherwood had hit her, leaving her enervated, as though the air had been knocked out of her. It had also brought an unwelcome feeling of guilt. She'd done a session with Sherwood, once. She should mention it to the police, as it could throw some light on what looked like a possible murder.

The gate creaked. Bongo rushed to the door, paws scrabbling on the tiled floor. It must be Will!

She opened the door on Ivor Reitz. Her face must have shown surprise.

“Sorry to drop in like this. I heard from George Tinkler about what happened on the beach – I’ve come to see if you’re okay.”

In the doorway he loomed larger than she remembered him. When had he last been to see her at the house? Two, three, months ago?

“That’s thoughtful of you – come in.”

They went through to the living room and she opened the shutters, uncomfortably aware of her red face and sweaty clothes. Ivor wore a lightweight jacket and creased chinos. He must have come straight from the stables. He always looked good, even with mud on his boots.

“How are you feeling?” His voice betrayed a certain tension.

“Well, I have seen worse crime scenes in my time – ”

“Regardless, it must have come as a shock.”

She realised that she had sounded cavalier, but she’d been taken off guard by his concern and her customary defensiveness had kicked in.

“Yes, it was. Even more shocking because I recognised him.”

“George said it was Andrew Sherwood.”

“Of course I forgot that he was one of your tenants.”

Sherwood had rented one of Ivor’s cottages in Kommetjie.

“Yes. Not that I had much to do with him – it was all handled through Renuncia.”

Like most of the residents of Noordhoek, Ivor was loyal to Renuncia Campher, despite her rather lackadaisical approach.

Marge didn't mention that she'd seen Sherwood professionally. She was scrupulous about not discussing clients with anyone.

"Sit down, sorry it's a bit of a pig-sty –"

Ivor remained standing, his hand in his pockets. "What exactly happened?"

He listened carefully as she went through the morning's events. She felt herself gradually regaining her equilibrium. Ivor's calm, rational response was a relief under these circumstances, whereas sometimes she found his reserve rather frustrating.

"Did you speak to the police?"

"Not really – they couldn't seem less interested. This very rude girl detective seems to be handling the whole thing." Persy Jonas' eyes glinting behind her glasses came back to her. She reminded Marge of the bookish, lesbian Trotskyites from UWC that she'd studied with in the eighties. She could hardly imagine a less likely detective.

"They were bumbling around, God knows what they were doing."

"Do they have any idea of what happened?"

"No, but I think it was murder."

He looked shocked. "Is that what the police say?"

"Oh, heaven knows what they think – I don't imagine they know what the hell is going on, quite frankly. Can I offer you something? Glass of wine, tea? I'm going for a large scotch."

“Good idea. I’ll join you.”

She went to the kitchen for ice. Will had left a note propped on the kitchen counter, saying he would not be back until late. She’d been looking forward to catching up over a meal, after not seeing him for weeks. But she knew better than to expect him to fall in with her plans.

Back in the living room Ivor was at the window, staring out at Chapman’s Peak.

“The McNaught comet should be clearly visible again tonight,” she handed him his drink. “I missed you up on the mountain on Friday. The whole of the valley was up there, having a look.”

“Yes, I wanted to see it, but I had... commitments.”

Code for one of Morgana’s lavish dinner parties, Marge assumed.

She sat on the sofa, dislodging the cats who jumped off with protesting meows. “You must see it. It’s only around for another month or so, and not visible every night – it depends on the atmosphere – then it’s gone for a few millennia. I hope Will gets to see it. He loved looking at stars as a boy. I offered to take him, but he’ll probably want to go up there with his friends, or some girl.”

“You can take me instead.” He smiled at her over his glass.

The flirting was clumsy and ill-considered. She felt embarrassed and faintly patronised. Marge had met Ivor through the Noordhoek Action Group and they’d become walking partners after discovering they shared a passion for mountain walks. Over the course of the last winter he began staying on for a glass of wine or two after their return. One afternoon, after a vigorous hike up Pigg’s Peak, he

had flopped down comfortably on her sofa and they had shared a bottle of wine. She had laid a fire, and as night fell they carried on talking. Ivor confided in her, about his wife Justine leaving him for his oldest friend, and his subsequent ill-judged and hasty marriage to Morgana. In turn, Marge had told him about the slow disintegration of her own marriage that had ended with Louis' leaving. Predictably, they had ended up in bed. Both agreed that it should not happen again, and soon after the walks stopped. Marge felt vaguely foolish and made a conscious effort to be realistic about the episode. If he was on her mind more than she would like, it was a folly she was indulging. No more no less.

“Well, I must be off. I'm relieved to see that you're okay.” He was putting down his untouched glass in preparation to leave.

“I don't know if you're hungry? I bought ingredients for Will's favourite meal, but he's out for the evening. It's men's grub. Filet in Madagascan pepper sauce, roast potatoes. And chocolate mousse.”

He looked awkward. “It sounds tempting, Marge, but unfortunately I have a prior engagement.”

She hid her mortification behind a careless tone. “Of course – and I should get some work done.”

He was already making for the door. “But thank you for asking. Let's try for another time.”

She got up and followed his broad back down the passage, feeling inexplicably vulnerable, fighting the prick of tears. Stupid! The after effects of

shock, probably. She opened the door. On the doorstep he turned to face her, his face dark in the sudden blast of light, the blue of his eyes burned almost white.

“It was good to see you again. It’s been a while.”

“Well you know where to find me.” Her tone was more acerbic than she’d intended. She tried to cover by changing the subject. “You should let the police know that Andrew was your tenant. For what it’s worth.”

“I’ll do that.”

She watched him leave, and recalled the many times before when he had walked home, wobbly-legged through the dark, looking back to see her silhouette at the door of her house, watching him.

\*

Mhlabeni was sweating. Persy could smell the alcohol oozing from his pores. “Let me get this right. You didn’t take her statement?”

He shrugged, chewing gum, his jaw working irritably.

“I told you – she’s gone.”

Her fists clenched involuntarily. Mhlabeni was out to fuck this up for her. Putting the boot in.

Persy scanned the fast thinning crowd, recalling Marge Labuschagne’s intransigent air; her square set chin, her arrogant assumption of superiority. Had the old bag gone off in a sulk? She took out her cell. “What’s her number?”

Mhlabeni shrugged. “I don’t know. You spoke to her. And I’m six hours over overtime.”

She moved away, not wanting to give him the satisfaction of seeing her fury, checking her phone to see if the woman had left a message via the station.

No messages.

She called Phumeza, who promised to track Labuschagne down and get back to her. She wished Dizu were around, backing her up efficiently in his quiet way, watching her back.

The beach had emptied; the sun was high in the sky, the heat pulverizing. She had been so hell bent on getting to the SOC that she had not noticed the spectacular setting. Now that she did, she was seized by an unaccountable anxiety – the place was so big, vast and impersonal. In contrast, she felt insignificant and exposed by the too bright light. She turned and looked up at Chapman's Peak. On the lower slopes seven tall palms rose out of the bush, unnaturally still, towering over the surrounding fynbos. A cloud moved over the sun, darkening the palms to black silhouettes. Sound took on a supersonic loudness: hissing bugs, the roar and boom of the ocean, her own overheated blood pounding in her ears. An unaccountable dread, verging on panic, came out of nowhere, and a hot flush burned through her, leaving an icy film of sweat in its wake. She felt as though she might pass out. When had she last had something to eat? Or to drink for that matter. Her cell rang. Phumeza. To say she'd had no luck finding the Labuschagne woman. The cell number she'd used to call the station had redirected Phumeza's calls to a company's answering machine. Marge Labuschagne had vanished, and her statement with her.

“What about the phone book, directory enquiries? Someone must know how to get hold of her.”

“I have. She’s not listed anywhere. You alright?” Phumeza had picked up her tension.

“Yeah, I’m fine.” She clicked off the phone.

The morgue attendants moved past carrying the body bag. She should get back to the station. She had to persuade Titus to give her the case. It was murder, she had no doubt. She had been waiting for this opportunity, enduring the barbs and shit of her colleagues all through this long year. But right now her chances of getting the case were fast diminishing. Thanks to Mhlabeni and Marge Labuschagne.

## Five

Gregory Crane looked out at the Atlantic Ocean from the floor to ceiling windows of the studio. He used to do his spiritual healing sessions in that damp hovel he rented in the Fish Hoek Main Road Arcade. Now the spacious sprung floored room with the spectacular view placed him in an altogether different category, and he had noticed a marked heightening of respect from his clients. And so they should. He had the esoteric knowledge. He alone understood higher worlds. But then he was an adept, whereas most people were confused and spiritually unevolved. Of course it had its drawbacks; occasionally the voices broke through. One could not manipulate unseen forces without consequences. But he had ways of protecting himself.

He had moved in his collection of esoteric books and scattered the odd one here and there on the table. Madame Blavatsky, Annie Besant, Aleister Crowley and then the usual new channeled stuff, Sarchon and Lazaris. He'd read them all. It was the same old thing, really. Nothing he did not know. Today he was expecting Kurt Schneider, Morgana Reitz and later, Asha de Groot. His new disciple and meal ticket. June de Groot, Asha's grey little wife, had accompanied her husband for a couple of sessions, got spooked and left. Sexual initiation, ridding oneself of one's inhibitions, the whole Dionysian aspect of Crane's approach had terrified the wits out of her. She was a bore, but unfortunately exerted a lot of power over Asha through those two sickly brats of theirs.

His thoughts moved to the girl detective he'd seen on the beach. She was a mere child. Any criminal with half a brain could elude her. He despised the police. They were uneducated fools. He'd had to deal with them during his years as a court appointed lawyer, those days when he was on the bones of his arse and forced to represent every two-bit drug dealer and pimp. People like Sean Dollery. Mercifully that was behind him now. Thanks to his new and gullible benefactor he had moved into property development. He would never go back to his old life, would do anything to ensure that he did not. He'd had enough humiliation in his life, thank you very much.

His thoughts turned to the new development at Bellevue. The biggest obstacle to his success had been removed. Permanently. He was going to be a wealthy man. Asha de Groot saw only the projections; but Crane knew that one could cut corners in a myriad of ways to increase profits. The image of Marge Labuschagne's big red face staring at him reproachfully on the beach came back to him. She would create merry hell when she learned of his new plans. He was annoyed that the police markers were already up when he arrived at the scene, he'd have liked a good look. George Tinkler, who he'd passed earlier on the beach, told him that Marge Labuschagne had identified the body as Sherwood's, but he'd wanted to make sure for himself.

Unfortunately, by the time he'd got there Marge Labuschagne was bending the ear of a fat slob policeman who was manning the tape and would let no one through. Trust that damn nosy-parker busybody of a woman to meddle in everything. He dimly recalled hearing that she'd once worked in the criminal

justice system, profiling or something. Must have been donkey's years ago. These days she ran a not too successful practice from home. Apparently patients complained that she could be brusque and abrasive. No surprise. He could not imagine why anyone would go to her for help. Besides, conventional psychology was no help to anyone. He should know. Psychiatrist's and therapists had given up on him. People's problems were largely karmic and could only be healed in the energetic realm.

He remembered an unpleasant incident with Marge at a Conservation Meeting, soon after her husband had left her. After ploughing into the boxed wine, she had become mocking and unpleasant, intimating that he preyed on lonely, desperate people. He did not need to be insulted like that. Still, it came with the territory. He must expect to be maligned by negative energies like Marge Labuschagne. He'd sort her out at some point. Neutralize her.

His clients were on their way and would be expecting some sort of show. He covered the table with a cloth and arranged things on the altar. The dish of salt water for purifying, an ornamental dagger, some wild sage and a candle in a red glass. Some new age music and the mood was set. Let the clients come. He was ready to bestow upon them his spiritual insight.

## Six

Titus was back at the station at seven, after nineteen straight hours of fighting fires in Gugulethu and New Crossroads, hot, irritable, and covered in fine grey ash. He collapsed behind his desk. “It’s under control for now, but if the wind picks up any embers lying around it will all flare up again. So what have you got for me, Jonas?”

Persy filled him in about the body on Noordhoek beach, while he paged through her notes.

“There’s a large impact wound on the head. Forensics think it may have been caused by being thrown against the rocks, or falling, or it could have been inflicted. We’ll know after the autopsy. The woman who found him said that she recognised him as Andrew Sherwood.”

Titus sat still, observing her closely. It was one of the things Persy liked about Titus. His quiet, steady ways. He listened as if he had another ear, hearing things she didn’t even know she was saying.

“Any info on the victim?”

Persy shook her head. “No identifying documents, but Phumeza tracked down a missing person’s report on him that was filed on Saturday by his neighbours. Seems he offered to feed their dog while they were away, but when they got back on Friday night there was no sign of him, or the dog. They noticed that Sherwood’s car was missing. It’s usually parked outside the house. They were worried enough to call the station, although Phumeza thinks it was the dog they

were worried about. Fortunately they remembered the car registration. We've put out an alert."

She could see Titus was pleased that she'd moved fast. So far, so good.

He flipped through the report.

"Where's the statement from the woman who found the body?"

The million-dollar question. "She did a duck, sir."

Titus frowned. "How did that happen?"

"Mhlabeni was meant to follow it up – "

"Are you saying there was an oversight on his part?" he said sharply. Titus discouraged snitching among his team. He valued loyalty.

"He was busy securing the SOC. He was meant to get her statement while I dealt with fingerprints and forensics. But I have her details, I'll find her."

She was passing the buck, but she wasn't about to blow her chances of getting her first murder case by covering for Mhlabeni.

"A witness's statement is a priority. You know that, Jonas. "

"Yes, sir. I'm on top of it."

Titus stood up and stretched. "I'm going home to kiss my girls, take a hot shower and sleep." He struggled into his jacket. "Hopefully my good wife recorded the cricket for me."

Persy was instantly deflated. Not a word about her taking on the case. Which meant he intended to give it to a senior detective. Her nemesis Mhlabeni, probably. His probation was due to be lifted. Mhlabeni detested Persy: for being

young, coloured, smart, and worse of all, female. Well, she was not going down without a fight. She followed Titus out into the corridor.

“I’m ready to work a murder case, sir.”

Titus locked the office and pocketed the key.

“Bring in Dollery. Then we can talk.”

“I’m sure we’ll pick him up in the next couple of days.”

She followed him down the corridor. “I’m monitoring his mother’s house. Ocean View station is helping, and Grassy Park is on alert as well.”

She was busking. Dollery had evaded her for nearly two weeks now.

Titus paused at the top of the stairs leading down to the charge office.

“Mhlabeni says Dollery’s small time. Some of the other cops seem to think he’s running tik for the 28s in Ocean View,” he said. “What’s your take?”

The 28s were one of the biggest gangs running drugs on the Cape Flats, and tik was their biggest cash cow. Cheap to make with poorly regulated ingredients. ‘Tik’ from the sound the methamphetamine made when it was burned in a light bulb, and inhaled through a straw.

“I don’t think he’s with the gangs – he’s a lone wolf, doesn’t like to answer to anyone. But he’s not small time and he’s getting bigger. It’s not only tik. He’s into armed robbery, burglaries, dogs lately. He likes excitement. And variety.”

Titus watched her, shrewdly. Everyone at the station knew that she had some kind of history with Dollery. Well, she wasn’t going to enlighten him.

“Well, you have your ear to the ground in Ocean View – by the way, what’s with the Rastafarian hairdo?”

She felt herself redden. “It’s not against SAPS regulations, sir. I checked.”

“Ok, then. Goodnight Jonas. And God bless you.”

He went down the stairs. Persy watched him descend. He was losing hair on his crown. Made him seem more vulnerable.

She ducked into the Ladies toilet, to wash up before she began the long trek back home to the Northern Suburbs. She scrubbed her hands under hot water, feeling tainted by the day. She had her own wash bag, which she always carried with her. She would never use the soap in these places, let alone the filthy towels. Wet wipes were the answer. Use one and discard it, and then another one just in case her hands had touched the side of the bin.

She came out of the Ladies and ran straight into Mhlabeni. “Hey Jonas, powdering your nose again?” Looking nervy and keyed up, been drinking, or jittery from some other illegal substance. There was always a tension in him, an ever-present threat of violence.

“I thought you were desperate to get home.”

“Out the way you mean? While you give Titus a blowjob and spread shit about me?”

“Don’t be so fucking paranoid.” She tried to move past him, but he blocked her.

“How’s your old friend Dollery?”

He knew that she had grown up with Dollery in Ocean View. In fact he knew a lot more about Persy than she was comfortable with.

“I’ll find him,” she said, “don’t lose sleep over it.”

He slammed her against the wall, both his hands pressing on either side of her head. His face was so close she could see his blackheads and ingrown hairs. The sharp smell of mints could not mask the fetid undertow of his breath. “You coloureds. Always sticking together, like flies on shit.”

She was suddenly very aware of her size. He was big and, even going to seed, stronger than her. And they were out of view of anyone in the charge office.

“This Noordhoek thing is my case.” Mhlabeni would block her from working the case every way he could. Not because he wanted the extra workload, but to stop her getting the break. “Maybe if you suck my dick I’ll put in a word with Titus.”

“I’d rather lick a donkey’s arse,” she said. “Fucker.”

He made a disgusting licking motion, and stepped away from her, laughing and hitching up his pants, his dominance established.

Another rogue male baboon.

It was no use complaining about the intimidation. Her life would not be worth living if she ran crying to Titus. She felt the urge to wash her hands again, clean away Mhlabeni, her anger at the Labuschagne woman. But she had to control herself. That’s all she had, her ability to appear impervious, no matter what.

\*

It was after seven, but the sun was still high over the ocean by the time Persy caught her lift with Sergeant Chester April. He usually dropped her off on his way home at the Cash Crusaders in Voortrekker Road in Milnerton. Sometimes she was lucky and Donny was locking up. Sometimes she wasn’t. Sometimes his

mates from the garage had popped round and he was already pissed and a poker game was going on in the back room. It could be a couple of hours before Ferial called and yelled at him to get his arse home, his dinner was getting cold. Or he would have locked up early because of the rugby, or if it were a Sunday like today, he would be waiting impatiently on the pavement for her. There he was on the corner, she could make out his heavy build and bullet-shaped head. Donny liked to work out at lunchtime and all that pumping had paid off. He was just a slab of muscle. He carried a plastic bag. He must have bought brandy and a few beers under the counter at the hotel bar. Probably been drinking in there since he closed the shop a good few hours ago. Her heart sank. Donny was a mean drunk, and more than once she'd had to break up fights with Ferial. At least it was not a Friday – Friday was Donny's binge day, get home at dawn, chuck furniture around, pick on Ferial. Whenever she'd seen Ferial with bruises or a black eye and asked about it, Ferial got pissed off and came up with some story: she'd fallen on the stairs; someone had stuck his elbow into her face on the train. Persy stayed out of it. Domestic disturbances were bad news at the best of times. Treacherous when it was family.

She got out, said goodbye to Chester and followed Donny to his new BMW. God knows how he could afford it. Probably used up his whole salary and then sponged off Ferial who had a job in Human Resources, whatever that was, and was doing well, earning more than five times what Persy was earning. The moment she was in the car she realised that Donny was a lot more pissed than he had first appeared. He swung out into Voortrekker, throwing a zap sign at a taxi

driver who had “Every Black Man a Suspect” on the back of his minibus as well as a sticker of a German Shepherd’s head which said “Adopt a Police Pet.”

Another police lover.

That got her thinking about Mhlabeni. Dizu said Mhlabeni had ‘a wild hair up his arse’. Mhlabeni came from the notorious Eastern Cape Border region and was rumoured to have worked with the tail end of the Special Branch in the early nineties. He had race issues and was skilled at stoking the grievances of the black officers. For that reason alone, Titus treated him with kid gloves. Mhlabeni spoke fluent Xhosa, Zulu, Sotho and Afrikaans, had the chops to be a skilled detective, but booze and the politics had soured him. He’d once said to her, “The public thinks we are rubbish. They don’t give a shit that we risk our lives for them everyday.” She couldn’t fault this worldview from his perspective. Overworked, underpaid and after a lifetime of service he’d lost the commandership to Titus, and was now facing a disciplinary hearing for an overenthusiastic interrogation. Persy understood something of his bitterness but she couldn’t like him. Resentful, but sticking to his job like a fly to shit. To use his expression.

Donny weaved in and out of the traffic and shot a couple of lights.

“Hey, steady on!”

“You telling me I don’t know how to drive now?” Donny grinned, but not because he was happy.

“No, I just want you to take it easy, cowboy.”

“I’m in a hurry, ok? Ferial is always sitting on my fucking head about being late. You cops want to do something about car crash stats? Shut all the nagging

bitches up. They cause these accidents with their *gaaning aan*. Putting pressure on us to get home and eat their *kak* food.”

Persy knew better than to get into this with Donny. He would become obstructive and drive even more like a maniac. No matter she was a cop, she was still trapped in the same shit other women were in every day, men who bullied and intimidated using the car as an instrument of terror. If she really got heavy, he would dump her right here in Voortrekker Road, and it was getting dark. Better just to hang on, hoping to get home in one piece.

University of Cape Town

## Seven

Marge woke up with a sticky mass of wet hair plastered to her neck and forehead, dry-mouthed, head thudding from dehydration. Heat stroke. The painkillers she'd taken earlier for her headache had left her fuzzy headed. The room was in semidarkness. What time was it? Through the bedroom window Chapman's Peak was a solid dark mass against the receding lightness of the sky. The first stars had appeared. It was later than she thought. The morning on the beach came back to her: Ivor Reitz and his horse appearing like ghosts out of the mist, Bongo poised on the skyline, the brightly coloured tail of the kite, and Sherwood's sightless eyes. She had only spoken to Sherwood once, and that had been seven years ago. Yoliswa Xolele had asked her to mediate in a dispute involving Sherwood, who was an administrator at the Logos school at the time, and the music teacher, who had accused him of molesting her child. It had been an upsetting incident, with its echoes of Theo Kruger and the Cupido case. Of course it probably had no bearing on Sherwood's death. In any case, how would the police get to hear about it? She could not disclose what went on in session.

She struggled out of bed and went into the bathroom to splash cold water on her face. In the mirror, under the electric light, her eyes burned in her flushed face.

Downstairs the living room was musty with trapped heat. She opened the French doors leading into the garden. The drone of the night insects rushed in. A large moth fluttered past her into the light above the door and sizzled.

The smell of cooking food came from the Tinkler's across the road and Marge realised she had not eaten all day. No wonder she felt ghastly!

In the kitchen she prepared some store bought minestrone and toasted stale bread, then poured herself a scotch. Made it a double. She carried her supper tray through to the living room. She could kick herself for arranging such a large area of the living room for dining. Now she sat alone at the far end of it. She had covered it with books and papers, not wanting to see the ten empty seats stretching along the room. Ten chairs that had once seated Louis and the children and their numerous friends, eating and drinking wine under the stars on the long summer nights while the house was being built.

Her habitual gloom threatened to descend. The girl detective had not bothered to get back to her. Marge had given that bloody fat cop with the *babbelas* all her details. They should have been around by now, if they had any intention of taking her statement. What if she had important information to convey? In fact, the more she thought about the accusation against Sherwood, the more she became convinced that she had. The whiskey, combined with the heatstroke and the disappointment of Ivor's turning down her dinner invitation, fuelled a growing sense of grievance. Her expertise was being disregarded. The damn falling apart country needed people with her skills, or they'd never get on top of the crime epidemic. But who cared? She had to get the information to the police in an indirect way.

She went over to the phone in the mood to throw caution to the wind, and spoiling for a fight. “Watch me raise merry hell.” She said to Bongo as she picked up the receiver. He watched with interest, one ear cocked. Titus sounded pleased to hear from her. If he was surprised his voice did not convey it.

“I’m sorry to call so late on a Sunday, Paul.”

“Not at all! Long time no see. How are you Marge?”

There were formalities to be gotten through, skirting the subject of Louis’ departure. She caught sight of her sunburnt face and uncombed hair in the mirror above the phone table. Good lord, she looked like a damn *bergie*. But then Titus no longer had that leather jacketed, hungry look he’d had when she’d first met him. A Captain now. Of course he should by rights be the Head Commander of the Western Cape, but he’d blotted his political copybook. Too independent. Not a party man. And of course there’d been the controversy of the Cupido case, which couldn’t have helped his prospects. She told him of her dissatisfaction.

“I apologise for this, Marge. Let me send someone else round to get your statement.”

“Thank you, but I’d prefer Jonas to come. She owes me an apology!”

She rang off, trying to shake the feeling that she’d been petulant.

Bugger that. It had nothing to do with her ego; she had a duty to assist the police. She would point Persy Jonas in the right direction, and hopefully the young woman would connect the dots. She closed the French doors and switched off the lamps. No sense waiting up for Will. Best to have a hot bath and go to bed

Maybe one more scotch to blot out what had turned out to be a very difficult day.

University of Cape Town

## Eight

Monday morning. Beginning of another week. No sign of rain, or of the heat abating. Persy had been up since five, been for a ten kilometer run, caught up on some paperwork and been collected by Chester April, who was now braving the rush hour from Parklands. She had little to say to Chester, had long run out of conversation. He was a classic flatfoot, bespectacled and bemused, with zero ambition, would happily settle for a desk job so that he could pay for his much younger Xhosa girlfriend's airtime and clothing accounts.

The Nissan was no more than a glorified bakkie, with a stiff clutch and stubborn gearbox. The stop-start driving was wearying in the slow moving traffic. All the way her mind had been on the Sherwood case. She was sure it was a murder. A sixth sense telling her. Foul play. Then there was Marge Labuschagne and her missing statement. Had Mhlabeni been assigned the case? Knowing the lazy bastard, he'd probably try to get Sherwood's death signed off as an accidental, to avoid the extra work.

By the time they got into Fish Hoek, she was wound up from the heat, the wind and Chester's overcautious, stop-start driving. From behind the bleared windscreen she peered out covetously at the small houses and salt-blown blocks of flats just visible behind the rundown shops lining the main road, inexplicably barricaded away from the beach by the main road and the railway line. It could have been a seaside town in the 1970s, an old apartheid 'Whites Only' enclave. But Persy would give her left arm to live here, right on False Bay, where the

beach was wide and lapped by the warm Indian Ocean, and she could walk to work.

In her dreams.

Phumeza blocked her in the charge office.

“We found someone to ID the body. Mhlabeni’s at the morgue now.”

So, Titus had given the case to Mhlabeni. Fine. Let him deal with Labuschagne.

“Who’s doing the ID?”

“An old girlfriend of Sherwood’s, Colette McKillian. I tracked her through his car registration – car’s still in her name. Apparently Sherwood never registered it because he didn’t think it would get through roadworthy.”

“Any sign of the car?”

“No – oh, by the way, Titus wants to speak to you. Says it’s urgent.”

Titus was watering his ‘Peace in the Home’ on the windowsill of his office.

“I got a call last night from the woman who found the body on the beach – you know, the missing statement?” He put down his small watering can.

Persy thought, *here we go* –

“I offered to send Mhlabeni, but she specifically asked for you. Said you owed her an apology.”

“Sir – ”

He put up a hand to silence her. “No, hear me out. You obviously don’t know much about Marguerite Labuschagne?”

Persy shrugged.

“The highly respected criminal psychologist? Advised on the Truth Commission hearings?” He paused. “Who happens to be an ex-colleague and old friend of mine.”

“Shit.”

Titus flinched. Titus, a practicing Christian, detested bad language.

“Sorry, sir.”

“I want you to get down to her house, apologise to her, and take her statement. Take Calata along. It may defuse the situation.”

She knew what he meant. Dizu’s charm could melt ice at fifteen paces. He was going to have to put it to good use.

“Sir – ”

“Get going Jonas – Marge doesn’t like to be kept waiting.”

\*

Dizu Calata had arrived at Fish Hoek station a few months after Persy, deployed from the Eastern Cape. He was a born and bred New Brighton boy with a law degree from Rhodes who’d decided to become a detective. His father, a popular ‘struggle’ priest, had virtually disowned him as a result. Dizu said he could not stand the thought of sitting behind a desk sorting out divorces or property disputes, had said, “I want to be where the law is executed, on the ground. The rest is just dust gathering.”

But Persy knew there was big pressure from structures above to move him up into management, where there was a dearth of qualified black faces. A smart, eloquent, black detective with a law degree and an impeccable struggle pedigree made them salivate. And especially in the Western Cape, which was distrusted by the top echelons as too white, too coloured, possibly even reactionary.

He amused Persy with his stories about the *bosberaad*. It had been a complete waste of time, he said. Management types who had never been out of their offices, let alone working policemen, telling him how to establish good relationships with the public. “They should get off their fat backsides and see the kind of public we have to deal with every day. These guys live in cloud-cuckoo-land, man.”

Looking at him now as he drove them to Noordhoek, looking relaxed and cool in a mint coloured open neck shirt, chinos, and loafers, Persy thought that no one would take Dizu for a cop. He looked like the lawyer he’d originally set out to be.

“They’re grooming you, *buti*,” she said.

“I don’t want to be hot-housed into management. It’s just another form of *baaskap*. I see it with all my varsity friends, job-hopping, on this board and that, chasing the big bucks, never taking the time to find out what they’re good at. It’s bad news, man. You’ve got it but you haven’t earned it. It eats away at your self-respect. No ways I’m going to let that happen. I want to work my way up to Captain. Get that kind of respect.”

They turned off Fish Hoek Main Road onto the road to Kommetjie and then right into Ou Kaapse Weg, down past Long Beach Mall, the ugly brick Baptist

church on their left, and the MacDonald's giant plastic M. Along the windswept road with its ugly urban sprawl, vendors sold baskets and firewood and Malawian garden furniture. The South Easter raged on, hot and dry, rocking the car with its gusts, scattering litter across the road and leaving a gritty coat on everything.

“So what's your beef with Marge Labuschagne, Persephone?”

Dizu was the only person Persy allowed to call her by her full name, and only when they were alone. He made it sound okay, even quite beautiful, with his husky timbre. To the rest of the station it was an unpronounceable, pretentious joke. Poppa had chosen her name. His knowledge of Greek mythology was a source of pride, a way of singling himself out as a scholar, an autodidact in a family of illiterates.

It turned out Dizu knew Marge Labuschagne.

“She lectured us on criminology at Rhodes a couple of times. She did a lot of Truth Commission work with the investigators. She knows her stuff.”

“Well I don't rate her people skills,” Persy said sourly.

He grinned. “Don't like her, huh?”

“I was in with a good shot to work this case until she fucked up my chances. So the short answer's no.”

They passed a couple of ugly new developments, mostly walled estates that sprawled across the Belvedere side of the valley.

“A beautiful place like that,” said Dizu, “and they go put walls around everything. It's just a prison, man.”

“You can’t blame people for wanting to be safe.”

“It’s an illusion,” he said. “There’s nowhere safe.”

They were approaching the east side of Chapman’s rearing peak, with its white scar of a kaolin mine cut into the lower slopes.

The sight of the mountain brought back Persy’s unease from the day before. She was relieved when they turned into Beach Road past the Noordhoek Common, and the trees hid the mouth-like gash of the mine. Horses grazed peacefully on the green open space, shaded by rows of gnarled oaks, the leaves withered and browned from the heat. A memory, long forgotten, surged back with surprising clarity. “I rode horses here as a kid.”

“You rode these things? How come?”

She hesitated, at a loss. The retrieval of the memory had brought more inexplicable anxiety. “Well, I lived here with my grandfather, so it must have been then – but I dunno, I’d basically forgotten about it until now.”

“You lived here when you were a kid?”

“They removed all the coloureds – sent us off to Ocean View – to make way for the whites.” She remembered helping Poppa to pack, her mother watching them, blank eyed. “We were among the last coloureds to leave this valley. It must have been nearly twenty years ago.”

“Where’s your grandfather now?”

“Poppa? He’s in a home. He has cancer.”

“Shit, I’m sorry.”

His sympathy made her uncomfortable. *I don’t want your pity.*

She shrugged. "He's in his eighties."

The anxiety pressed in on her, a spectral shadow of something half remembered.

"It's beautiful around here." Dizu, picking up her discomfort, changed the subject. "It reminds me of the Eastern Cape. Mboyti. Near Lusikisiki. Warm sea, thick bush, and eland on the beaches. It's magic, I tell you."

"I've never been to the Eastern Cape. Never been anywhere, actually."

"Should come visit. I'll introduce you to my family, show you some real Xhosa hospitality."

She knew it would probably never happen, but she was pleased he'd asked.

"I'd like that."

He looked surprised by her response. More than that.

Touched.

## Nine

Colette McKillian's hands were shaking so badly that she struggled to fit the key in the lock. What if Andrew had installed an alarm since she had last been here, or employed a maid? The key turned, the door swung open. Dusty Indian cloths, draped across the windows, blocked out most of the light. Hot, the heat trapped in here for days. Rotting vegetable smell and, beneath it, the faint whiff of gas. She went over to the cooker and tightened the screw top of the gas bottle, then hung the keys on the key rack and went through to the living room. She was momentarily disoriented – the room looked different – virtually empty of all furniture. Her mouth dry now, she went through to the bedroom. No bedding, just a stripped mattress. She looked at the desk that the computer was usually on. The computer was gone. She pulled open drawers and cupboard doors, searching for what? Evidence? Photographs, letters, diaries? But everything had been emptied out.

The place felt eerily unused. She had sweated getting to the house from the Salt River morgue, desperate to get here before the police searched it. Now the sweat had dried on her and she was shivering.

What if Andy were watching her?

Andy was dead; she had seen him with her own eyes.

Lying on the slab.

When the body was rolled out at the morgue, Colette had glanced quickly at the face, and then at the familiar tattoo of Celtic patterns around his upper arms.

She had nodded at the detective to confirm identification, not able to speak for the nausea that gripped her stomach.

In the sunlight outside the morgue she'd hidden behind her bug glasses and fiddled in her embroidered bag for a bottle of mineral water. Her hands trembled as she took little sips. Detective Mhlabeni, the fat, black policeman, had sat down beside her on the small concrete bench that looked out onto the morgue's parking area. He stank of alcohol. The traffic roared past on the two-lane highway. A bedraggled pigeon landed near them and began picking at the ground-up litter on the tarmac. She had held her body rigid, as if afraid some part of her flesh might touch his. He'd been incurious, asking only the generic questions, expecting little in way of reply. Colette now went through to the kitchen and drank from the tap, dried her hands with a filthy tea towel, mopping up the sink where she had spilled drops. She went into the bedroom.

Half a dozen wire hangers hung haphazardly from the rail in the wardrobe, as if clothes had been carelessly torn off them. Where were all his clothes and personal effects? Yet another mystery. Like the other unanswered questions around Andy. Whatever had happened, all her suspicions would now be buried with him. She felt immense relief, and guilt at the relief, but underneath a deep abiding anger continued to gnaw away at her.

He had cheated her.

Again.

Now she would never know for sure. He'd had the last laugh. Her torment would continue. In the finality of his death he had taken his secret to the grave

and robbed her of the peace of knowing whether she had been right or wrong. His deception lived on; she would never be free of the lingering doubts. And even worse, she now had another terror to contend with – the twisted legacy of her own mind.

University of Cape Town

## Ten

Marge Labuschagne lived in a small vernacular Cape style house two blocks below the curving Beach Road, facing north onto Chapman's Peak. An unpretentious house in a spectacular setting. Persy shivered as she climbed out of the car. A strong smell of the sea had come with the wind change, bringing a slight chill from the Atlantic. She had not brought a sweater, anticipating another scorching day. She should know better. Cape Town's weather was always surprising. A goofy looking German shepherd rushed to the gate. She recognised the dog that had found the body. His frantic barking brought a lanky, rumped haired young man to the door. He introduced himself as Will. Must be the old bat's son; there was some resemblance in the widely spaced blue eyes. He cast a glance at Dizu and gave Persy a sleepy, interested appraisal and then led them through an open plan living room with a long refectory table and into an adjoining study. It was a large room with a low-beamed ceiling and French doors that looked out onto a wild-looking garden. Every wall was covered with bookshelves stuffed with books, photographs and knick-knacks. Cats were everywhere. Draped over the divan, curled up on the desk. A large ginger lying on the windowsill fixed Persy with a malevolent stare. At once Persy felt her eyes begin to water and her palate itch.

Marge Labuschagne's voice boomed through from the living room. She entered looking harassed, running her fingers through her bob, a lit cigarette in one hand. Dizu stood up. Percy followed suit reluctantly. The psychologist wore a

man's khaki shirt and baggy jeans, with strangely unattractive sandals. Around her neck was a beaded necklace in a vaguely African style. "Morning ma'am," Persy said, stiffly. "This is my colleague, Detective Constable Calata. We've come to follow up for your statement."

"About bloody time," Marge said. "Sit down, please. People milling around make me nervous."

Persy looked with distaste at the fur-choked blanket on which she was expected to sit. The last thing she wanted was to get her black brushed-denim jeans covered in thick cat hair. She took a seat on a strange looking wooden stool. Annoyingly, it left her positioned much lower than the others, a distinct disadvantage for someone of her height.

Dizu unveiled his killer smile. "You lectured me once at Rhodes, ma'am. In Criminal Psychology, Forensic Psychology and Profiling. It was fascinating. It made me decide to give up law and become a detective."

Taking in the kilowatt charm, Persy recalled hearing somewhere that pronounced eyeteeth meant you were highly sexed. She tried to put the thought out of her mind.

The older woman softened visibly at the mixture of charm and dental perfection. "Well, don't hold that against me, please," she laughed, clearly flattered. "It would have been far more lucrative for you to have stuck with law." Was the old bag actually flirting with Dizu?

"I'd rather enforce the law than argue about it. I'm a hands-on kind of guy."

“Lucky SAPS. They don’t often get your caliber of person joining the force.”

She glared pointedly at Persy.

Time to step up and do the necessary.

“I apologise for the mix up yesterday, ma’am. Your number and address were not logged at the station and you are ex-directory,” Persy said.

A flicker of irritation passed across Marge’s face. “My married name is Piper, which you would have known, Detective Jonas, if you had bothered to get my details from you colleague.” She frowned. “Why are you sitting on the Dogon birthing stool, for Pete’s sake? Why don’t you sit in the armchair?”

“Cat allergy, ma’am. It’s the fur.”

“Suit yourself.” Marge puffed irritably on her cigarette.

Did she actually inhale? Persy was finding it difficult to breathe. She went over to the French doors. “Do you mind if I ... I’m allergic to cigarette smoke.”

“Go ahead then, if you must.”

She struggled to open the doors, conscious of Marge’s eyes on her.

“You’re very hypoallergenic, detective.” Marge’s tone was dry.

Must be hell living with her.

Persy sat down on the edge of the armchair and pulled out her notebook. “Did you notice anything out of the ordinary on the beach yesterday?”

“Apart from a dead body, you mean?” Marge gave a short, barking laugh that turned into a prolonged smoker’s cough. “No, just a couple of riders, Noordhoek people, my friend Ivor and his groom, Petrus. They were coming back from the Kakapo; they turned off onto the dunes heading home.”

“Could we have his contact details?” Persy flipped her notebook open in an attempt to look official. “He may have seen something.”

Marge ground out her cigarette. “I very much doubt it. He was heading in the opposite direction. But I’m sure he’ll call you. He was Sherwood’s landlord.”

Persy was alerted by the overcasual delivery.

Will came in, carrying a large tray with a cafetière of fresh coffee, rough-hewn pottery mugs and homemade rusks. Marge beamed at him “Thanks, *skat* – just put it down there.”

Will put down the tray and then ran his fingers through his unruly thatch of dark blonde hair. The mugs looked none too clean to Persy’s expert eye.

“I’ll be upstairs – I have some paperwork to do.”

He left the room and Marge turned to Dizu. “He can’t deal with dead bodies. Comes from having a criminologist for a mother.”

Will looked incapable of much generally, in Persy’s opinion.

“Unless the bodies have been dead for years, that is. He’s a historian,’ she continued, picking up on Dizu’s mystified look. “He’s writing a book on the Cape. On Noordhoek, in fact.” She began pouring coffee into the three mugs.

“So, you’ve decided Sherwood was murdered?”

“We’re still investigating,” Persy said.

“Oh come on. He had a great big gash on his head! Someone *bliksem*’d him.”

Persy did not take the bait.

Marge shot a look at Dizu. “What do *you* think?”

Dizu skillfully ignored the question, accepting the proffered mug like a peace offering. “How did you know Andrew Sherwood?” Persy took a sip of her coffee. Black as mud and lukewarm.

“He hung around Noordhoek and Kommetjie. A hippie type, a beach bum. Lots of them around here. It’s the sea air, turns the brain soft. He sold bits and bobs at the market here at Noordhoek Common. It’s a dismal affair, bloody muesli eaters and didgeridoo players. Small world, Noordhoek. Everyone knows everyone around here. And their business. And what they don’t know, they make up.” She gave her short bark-like laugh.

“Anyone who might have reason to kill him?” Persy asked.

“Everyone has some reason to get murdered in my experience,” Marge said sharply.

*Especially you*, Persy thought. “Was he a patient?” she asked.

“Client is the word we use. But yes, I did see him professionally. Once. About seven, eight years ago. I was called in to assist with a – a certain situation.”

“A criminal case?”

“I don’t do criminal cases anymore. Just common or garden neuroses.” She said wryly. “But speak to Yoliswa Xolele. She’s a teacher at the Logos School.” Marge reached for her cigarettes, moving a large grey cat off the desk with a sharp nudge. The cat dropped heavily to the ground with a spitting sound. “Ignore him,” Marge said, lighting up. “Bad tempered old bastard. He’s nearly as old as I am.” She exhaled, her blue eyes like chips of glass squinting at Persy through the

smoke. "I can't tell you anything more. As a therapist I can't disclose privileged information."

Persy's mug of coffee sat untouched on the tray. "Even if the patient is dead?"

"There was another person in the session. Who is still alive. Last time I checked." Marge took a long draw of her cigarette, and then viciously ground it out. "Are we finished here? I have a NAG meeting." She stood up, pulled a crumpled looking jacket off the back of her chair and shrugged it on. The coat was too tight and she fumbled with the buttons. "Noordhoek Action Group. Appropriate acronym as it turns out."

Dizu stood up. "Thank you for your time, ma'am."

Marge ushered them into the hallway.

"I'm glad you got my statement." Her eyes bored holes into Persy's. "Finally."

Persy wasn't going to respond. Was not going to give the old cow the satisfaction.

Marge shut the bottom half of the barn door, locking them out. The light and wind hit them like a blow after the cool dim of the study.

"It was a pleasure to meet you, ma'am," said Dizu.

"Likewise," she said. Then she stared pointedly at Persy. "Don't forget, detective. Yoliswa Xolele. At the Logos School."

Persy gave a stiff smile. "I'll pass the information on to Detective Mhlabeni, ma'am."

Marge paused in the act of closing the top half of the door. “I thought you were in charge of this case?”

Persy couldn't resist a smug little smile. “I've been replaced. Captain Titus thought it should go to a more experienced officer.”

See how she liked dealing with Mhlabeni.

\*

Gregory Crane had left Asha de Groot's house after their usual Monday morning meeting. He detested these breakfast meetings: June de Groot's lumpen food, Asha half asleep, the brats underfoot in the kitchen, the little girl Orlanda, whingeing about school, the toddler with vomit-like cereal smeared everywhere. Crane particularly disliked Orlanda, who stared at him fearfully with black eyes as shiny as olives, as if he was some kind of monster. Fortunately, this morning he and Asha met in the den-like office instead. It was the room of an adolescent boy: a huge flat screen TV dominated one wall. Shelves of computer games gave a good indication of how Asha occupied himself most of the day. Stupid spoiled bastard. Choking on the silver spoon. But pointless to feel aggrieved seeing as Crane was supping from the same utensil. The meeting had been upbeat. As was to be expected. After all, everything was working in their favour. It was all systems go, no more having to handle intransigent fools like Andrew Sherwood.

He cruised down Oak Road in the Mercedes, enjoying the air conditioner that kept the leather interior cool and luxurious. He was taking a shortcut through Keurboom, hoping to bypass building works on Beach Road, when he spotted the girl detective and a young black man emerging from Marge Labuschagne's

overgrown wreck of a house. Of course, having worked with the police before, she would start poking her nose into the investigation. He wasn't too concerned; it might even play into his hands considering her past dealings with Sherwood. He made a mental note: do some background checks on Marge Labuschagne. Never know when he might need some information.

Dizu watched Marge disappear in the side mirror of the Nissan as they drove away. "She's not pleased about Mhlabeni."

"She's just pissed off because she won't have me as her fucking punching bag anymore," Persy said irritably.

"I must say, I liked her. She's a character."

"There's no accounting for taste."

Dizu was amused by her acid tone. Why was she threatened by Marge Labuschagne? He rolled down his window. It was getting warm again. The wind was coming off the two oceans through the channel between the Fish Hoek and Noordhoek mountains. Two oceans bringing two winds. One off the warm Indian and the other off the icy Atlantic. Impossible to predict the weather in this place. After two years in Cape Town he still felt like a foreigner, and not just because of the weird weather. The racism was so entrenched that only outsiders could see it. Not a conscious thing, just a smug complacency from the whites, and sometimes open hostility from the coloureds.

"She knows a lot more than she's letting on, believe me," Persy continued.

Dizu felt compelled to defend Marge. “To be fair, she can’t disclose anything about Sherwood if she treated him professionally.”

“She’s withholding information.”

Dizu was amused at Persy’s prissy tone. “Since when were you so by the book, Persephone?”

He’d kept it light, teasing her, but she didn’t like it. She slumped down, brow drawn, lip stuck out. Like a little kid. His eyes strayed down to the button stretched across her starched shirt. Not a bad figure. A bit boyish maybe, but he preferred his women cerebral, wasn’t a Pamela Anderson type of guy. He conjured up a fantasy. Persy in a bikini, running into the sea with David Hasselhof at her side. He must have smiled.

“Want to share the joke?”

He shook his head, fought the image off. Jeez, he was only human. Even a good mission schoolboy like himself.

She looked out of the window. “Think Mhlabeni would let me work this case with him?”

“In your dreams, maybe.” Mhlabeni was lazy and corrupt. Persy was sharp and ambitious. He would never give her a break. Dizu wondered why Persy couldn’t work that one out. Persy’s cell rang.

“Phumeza, what’s up?”

She listened, then turned to him. “Armed robbery at a video shop on Fish Hoek Main Road, about ten minutes ago.”

## Eleven

The fat coloured girl from the Fanatix Video Store snivelled into a tissue as she gave her statement. Persy was more concerned about the chunky middle-aged blonde, Fiona Tinkler, whose hands were in a white-knuckled clasp on the counter. Beneath the counter her one leg trembled uncontrollably.

But once she got talking, Persy thought she would never stop. She gave a good description of the culprits, two young men, one black and one coloured. The coloured was in charge and had the gun. His face was hidden by a baseball cap and sunglasses. He had known about the safe and must have known that they banked on Mondays. She said the owner of the store, her husband George, had employed temporary workers over the Christmas period and she thought she recognised the black youth as one of them.

Her husband was at a meeting, his cell was off. He ran a few small businesses in Fish Hoek: a plumbing company, a *vetkoek paleis* close to the station, as well as a beer garden-cum-sports bar. Persy knew it as a place that attracted older white residents, many now unemployable, who swapped horror stories about the new South Africa with Zimbabwean expats who had flooded into Fish Hoek in the wake of Mugabe's land grabs. Other shops around the outlet hadn't noticed a thing, and no one had seen the robbers get in or out of a car. The usual opportunistic quick hit, almost impossible to solve without a lead.

Fiona Tinkler didn't know the names of the temporary workers and had no idea where they lived. She said her husband had got them 'off a street corner'.

Dizu took down the notes wryly. Whites were so paranoid about crime, but seldom bothered with getting names or references from the blacks they employed, or found out where they lived. They only thought about getting someone to work for a few bucks a day, no questions asked.

He hated to think it, but some whites had it coming to them.

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## Twelve

The Noordhoek Action Group met after working hours on the first Monday of the month in the hall of the Baptist Church in Fish Hoek, one of the ugliest buildings in the world in Marge's opinion. And this in a country that made an art of producing ugly buildings. Reborn Christians abounded in Fish Hoek, a group Marge particularly distrusted. In fact all religions were suspect in her opinion, but she was particularly irked by the happy clappy contingent. Her profession had given her a jaundiced view on religion generally, never mind talking in tongues and so-called miracles. She knew too much about autosuggestion and how easy it was to induce hypnotic states to swallow outlandish ideas about supernatural intervention.

Inside the hall, white plastic chairs were lined up around a Formica board table. The no frills concrete floor and bare rafters meant the hall was unbearably hot, but the windows remained tightly shut to keep out the howling Southeaster and the fine sand that blew off the beach. They always tried to complete the meetings within an hour, but seldom succeeded.

The usual group was gathered round the table. Ivor and Morgana Reitz and George Tinkler and Yoliswa Xolele sat on one side, while Marge was stranded opposite between Hamish Cormac, the organic gardener, and the ferret-faced Gregory Crane. Hamish was chairing. The meeting had got off to a slow start because the talk had all been of Andrew Sherwood's death.

“Was this Sherwood dude a surfer? Because I nearly got totaled at Dungeons myself, *bru*.” Hamish said. He was an enthusiastic surfer who surfed the highly dangerous section of Noordhoek beach known as The Dungeon every morning before work, looking for the perfect wave.

“It could have been suicide,” said Morgana Reitz, leaning back languorously in her seat, all the better to show off her figure-hugging jodhpurs and a tight T-shirt. At first glance and a slight distance she could pass for thirty, but close up she looked mid-forties. Her jaw line had been tightened and her face had the colourless, plastic-like porelessness that came from repeated chemical peels. Too much Botox between her eyebrows had left her forehead free of all expression, apart from a look of frozen imperturbability. Yoliswa Xolele kept silent although she had known Sherwood best from his time as the Logos school administrator. It was understandable that she wanted to avoid questions and unwanted scrutiny. Not that anyone else apart from Marge knew about the molestation scandal. Except for Gregory Crane. But that was another story.

Once talk of Sherwood had died down, Hamish opened the meeting. Everyone tended to ignore Hamish. He was a cosmic type, all vegan and purity itself. He was also stoned more often than not. A typical inhabitant of Planet South Peninsula, thought Marge. Best not to stir him up though, he could be quite difficult in a passive sort of a way.

“Hey, nice to see y’all.” Hamish rubbed his nose. Or at least the small part that was not full of ironmongery. Marge stifled a sigh. It was going to be a long

session with Hamish at the helm. In fact the ship might not even dock at all, just sail right past its destination and head out into uncharted waters.

“Uh – first off. Oh *ja*, uh, Renuncia sends apologies.”

Renuncia Camphor regularly missed meetings, usually due to a hangover. Marge often saw her laughing raucously on some young man’s arm on the verandah of the Red Herring. She was so often caught in a conflict of interests at NAG meetings that Marge thought she should resign. But Renuncia loved Noordhoek, and had the sense to know that development was killing the goose that laid the golden egg. She was trying to make a living in a grubby business. Not that she added much to the group, if the truth were told. Only three of the members were really effective. Marge, Ivor Reitz and Yoliswa Xolele. Yoliswa could always be counted on to do admin and follow up, but her time was limited. As for the rest of the group, most were total deadbeats in Marge’s opinion.

First on the agenda were new proposals for development. These were always contentious. Gregory Crane stood up and began removing architectural plans from a cardboard roll. He occasionally attended meetings as an ‘interested observer’, which he was perfectly entitled to do, but basically he was a mole come to sniff and spy for his developer buddy, Asha de Groot, and his consortium of golf playing cronies.

“Here are the revised plans for our new development.” He unrolled the plans on the table, weighing down the curled up corners with water glasses and his briefcase. Today he wore a hacking jacket with leather inserts and a vaguely Tyrolean hat. The Bohemian architect. He was too humourless to be ironic, but he

always seemed to be subtly mocking whatever milieu he happened to be inhabiting. Marge had once spotted him playing the thespian at the Baxter Theatre, in a beret and a cape-like coat, sipping red wine and holding forth in the foyer to a gaggle of bug-eyed women. His costumes and personas indicated a grandiose narcissist with an undeveloped ego. Not that Marge put much store by the jargon anymore. The Truth Commission had left her somewhat jaded when it came to the wisdom of the graybeards of psychology. What if a person was just plain evil? She recalled the single-mindedness with which Crane had stared at the taped-off area where the police were examining Sherwood's body. Then again, was he any different to any of the other bloodthirsty onlookers rubbernecking on the beach? There was no accounting for the public's morbid fascination with the dead. Marge put these thoughts out of her head and concentrated on scrutinizing the plans.

They looked familiar. In fact, they looked much like the plans for a development Crane had tried to get built on Logos School land, some years earlier. Crane and de Groot had tried to buy several hectares belonging to the school, for the same development, but the deal had got bogged down in Trustee politics. Soon after, a suspicious fire had destroyed half the school.

Marge turned to Yoliswa questioningly. "I thought the school had decided against selling the land?"

"Same plans, different site," Crane cut in.

"What site?" Marge asked, antennae up.

"On the mountain, below Chapman's Peak Drive."

Marge could not believe the effrontery. The mountain was covered in pristine fynbos, and was subject to strict guidelines.

“How do you propose to get around the new environmental impact legislation?” she asked.

“Its not virgin land. The site has already been zoned, and has a building on it.” Crane had adopted a deceptively casual tone.

“Which building?” she asked.

“Bellevue.”

A knot began to form in her stomach. “Bellevue is up for sale?”

“We are in the process of resubmitting an offer, which we are confident will be accepted.”

Marge looked over at Ivor. His expression betrayed nothing of what he must be feeling. If Crane had managed to secure the highly desirable property he would be building right on the Reitz’s doorstep. It was inconceivable that Crane could have pulled off a deal like this without anyone knowing. From what Renuncia had told Marge, the ownership of Bellevue was a knot of complex legal problems, not least being that the owner, the so-called ‘Countess Szabo’, lived out of the country. But Marge would look into that later. Right now NAG had to block the proposal.

“Are these walls?”

“Low walls, yes.”

“In terms of the Property Owners Association’s guidelines, walled estates are out.”

“Then we will palisade them,” said Crane.

“It’s not about what type of wall is acceptable, it’s that we don’t want gated villages on the mountain at all.”

“You can plant around palisades,” Morgana argued. “They can look quite nice, actually.”

Marge fought a wave of irritation. She detested Morgana for obvious reasons: besides being Ivor’s wife, she was also a fool. A greedy fool. Marge had long learned the bitter lesson from being in conservation: financial self-interest always overrode environmental concerns.

Annoyingly, Hamish weighed in with his ten cents worth, waffling on in his stoner way. “Hey, I prefer like, those slats? And then some nice fynbos planting. You get an awesome effect, really. I mean, aloes are like as good as electric fences.”

“As much as you may want to reserve this little enclave of paradise for yourself, even you cannot have failed to notice that we have a housing crisis in this country,” Crane said.

“That’s so true, Gregory,” Morgana said. “It’s time Cape Town became more integrated. If developments are done sensitively, which I’m sure this will be, I really don’t see the problem.”

George Tinkler had not taken his eyes off Morgana for one moment, and now was beaming approval at her shameless display of self-enrichment posing as a social conscience. Marge caught Ivor’s pained expression. His own wife was arguing for a development everyone knew he would oppose. Why didn’t he say

something? Well, Marge wasn't going to shut up! "Oh please, don't try and pass this off as some low-cost, high-density development for shack dwellers. How much are you selling these units for?"

Ivor looked embarrassed at her outburst. He was one of those well-bred types who were more open about their sex lives than their wallets. Well bugger him and his stiff upper lip.

"I have national government's buy in for this project," said Crane. "They want to see densification in elite areas."

"We're not talking low cost housing I hope?" said Tinkler, alerted to a potential threat.

"Of course not!" Marge retorted. "Government cronies will get their kickbacks while passing it off as a local housing initiative, the developers will make a killing, and the rich buyers will feel safe in their electrified shoeboxes. It's a win-win situation."

Crane looked bored by the outburst.

"I'm only worried about the builders and my privacy," Morgana tossed her head coquettishly. "I like to walk around naked in my own house."

Every man in the room was riveted at this disclosure.

"Why deprive them of simple pleasures?" Tinkler gave a lecherous wink. Morgana pretended to be offended, and gave him a light reproving slap.

Ivor looked pained. "We do have to look at the plans in the light of conservation legislation, Gregory."

Crane ignored Ivor and addressed Hamish. “Mr Chair, I ask that Mr. Reitz absent himself,” said Crane.

“Why?” Marge asked.

“Mr. Reitz put in a bid for the same property.”

Ivor avoided looking at Marge, and stared intently at Crane. “This is hardly relevant anymore.”

“It’s a conflict of interests,” Crane insisted.

“I have a right to comment, seeing as the proposed development adjoins my property. I am strongly opposed to having a walled estate next door to me.”

“It will increase the price of our property, darling,” Morgana protested.

“She’s right,” said George Tinkler. “Far better to have an estate than uncontrolled development.”

“Crap,” said Marge. “Plopping bloody great blocks of walled estate everywhere will destroy the unique nature of the valley.”

“Let’s break for tea, people,” said Hamish, who hated confrontation and sensed a dispute brewing. “Just a last minor item – as y’all know, I’m off to Jeffreys to surf for a few months. Anyone know someone to housesit my cat for me? She like freaks out in the cattery.”

As Hamish lived in a caravan in a rundown resort, Marge thought he was unlikely to find a volunteer among the largely middle-aged, middle class Conservation Group. “I’ll ask around,” she said, making a mental reminder to be sure to get Hamish’s objection to the development before he left town.

At tea break, Ivor came over to Marge, who was sipping lukewarm rooibos tea from a polystyrene cup. “Hello, Marge.”

His bullish, hunched intensity blocked out the hissing urn and the forced bonhomie of the others milling around the tea table.

“Hi.” Marge was uncomfortably aware of the large slice of chocolate cake perched precariously on her paper plate. “I had no idea that you were planning to buy Bellevue?”

“That was my intention, yes. But there were – complications.” He was twitchy, not his usual imperturbable self.

“You should have told me – I was caught on the back foot there with Crane.”

“I’m sorry, I’ve been meaning to tell you for a while.”

“Well, I’ve not seen much of you lately.”

She was surprised by her accusatory tone. She realized that the long walks and winter nights of intimate conversation had led her to imagine some claim on his affections, foolishly as it now appeared.

“We should do one of our Silvermine hikes some time,” he said, distractedly. The lukewarm, slightly diffident invitation only added to her sense of grievance. Was he so obtuse, or was he genuinely unaware of her feelings? But then he’d never given her cause to think he was interested in more than a walking companion, despite what had happened that one night. He must have picked up something of her malcontent, because he hastily dissembled. “Sorry, Marge. I’ve just had a lot on my mind. This Bellevue thing is a huge concern.”

She noticed Crane taking it all in from his position at the urn. She spoke loudly, so he would overhear.

“Don’t worry. Over my dead body will this development ever see the light of day. That I can tell you.”

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## Thirteen

Persy stayed late writing up reports on Marge Labuschagne's interview and the video shop robbery before knocking off. She knew from experience that paperwork had a habit of growing exponentially in proportion to the amount of time you spent ignoring it.

George Tinkler had got her message as he came out of his meeting and called her at the station. He became quite heated, accusing his staff of negligence and raging on about the inefficiency of the police, and crime and corruption. Persy was getting *gatvol* of being the public's whipping boy. People's sense of helplessness at being engulfed in a crime wave, their fear and trauma, was often directed at the cops. It was as if the police were responsible for all the ills of the new South Africa, from rising food prices and electricity outages to rates hikes, rapes, robberies and drugs.

"We don't create the crime, sir," she'd retorted after he'd finished his tirade. "We just try and uphold the law."

Tinkler had nothing fresh to offer, had barely any memory of the temporary workers he had hired over Christmas, only that he'd picked them up outside Masiphumelele. Persy gave him the case number for insurance purposes and placed the finished reports on Titus' desk for the morning. He always came in to the station at least an hour before the detectives arrived.

Chester April dropped her off in Voortrekker Road. She hung around while Donny did stocktaking at the shop and they only got back to Dorchester Place in Parklands at 8pm. Persy wondered which wit of a developer had decided on naming the development after some swanky London Hotel. Well, you couldn't expect greedy speculators eating up every bit of pristine nature to come up with appropriate names for their monstrosities. And perhaps it would be worse if they were named after what they'd destroyed, Protea Estate, or Aloe Mews. By any name it was desecration, pure and simple. She felt sorry for modern kids. Seeing the natural world disappearing, one townhouse development at a time. Knowing they would never run in the veld or explore the natural wild; the whole beautiful country walled in, concreted and lashed in with electric fencing. She'd grown up on the mountain above Slangkop, fishing in the wetlands, out on the boat with Poppa, with the scent of the ocean.

The tacky tacky units of Dorchester Place were so rigid in their conformity, they could have been constructed by a machine cutter. No views apart from the ash brick walls of the newly built complex opposite. Ferial's dream was to live on the other side of that wall, where the better-off coloured yuppies clawed their way into respectability by hocking themselves to bonds and hire purchase Mr. Price Home furniture. No way soon was that going to happen with Donny.

He had been silent throughout the journey. He was becoming morose, booze wearing off and leaving an existential void. A brooding that didn't bode well for the evening. He dropped her and muttered a message. To tell Ferial he had some

business to attend to and if she didn't like it she could chuck his dinner in the rubbish bin.

Sayeed, who also shared the flat, was on his way out as Persy came in. He greeted her reservedly, taking with him a faint waft of halal mutton left over from his microwaved supper. He slept behind a screen in the lounge, was devout, did not drink and attended mosque regularly. He was offended by Donny's predilection for drinking and porn and spent as much time out of the unit as he could, studying computer science at the Technikon and taking martial art classes. It was only a matter of time before he moved out and lived with his sister in Athlone, who was building a flatlet for him in her yard.

Ferial was at the stove. Donny expected the women to do all the cooking and cleaning. Another reason Persy would love to move out: she was *gatvol* of being treated like a kitchen skivvy, cleaning up after him and his mates.

Ferial was ok, but had made it very clear that Persy was in the way, that she was only tolerated because she was family to Donny.

Fact was, Persy was trapped. On her lousy salary there was no way she could get anywhere near to Fish Hoek, or even a half-way decent place in a working class area of the Southern Suburbs.

She made for the bathroom and scrubbed her hands once, then twice, getting off all the filth from the drive home. Then she escaped to her monk's cell of a room. There was barely space to open the built-in Formica cupboards, but it was a place to be alone and her bed was comfortable. Later, after Donny returned and he and Ferial had finished eating and had the TV on full blast, she would go into the

kitchenette and make a toasted sandwich and a mug of tea. Watch a bit of TV to be sociable. Then when the charade was over, she would maybe get a chance in the bathroom, even a bath if Ferial didn't linger with her lotions and unguents and Sayeed had not used every last drop of hot water from his frequent showers. The bathroom was also the safest place to stash her firearm, behind some removable tiles in the vanity cabinet filled with tampons and depilatory creams, where Donny, the loose cannon, wouldn't look for it.

Then to bed. It was the part of the day she dreaded, when she was left alone with her fear. She managed to keep it at bay with the sleeping pills that blacked everything out. Most of the time. Tonight she knew she would brood over the Sherwood case. It was murder, she was sure of it. But why him? He seemed like an ineffectual character. A "beach bum" Marge Labuschagne had called him. A beach bum who'd been battered to death and thrown in the sea. Why? Labuschagne wasn't telling them the full story about Sherwood, that's for sure. She fought her frustration with Titus for not taking a chance on her, chewed on her anger at Mhlabeni – at Marge Labuschagne – who was playing some sort of game with her. Persy had trouble trusting women at the best of times. Her own mother had been unreliable, a drunk who'd just disappeared one day. Persy didn't like to think about her and seldom did. Disquietingly, something about Marge Labuschagne made her insecure and anxious. She wished she could charge the woman with obstruction of justice, or something, wipe that superior smile off her face. Some part of her welcomed the anger; maybe tonight it would override the fear. Keep the nightmares at bay.

\*

Will stumbled home to Keurboom Road at about two in the morning, accompanied by Fleur Brident, a pretty art student in her last year at Michaelis. They had spent the best part of the night popping ecstasy and having energetic sex in her brand new Mini Cooper, a birthday present courtesy of her father.

In his bedroom, she giggled as he removed her clothes down to her designer bra and panties. She had an all over tan.

“It’s airbrushed,” she confessed when he remarked on its astonishing evenness. He enjoyed the game of searching for a pale patch that might have been overlooked.

Afterwards he put on The Kalahari Surfers’ ‘One Party State’. Softly, so as not to wake his mother, who slept lightly. Fleur rolled a joint and examined the panorama of photos he had blown up and mounted above his desk. “Where’s this?”

“Noordhoek, twenty years ago. Beautiful, wasn’t it?”

“There’s nothing there.”

“That’s the point.”

She fixed on a faded forties snapshot of a family group, a Malay wedding. The men in white fezzes, the girls in elaborate lace headdresses covered in flowers.

“Who’re these people?”

“The Manuel family.”

“Not relatives I hope.” She giggled.

Will felt a stab of something he took a while to recognize as irritation. He was particularly fascinated by that photograph, which he'd copied from the original in the Community Centre in Ocean View.

"They were a pretty significant family in this part of the Cape. Descendants of slaves from Indonesia." He was appalled by his pompous, politically correct tone. "They lived in Simonstown for a couple of centuries. Lots of coloureds helped build boats and defended the harbour during the war. For their troubles they were removed and dumped in Ocean View under the Group Areas Act."

Fleur reached over and squeezed his arm. "Don't get all socially concerned on me, lover – it's too boring. I'm not going to beat myself up about shit that happened before I was born."

He was suddenly aware of her silly blonde indolence and the phony Home Counties English accent she'd picked up at her private girl's school. A spoilt trust fund bunny like so many of her class in Cape Town. Would she ever do an honest day's work in her life? For some reason the image of Persy Jonas' almond shaped eyes and tough little chin popped into his head.

Fleur cut in on his fantasy. "Sorrree! I know you're a history major and all that."

"It's okay."

And it was, because she looked delicious in her see-through lacy camisole and little Brazilian designer panties with the lace trim. He nuzzled her neck, but her attention was on his big blow up of Bellevue, taken in 1910.

"Wow! Interesting house – love the palm trees."

“Mmm,” he ran his fingers up her back, “that’s Bellevue. First holiday house built in Noordhoek. Before the kaolin mine opened.”

“That’s ‘beautiful view’. Bellevue. In French.” Fleur had spent her gap year in Paris. Where else. “Who lives there now?”

“No one. It’s going to rack and ruin. It’s owned by Eva Szábo, a mad spinster. I think she lives in Hungary.”

“Sounds exotic.” She held up the joint. “Got a match?”

Will handed her his lighter and flopped back on his bed. It was surprisingly good to be home. He’d missed the house, the mountain, the beach. Even his mother. Maybe he’d stick around for a bit. “Blow out the window,” he said. “My mom’s really uptight about weed.”

## Fourteen

A hot wind blew through the open windows of the Nissan, churning up dust and litter along Kommetjie Road, a road that traversed all the contradictions of the apartheid past, with its township and newly sprawling middle class suburb across the road from each other. Persy and Mhlabeni were on their way to the lighthouse at Slangkop, sent by Phumeza who'd filled in Persy when she arrived at the station. "Sherwood's car has been found in the car park at Slangkop lighthouse. Captain wants you and Mhlabeni to check it out."

They passed the ten-year-old burgeoning township of Masiphumelele, built to accommodate the squatters in the valley who'd been moved to make way for new middle class developments.

"How's the township these days?" Persy's attempt to soften up Mhlabeni, who was hunched over the steering wheel wearing his habitual scowl. He'd been living in Masiphumelele for five years, having moved from Langa, and clearly enjoyed the easy pace of the small township with its village atmosphere, small enough for him to lord it over the locals, and conveniently near to shops and work.

"Its okay," he said, " except for the *kwere kwere*."

*Kwere kwere*. The disparaging term for foreigners: the Zimbabweans, Somalians, Zambians and Malawians who were steadily moving into the area, many of whom were refugees traumatized by flight from war torn countries. Problem was that white-owned businesses and households preferred employing

them to the locals. Foreigner's wages were lower, and they were considered to be less "trouble." Many were enterprising, setting themselves up as backyard mechanics and cobblers, opening small shops, spazas or cell phone kiosks. This entrepreneurial spirit, combined with the perception that they were stealing jobs, excited envy and resentment. Mhlabeni's attitude was not untypical of some local prejudices. Masiphumelele had recently been caught up in the wave of xenophobic violence that had swept the whole country. Shops had been looted and burned, some foreigners savagely beaten, even murdered. They'd been transported to a temporary campsite near to the lighthouse at Slangkop, where they had lived in inhuman conditions for months. Some had been reintegrated into the community, but many had not returned. Despite attempts at reconciliation, fear and mistrust still simmered. A tinderbox waiting to be lit. Persy switched to neutral ground. "How's the wife?"

Mhlabeni's wife, Barbara, was a bit of a witch, literally as well as figuratively. Most of the people in the area would not cross her; she was rumoured to have put a few of her enemies in the hospital with unknown maladies.

"She nags me but I can't do anything - she makes more money than I do."

Barbara Mhlabeni ran a large shebeen near the bus terminus, a shebeen for which she had somehow managed to obtain a legal license which conferred upon it the respectable status of 'tavern'. It was a grey legal area that Persy did not particularly want to interrogate, but the fact was that Mhlabeni's kids enjoyed a

better meal every night than most township residents would see in a year, a truth borne out by his not insubstantial girth.

They came to the four-way stop at Imhoff Farm that stood at the Ocean View crossroads and was all that remained of the original farm that had been sectioned off to build the township. Housed in the original thatched farmhouse, it had become a ragtag collection of restaurants and shops, offering camel rides and tourist trinkets and row upon row of kitsch soapstone African statues for sale. On the opposite side of the road, ragged eucalyptus flagged the turnoff into Milky Way, the main road through Ocean View, off which the jerry built houses and shacks climbed the low rocky hills.

Mhlabeni cocked his head. “There’s where you from, eh? Gangster’s paradise.”

“Actually, I was born in Noordhoek, my grandfather had a place there until they moved us.”

The Group Areas Act, apartheid’s ingenious scheme for keeping the plum areas lily white while everyone else, blacks, coloureds, Indians, were relegated to the sand strewn, or the marshy, the dusty and wind-blown. Dormitory towns filled with labour that traveled to the white areas to work, and then back to the hellholes at night. Not much had changed even though the act had been abolished more than twenty years ago.

Persy and her mother and Poppa had been among the dumped in Ocean View, along with the other original coloured inhabitants of Simonstown,

Glencairn and Noordhoek. Poppa had had to give up the long lease on the smallholding where he'd grown vegetables to sell in Simonstown.

“You don't sound like you come from the township.” Mhlabeni hawked and spat out the window. It was true. Thanks to her convent education she sounded like a ‘Model C’, a black kid from one of the posher integrated schools in the suburbs. St Norbert's could be glimpsed high on the hill in Rubbi Road and she silently thanked Poppa. He had used his muscle at St Norbert's to get the nuns at the Star of the Sea school in the white suburb of St James to take Persy on as a pupil. She'd been relieved to bury herself in her schoolwork, getting home late every day to Ocean View. Relieved to be going to a decent school. To escape her mother's grief and rage.

After she'd matriculated and decided to join SAPS, Poppa could barely hide his disappointment. “With your brains you could be a doctor. Or a lawyer.” But as with everything, he'd supported her. Had been so proud when she made detective.

They traveled a few kilometres past Ocean View, beneath the patchy shade of scrubby pine and peeling eucalyptus, and entered the seaside village of Kommetjie, built along a stretch of coast that curled around a rocky promontory from where majestic views unfolded: Chapman's Peak and, beyond, the Sentinel in Hout Bay. At the far end rose Slangkop lighthouse.

Mhlabeni pulled up on the neatly tarmacked car park outside the tall white painted steel structure, surrounded by fenced-in municipal looking buildings. Sherwood's faded red mid-eighties Honda Ballade stood alone and forlorn on the

north side, close to the wooden boardwalk. A lopsided bumper and a slightly dented boot accentuated its lowly *skedonk* status.

The lighthouse keeper, a thickset man in khaki uniform with a disconcerting lazy eye, was not particularly helpful. “I noticed it when I came on duty on Friday about six o’clock in the evening. Thought it belonged to a couple of young guys I saw surfing near Misty Cliffs. Thought I’d better report it seeing as it’s Tuesday and its still here.” *Five days ago.*

The car was unlocked. Persy put on gloves and began meticulously picking her way through the car; Mhlabeni did the same in a more desultory fashion. There were the remains of a joint on the floor of the car and some dagga pips and dust scattered around. An empty Black Label quart bottle lay on the back seat, along with a crumpled black knitted polyester beanie with a South African flag stitched on to it. Persy popped the boot. It was empty apart from a faded towel, an empty tube of sun protection cream, and a pair of worn looking surfing booties wrapped in a crumpled month old Cape Argus.

The car had a radio and an old cassette deck. In the cubbyhole was a selection of cassettes marked with Koki pen and a flyer for The Boma Bar in Kommetjie, advertising “Duncan the Righteous Rasta. Kickback with the Legendary Soulja of Local Grooves.” She showed Mhlabeni.

“That place is in the village.”

Persy ejected the cassette in the player. “Bob Marley and the Wailers. Exodus. Man had excellent taste.”

“*Zol* smokers’ music,” Mhlabeni muttered.

Persy dropped everything into evidence bags and carefully labeled them. Mhlabeni followed her onto the wooden boardwalk at the start of a trail that led walkers on a leisurely amble up to the Kom, from the Dutch word for 'basin', a small protected bay where the fishing boats launched. A wooden bench was set just off the path, affording an uninterrupted view as far as The Sentinel in Hout Bay. A light breeze wafted in a strong odour of rotten eggs.

Mhlabeni held his nose. "Jeez, what a pong." The stink was a by-product of the kelp beds that thrived in the cold Antarctic currents offshore. Storms had cast strands onto the beach, where they lay decomposing in the sun. Persy sniffed appreciatively. Beneath the sulphurous top note of the kelp was the salty, herby tang of coastal fynbos. It brought a rush of memory, of going out early on the boats with Poppa, light just silvering the glassy swells of the water.

"My grandpa told me that my ancestors, the Strandlopers, used the Kom as a hunting ground for hundreds of years," Persy said, scanning the ground for any signs of disturbance. "They used to place boulders across its mouth to trap fish at low tide."

Mhlabeni gazed out to sea and looked bored. He had a thing about 'coloureds'. She'd once overheard him joking with another black cop, calling her a "township special", after the dogs of unidentifiable parentage that scavenged in the streets of the 'locations'.

She spotted a couple of roaches under the bench and retrieved another empty quart of Black Label and two squashed chip packets from the nearby bushes. She carefully placed them in evidence bags.

“He came here to have a few *dops* and a smoke,” Mhlabeni said.

“Ja, and looks like he had company,” said Persy. “Better get the car towed back to the station and checked for prints. Then check out the Boma Bar.”

University of Cape Town

## Fifteen

After a morning spent dispensing spiritual guidance to a couple of clients, Crane was hunched over the computer in the Internet café hunting for dirt on Marge Labuschagne. So far her history looked pretty straightforward; there were links to her practice listing her degrees and training. He was more than likely wasting his time. But he couldn't erase her malevolent stare at the NAG meeting, nor her loud-voiced threat to Ivor Reitz at the tea urn. Spoiling for a fight. Women became irrational and obstructive after a certain age. After they threw off the shackles of marriage and motherhood, they surged ahead aggressively. Like men. He had to do something about her. He could not allow her little campaign to gather steam. He had come too far, risked too much to see the prize withheld from him now.

The chatter of the local patrons, mostly Fish Hoek housewives and Nigerians, was doing nothing for his nerves. These were people who could not afford their own personal computers and it offended him to be among them.

Of course he had a laptop that he used for his own private business. Not ever to be used by anyone else. He kept it under lock and key, no one knew he even owned it. He'd asked Asha de Groot on a number of occasions to supply him with a computer for work. De Groot promised to, but he was chronically unreliable. How had someone like him managed to amass a fortune? It was a travesty, the whole IT business, all these callow youths making money for jam.

De Groot enjoyed the power of withholding certain things. On one hand lending Crane the Ocean View house, leasing him the Mercedes, on the other not giving him a laptop or a regular salary. Crane felt a surge of rage. Spoilt young bastard. It brought back unbearable memories of Lance, his ‘foster brother’ and so-called caretaker, who had also liked to withhold certain things from his young charge. Like food. Or clean clothes. Or affection. Although he had substitutes for that. Yes, Lance had taken care of him alright. Though not in the way Welfare Services imagined. Sometimes he wanted to laugh when clients came with their hard luck stories. What did they know about pain? Or shame? He could teach them a thing or two about humiliation.

Crane was just about to log off and give his terminal to an overweight woman who had been letting out intermittent sighs of impatience, shifting her bulk from side to side, when he remembered that Labuschagne had called herself Piper before her husband had dumped her. He punched in Piper. Up came pages of similar information, links to South African criminology, lectureships, papers she’d delivered, her work on the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. The only new link was to an archive of related newspaper articles. He clicked on it and scrolled through. Within minutes, he hit pay dirt. The piece was in the Cape Times, dated June 28, twenty years ago.

“SUICIDE WAS “TARGETED” BY TOP PROFILER.”

Dr. Marguerite Piper may be forced to defend herself in court if the mother of suicide Theo Kruger, who has accused the renowned criminal psychologist of causing her son’s death, presses charges of culpable homicide ...

He read on, hardly able to believe his luck. It proved, yet again, how the universe was conspiring to give him the help he needed. Indeed, all the stars were lined up; a once-a-millennium comet was passing over the city at this very moment, a sign of things preordained. At long last his life was starting to look like a victory of hard work and resilience over the raw hand that life had dealt him.

He printed out the newspaper article and logged off. He would have to think carefully about the best way to handle this bombshell, to neutralize Marge Labuschagne and get her off his back.

University of Cape Town

## Sixteen

Until a few years ago, Kommetjie had been a scattering of 1950's brick bungalows, a small place of holiday homes and retirees, but recently speculators had moved in and begun building modern double-storey villas in their place. The better ones gave a nod to Cape vernacular styles, or Cape Cod style beach houses, but uglier, more pretentious structures were proliferating, as they were all over the coastline. Now the small village boasted a couple of restaurants and the newly built Long Beach Mall a couple of kilometres away. Professional whites were moving in, keen on the lifestyle of surfing and beach culture and reassured that their kids could cycle to the little cluster of village shops and back in relative safety. The boom had also brought an influx of people to Ocean View and Masiphumelele, to service the houses and small businesses. But unemployment was still high and contributing to rising crime rates. Despite these changes Kommetjie retained a village atmosphere, with a smattering of shops along the main road consisting of a pizzeria, a corner café, a pharmacy and the ubiquitous estate agency.

Diagonally across the road from the shops stood the Boma Bar, next to The Phoenix Rehabilitation Centre, in a converted 1940's style hotel. Persy wondered how the patients felt about the carousing on their doorstep, while they tried to fight off demon cravings for drink and drugs. The dealers from Ocean View perched brazenly on the low walls around the facility, sure that sooner or later one of the inmates would crack.

The Boma bar-come-seafood-restaurant was not without its charms. It was an open-air, thatched construction surrounded by a low wall. Bougainvillea and spreading milkwood trees gave it an exotic, Caribbean air.

“Nice,” said Persy.

A bit early for lunch and not many punters around. Persy sent the waiter to get the proprietor while she and Mhlabeni took a table in the shade and drank a Coke each. Persy would have liked to share some *slap* chips, but didn't feel like being convivial with Mhlabeni. The proprietor came over, tying his thinning hair back with a rubber band, revealing a freckled avuncular face, slack-lipped and speckled with broken veins. An old boozier by the looks of things. A dirty singlet tucked into frayed khaki shorts held up his overhanging gut. “Hi, I'm Charl Human. You wanted to see me?”

Persy introduced herself and Mhlabeni. “We're investigating the theft of a car belonging to Andrew Sherwood.”

Charl's face twisted into a parody of dismay. “I heard about Andy. Terrible, just terrible – was he hijacked?”

“We're still investigating.”

“Doesn't seem to matter what you drive these days. No one's safe. Jeez, poor Andy.”

“When did you last see him?”

“Couldn't tell you, memory like a sieve. But I don't think he was here on the weekend. Unusual because old Andy liked a few pints with his lunch and he usually ate here. Enjoyed the laid back vibes. And the music of course.”

In the background a lone Rastafarian guitarist was setting up a mike.

“Actually, Duncan may have seen Andy. Hey Duncan!”

The guitarist looked up. He had dreadlocks tied back into a sock like a knitted cap, and wore a tie dyed shirt and potato print pants. He ambled over on bare feet, looking friendly. Close up he was a lot older, in his mid-fifties, and baked a nut brown, weathered by the sun and sea and wind like a fine piece of driftwood. Persy recognised him from around Ocean View. He was one of the ‘holy’ Rastas living in virtual seclusion on the mountains above Ghost Town. She pretended not to notice the dagga fumes that impregnated his clothing and every pore of his skin. Most of the Rastas in Ocean View were good solid citizens – apart from their copious and prodigious use of da herb for ‘religious reasons’ they were generally among the more peaceful and law-abiding citizens of the area. Lately however, some ‘Wicked Rastas’ as they were known, had moved in, selling tik and dagga, as well as cheap heroin, causing tension and turf wars with the established dealers.

Duncan had a certain insouciance, didn’t seem too worried about chatting to the cops. Certainly no concern or anxiety marred his beatific countenance. Too stoned to care, thought Persy.

“These guys want to know when you last checked Andy,” Charl Human said. Duncan screwed up his eyes and bared his brown stained teeth, in a parody of forced recall. “I checked him at lunch time on Friday. He ate the special – snoek, calamari and chips. Lekker.”

“What time was that?” Persy asked.

“Between about one o’clock and ... I think he left at about three thirty, four, somewhere around there.”

“Did he say where he was going?”

Duncan shook his head mournfully. Some dim recollection of a tragedy beginning to find its way through the haze. “No. Wish I did. Would like to see justice done for Andy. Shoo, this crime it’s terrible. It’s the tik merchants, man. They bring the crime and violence to the township.”

“Speaking of criminals, seen Sean Dollery lately?”

Duncan’s face hardened. “I don’t talk about Dollery. I don’t want no trouble with tik crazies.” He sloped off back to his sound check. Strains of “A Change is Gonna Come” became discernible through the feedback.

On their way out, Charl Human stopped them. “Just one thing. Andy did tell me that he wanted to go check out the comet.”

“Comet?” Persy wondered if she’d heard correctly.

“Ja, the comet McNaught? It’s passing the earth very close right now at a speed of eighty-five kilometres per second. Andy said Cape Town is one of the few places on the planet you can see it from, man. Should look out for it, only gonna be around for the next week or so. Andy said ‘If you don’t get out there and watch it, you’ll have to wait 85 000 years until it comes again.’ Typical Andy.”

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Marge stared at herself in the mirror in the change room cubicle of A P Jones department store. The crude overhead fluorescents did nothing to soften the blow. The lilac and turquoise two-piece, which had looked so enticing on the hanger,

clung to every bulge. The fat rolls on her back, the lumpy thighs and disintegrating buttocks could be glimpsed in the reflection behind her. Full frontal, the sight hit her like a body blow, not helped by the fading 80's Anarchy tattoo. "Yissus!" she exclaimed.

"Can I help you, ma'am?" Marge suspected the reed thin assistant was lurking behind the curtain, sniggering.

"I'm fine," she retorted rudely, a warning to the woman not to dare enter. Marge detested shopping and would not have subjected herself to it, were it not that her old bathing suit was falling apart from constant use. She swam in the sea at Fish Hoek at least three times a week. With a sigh she reached for the rather garish one-piece that had been on the 'fuller figure' sale rail. There was a time when she could have carried off the two-piece, and not that long ago, but now facts would have to be faced. She pulled the school-issue looking Speedo one-piece over her buttocks, berating herself for lack of control with the scotch; it was like drinking raw sugar. And there she was, imagining she could reignite the interest of Ivor Reitz. "In your dreams, my dear," she muttered.

She bought the swimsuit and a garish orange cap, the only colour they had. While she waited in the queue she perused the notice board lining the wall behind the tills – lots of Malawians with their tell-tale mission school hand writing – ads for baby carriages, pitiful scrawled requests for jobs, gardening and housework. Under the To Let section she spotted: 'Caravan. Available immediately, sleeps two, best spot, ablutions and security.' A cell phone number with Hamish written below and a peace sign. So Hamish was still hoping to find a cat-sitter.

She emerged into the burning heat and white light of the early afternoon, noting with dismay the ‘modernised’ shop window displays. A P Jones had been on Fish Hoek Main Road since 1963 and the décor had barely changed for decades. Sadly, in a desperate bid to compete with the generic chain stores, the owners were ruining its delightfully nostalgic *oudoos* image by displaying strange artifacts in a haphazard manner in the store entrance; inappropriate merchandise like African arts and crafts and branded surfer clothing. In the process they were alienating their loyal clientele who had stuck with them through the many vagaries of changing fashions. The middle-aged and retired conservative set: old ‘Rhodies’ and Christian conservatives who’d kept Fish Hoek dry for decades, withstanding the forces of progress that were lobbying for a bottle store. This compromise to crass modernity on the part of an institution Marge secretly cherished only served to dampen spirits that were already low. She loathed ‘progress’; change made her insecure and was seldom an improvement, in any case. One had just got comfortable with things the way they were, and then they changed. Shifting sands – husbands disappeared during mid-life crises and children grew up and left home in a ruthless process of loss.

She decided to head off her incipient gloom by having lunch at the Bohemian Rhapsody. It was a newish addition to Fish Hoek, a restaurant and cabaret venue in a recently converted old cinema. It was run by one of her patients, Julian Duval. She was usually fastidious about avoiding her clients outside of session, but she enjoyed the convivial atmosphere and the mostly gay clientele provided

unthreatening company and were less quick to judge her single status. Julian was always welcoming and seemed unconcerned by her presence.

Initially, the curious Fish Hoek punters had come out of curiosity, but came to resent paying exorbitant prices for the rather pallid and confused cuisine. They soon flocked back to faithful old haunts like the Pizza Romano, the family friendly pizzeria in the Main Road, or the Black Marlin further up the coast which was good for seafood. Soon the venue had run aground. Fortunately, just as Julian was about to declare bankruptcy, Cupid struck: he met and fell in love with Mustafa, a wealthy, tattooed Mauritanian with blackened teeth who looked like a biker, but was exquisitely cultured and read Djuna Barnes and Rimbaud. He was also a generous lover – his deep pockets were keeping the Rhapsody afloat.

But today Marge found the Bohemian closed. She wandered back in the direction of Pizza Romano, telling herself she would get a slice of pizza and glass of Sangria, when all the time she knew where she was heading and why she was wasting time in Fish Hoek when she had reports to file and many chores to do.

The entrance to the modest block of flats was sandwiched between a kitchen catering supplies store and Texies fish and chip shop. She peered in at the dingy foyer barely visible through the greasy glass of the double doors. She could still smell the frying snoek that had followed her and Titus, following up on Beverley Cupido's tip off, as they had climbed the stairs to Theo Kruger's flat on that rainy day, twenty years ago.

The rooms had been small and mean. The TV on loud in the next room, a sour smell coming off the elderly woman with swollen legs who sat watching it.

“What is it? What’s going on?”

“Nothing, ma – I’ll tell you later,” and Kruger had closed the door so that she could not hear them.

He had peroxided blond hair and looked as if he never went in the sun. He fiddled with the sleeves of his jersey. There was a small hole at one end through which he kept hooking and unhooking his thumb. Occasionally he would rub his cheek nervously with the sleeve, like a small child with a favourite blanket. Infantile, regressive behaviour brought on by stress, Marge had thought. So far he fitted the profile perfectly. Anti-social, trouble forming relationships, psychosexual problems.

She suggested Titus take him to the station for an interview.

Kruger became agitated. “I’ll come with you. But please don’t tell my mother.”

In the interrogation, he couldn’t say where he was at the time Clyde Cupido disappeared from the garden of his grandfather’s smallholding in Noordhoek.

Titus was hard on him in the interrogation and Kruger seemed confused and fearful. Only later did he realize that he was suspected of abducting a child, at which point he started going to pieces. “I would never hurt a child!”

Marge put it to him that he was often seen in the company of children.

“So, I love children – is that a crime?”

At the end of the interrogation Marge said to Titus. “He fits the profile, and he’s hiding something.”

Titus said he had nothing to hold Kruger on. Marge argued that if they let him walk they would never find Clyde Cupido. Titus took Kruger aside, pushed him up against the wall, keeping a lid on his rage. Just. Watching himself. A young, coloured detective had to be careful about manhandling a white man.

Kruger took the bullying with a strange, passive stoicism. It was Marge's cheap parting shot that delivered the knockout blow. "Does your mother know your secret, Theo? What's she going to say when we tell her about you?"

His face flattened out and lost all colour. "Please, leave her out of this."

After they'd released Kruger, Marge left for home. Drenching gusts of rain had been coming off False Bay as she headed home, obscuring the cypresses and Norfolk pines lining Boyes Drive. The phone was ringing when she walked through the door, relieved to be back with Louis and the boys, safe in their pyjamas in front of the TV, safe from people like Theo Kruger. On the other end of the line, Titus sounded small-voiced, as if he were far away. Theo Kruger had thrown himself in front of the four thirty train to Simonstown and been eviscerated on the tracks in full view of a trainload of commuters.

"When I heard from the stationmaster, I was taking sworn statements from two witnesses." There was a tired nausea in Titus' voice. Marge didn't want to ask, but had to hear it anyway. "They were with Theo Kruger all day Wednesday in a bar in Muizenberg, from lunchtime to 10 pm."

From there, the three of them had gone cottaging at the public toilets at the pavilion until after midnight.

Whoever had taken Clyde Cupido, it had not been Theo Kruger.

Now, two decades later, Marge looked up at the flat on the second floor, with the wide windows that looked down onto the street. And saw Gwen Kruger. Grey haired and hunchbacked, fine bones piercing the papery skin. Staring down at her through the ruin of her face. A face last seen in the gloom of the claustrophobic apartment, against the background flickerings of daytime television, accusing eyes turned on Marge, “*What is it? What’s going on?*” before Theo Kruger shut the door, blanking her out, saying; “*I’ll come with you. But please don’t tell my mother.*”

As she stared up at the woman a black hole opened in her face and she let out a silent howl. It was like being sucked into an abyss of inconsolable grief. She was about to turn away, filled with horror, when she saw it was not Gwen Kruger, nor anyone remotely resembling her. It was a young woman, in the act of sweeping her fall of long dark hair across her face and tying it above her head. Relief made Marge’s legs tremble. Of course, it could not be Gwen Kruger! She would be in her nineties by now, if she were even alive. What she had seen was an optical illusion, like the black and white drawing she used in psychological testing. Depending on the observer, the drawing could be either a hag-faced old witch in a cowl, or a pretty young girl in a bonnet. Shaken by the way her subconscious had conjured up the hallucination, and sickened by remorse, she hurried back to her car.

\*

Sean remembered it was Tuesday, which meant that Schneider, his mother’s employer, had gone to Durbanville where he ran some do-gooder scheme,

employing some ‘formerly disadvantaged’ to assemble cheap electronic shit that no one wanted anyway. Which meant Charlene was alone at the German’s so Sean had access to the house and car keys. Well, fuck Schneider anyway – he was *poes* scared of Sean, as well he fucken should be, the fat white pig, only after his Ma for one thing. Sean thought he might go over there and get the keys to Schneider’s Toyota twin cab. Drive it around for a couple of hours. See if Persy Jonas was still around.

En route from Kommetjie back to the station, Persy spotted the name. *Afrikander Street*. “That’s where Sherwood lived,” she said. “Lets swing past and check out his place.”

“*Nee, man* – I have been on duty for four days in a fucking row,” Mhlabeni said.

“His car may have been stolen from outside his house, or out of his garage.”

“That’s not our problem, girlie.”

“I’m not your fucking girlie, and I’m just trying to do my job.”

Mhlabeni went into a sudden u-turn, eliciting a furious drawn out hooter and filthy epithets from a builder in a laden bakkie as he swerved in front of him, then turned into Afrikander Street and pulled up outside Number Six, his face set in an expression of sullen hostility.

It was a small sixties brick house with a Slasto-covered outside chimney attached to an A-frame roof. In the windswept garden a bent pepper tree hung onto life. Persy pushed open the gate, which hung disconsolately from its nearly

rusted off hinges, and they made their way up a brick path half covered by sea sand and creeping weeds dying off and going brown in the summer heat. At the peeling door a dusty dream catcher hung from its warped frame. She rapped on the door, hard and sharp. A makeshift Indian curtain hung in the front window. She peered in, shading her eyes against the late afternoon glare. The windows were greasy from salt air. She could make out the outline of a bookcase, which looked empty, and a cheap pine table. The sea, two or three blocks away, sounded unnaturally loud.

“No one’s here.” Mhlabeni came up behind her, stating the obvious.

Persy looked around. A small filthy looking doormat lay in front of the door. She took a quick look around and then stooped and felt under the mat. She spotted a large clay pot in the shape of a bird, containing half dead ferns. She plunged her hand among the dry stalks and dead leaves, until she felt a piece of string. She yanked it out. On the end dangled a Yale key. Amazing how many people stashed a front key at the door and forgot about it.

Mhlabeni hawked and spat. Whether clearing his throat or a sign of disapproval, she didn’t care. Disgusting either way.

She unlocked the door and they entered the living room. It was dim from the draped windows. The furniture Persy had seen from outside was about all that was in the room, apart from a table lamp with a torn lampshade lying discarded on its side.

“Looks like no one lives here,” Persy said.

Mhlabeni stared at her. “We don’t have a warrant. For all you know this could be a crime scene. He could have been murdered right where you’re standing.” In the dark hot room there was something menacing about him, but she had to stare him down or he would push and push.

She held his stare. “Since when do you play by the rules?”

He laughed contemptuously and moved away.

The house consisted of two bedrooms and a kitchen and bathroom, as well as the living area. Sherwood’s bedroom contained a small double pine bed with a foam mattress, stripped of linen. Persy opened the wardrobe. Empty wire hangers jangled in the gloom.

Mhlabeni followed her into the narrow galley kitchen. She opened the fridge. Two six packs of Castle from which five cans were missing. A cube of dried up cheese and various opened bottles of hot chili sauces.

“Only thing you’ll find in here is some stale *zol*,” Mhlabeni muttered sourly.

“Can’t be a *roker* – nothing here for the munchies.” She slammed the fridge door shut. The kitchen led out onto a small back yard. From the window above the sink, Persy could see a pair of swimming trunks and a thin African cloth hanging on the line, all colour bleached out of them by the sun. A worn-out looking surfboard leaned against the back of what appeared to be a garage. She turned on the taps and washed her hands, trying to get rid of some of the grime of the place. The window sill was thick with dust and speckled with the black dots of dead flies. A dishcloth stiffened with dry dirt hung from a nail next to the sink. She didn’t want to use that. She flapped her hands to get them dry. That’s when

she noticed the draining area of the sink. No sign of dust. It had been swept clean. “Someone’s been here,” she said. “They’ve wiped the draining board.”

Mhlabeni shrugged. He had fuck all interest. Her attention was caught by a locked door in the pantry. She spotted a set of keys hanging near the kitchen door, marked with plastic tags. She unhooked them. One tag read ‘Garage.’ The key opened the pantry door, which led into the garage. Mhlabeni followed close behind her. The door opened on a pile of packed boxes. Marked in black koki: Books. Clothes. Cutlery. Miscellaneous.

Persy stared around at the boxes. “He was doing a runner,” she said.

Marge Labuschagne’s friend, Ivor Reitz, was Sherwood’s landlord. Did he know where Sherwood was going, and why? Mhlabeni was a black shadow blocking out the light from the open door. “So the guy was moving, so what? I’m officially off duty as from now. Let’s get out of here.”

Persy dropped Mhlabeni off at the garage in Kommetjie. He said he was meeting his mechanic, but she suspected he was hanging for a drink, wanting to get down to the bottle store on the corner.

She was turning back onto Kommetjie Main Road, heading back to the station, window down, enjoying the cooling air when she heard the roar come up behind her, engine gunning and revving. In the rear view mirror she caught sight of an expensive white double-cab bearing down on her fast, lights flashing. Her brain quickly processed the information. Tinted windows, no number plates. It was up against her bumper in seconds, tailgating her. She put her foot down, took

off up to 140km/h and climbing. The cab fell back momentarily, losing ground, then, revving furiously, came right back up. She knew immediately that even in plainclothes, in an unmarked car, she had been targeted as SAPS. Cops got ambushed like this all the time, even in broad daylight, usually for their service weapons. They were rushing along a section of road perfect for an attack: blue gums and litter studded fences to one side, a dirt track council service road leading into Masiphumelele coming up rapidly on the left. They wanted her there, on that back road, trying to force her in that direction, the cab pulling out onto her left, pushing her off onto the gravel so that she'd be forced to take the dirt track. Ocean View cop shop was coming up on the right, but still two or three kilometres away. She was doing 160 by now, the Nissan beginning to wobble, not liking the road. If she didn't slow down she could hit the edge of the tar and roll.

The other car alongside her now, the window sliding down and a gun jutting out at her. Moron! Planning a fucking shootout right here on the road! The noise was deafening, the cab grinding as it changed gears, up, down, up, revving, charging at her like an animal. She was going to lose it, with that grinding sound, *the terrible grinding noise*, she felt her nerves go, panic rising, engulfing her. She had to hang on somehow. If she could get past the service road, ahead of the cab, she might have a chance. There was impact – the cab's bull bars hit her. Her teeth banged together from the impact, pain shot through her jaw as she flew forward, her wrist crunched against the dashboard, head missing the windscreen by millimeters. She was snapped back by the seatbelt as the steering wheel was ripped from her hands, sending the Nissan skidding dangerously. The front left

wheel struck the verge, sending the car into a slide. She was not going to die like this! She grabbed the wheel and pumped the brakes, teeth gritted – and through sheer determination wrestled the Nissan back under control, compensated too much and swerved dangerously onto the other side of the road – another shove like that and she would hit something. A Golden Arrow bus appeared, a rust bucket with useless brakes, turned slowly out of a stop street just yards ahead. She missed the bus with inches to spare, saw the terrified ‘O’ of the driver’s mouth as she shot past, the blare of his hooter following like a howl of protest. She hurriedly wound up her open window, mercifully blocking out the engine and grinding gears.

Ocean View Station was in sight, she was safe! The cab suddenly roared onto the right hand side of the road, overtaking her on the double white line and narrowly avoiding a laden minibus, shooting past a police van turning out of the yard from the from the cop shop, oblivious to the drama. She slowed down, adrenaline pumping, watching the cab dodge in and out of traffic, heading at speed towards the intersection at Ou Kaapse Weg, from where it could take off in one of any three directions.

She turned into the Ocean View station yard and cut the engine. She radioed into Fish Hoek, her voice unnaturally high, although she felt strangely calm. The response from the station seemed excruciatingly slow – then the crackling feedback from the patrols on the road started coming in. But they’d lost the cab. Her legs and arms began to shudder uncontrollably; she pressed her hands on her knees to control them. The grinding noise filled her head again. Saliva filled up

her mouth. The radio crackled. “You okay, Jonas?” Dizu’s voice was strained with anxiety. She found she couldn’t speak. She sat there, heart racing, listening to her ragged breath, throat closing up from the stench of burnt rubber and oil.

“You there?”

“Yeah. I’m fine.”

“Who was it?”

Persy concentrating on trying to keep her legs still. “The windows were tinted. No plates, either.”

“Road rage?” Yes, except that her attacker had been in complete control. “He had a gun.”

“Jesus! Hang on. Titus wants a word.”

Titus told her to take the rest of the day off; even offered her a driver. She said she could drive herself, but promised to go home.

Thing is she never knew what to do with herself when she wasn’t working.

## Seventeen

Colette stubbed out her third cigarette. Her car had filled up with smoke, but the South Easter was howling too much to open the window. Gregory Crane was late. As was usual with him. It was a power thing, making others wait. He'd agreed to meet Colette, under duress. He said he had very little time, couldn't stretch to a coffee, but finally agreed to this clandestine liaison in a car park behind the arcade. She was about to light a fourth when he pulled up next to her in his new Mercedes, courtesy of Asha de Groot, no doubt. He gestured at her through the window to get into his car. It was humiliating, as if he was soliciting a prostitute. She went over and got in the passenger side.

The car was faintly perfumed with expensive aftershave and new age music was playing. Crane was dressed like some sort of guru, in an embroidered African dashiki. He didn't look at her, keeping her on the back foot, at a disadvantage. "Have you spoken to the police?" he asked crisply, businesslike.

"Yes. At the morgue. It was awful. Seeing him like that."

He looked briefly at her and she saw a flicker of pleasure or excitement, but his voice was cold. "What do you want, Colette? I don't have all day."

She stuck to the script she had rehearsed in the car earlier, keeping her voice soft and agreeable, knowing how he preferred her acquiescent. Her son was all that was important now; for Jasper she would keep up this charade. She had to keep telling herself that she was a sane, well-balanced woman, making a

reasonable request. It was a small favour to ask, not even a favour, more of an omission. Merely to spare others pain and embarrassment.

“I thought if the police ask you any questions –”

“They won’t. Unless you give them cause to.”

He was staring out of the windscreen at the Fish Hoek shoppers with their Shoprite and Woolworths and A P Jones parcels, his eyes flickering disdainfully from one to the other.

“I don’t know ... they might, about the school and everything – about what happened with Andrew and Jasper – please, don’t bring it up again, for Jas’s sake.”

There was not a flicker on his face. It was as if he hadn’t heard. She felt a brief flare of hope. Perhaps he was not that interested in turning the screws on her any more, maybe he was bored by the whole debacle. But she soon realised that she’d hoped in vain.

“You’re worried that the cops will think your precious son killed Sherwood!” He laughed, and finally turned to look at her, his face twisted with malevolence. She had been deluding herself. He was going to punish her for her former rejection, for using him. She was completely at his mercy.

“All things considered, don’t you think that’s the last of your worries?”

Colette felt her mouth dry up. She found it difficult to assemble her thoughts coherently. As usual she had underestimated his thirst for revenge. She had now exposed her weak flank, and he was going to exploit that weakness to the full, savour every last morsel of her humiliation. She heard herself pleading, and

despised herself for being overtaken by her fear. “I’m not asking you to lie, but if they don’t ask – ”

He became ever more cold and disdainful. “It’s my responsibility as a citizen to tell the police anything that will help with their enquiries. Now, if you have finished, I have an appointment with a client at my studio.”

Terror overcame her natural revulsion; she found herself clutching at his arm. “Please, for the sake of what we had, we could even – try again.” The words breaking into brittle pieces at the contempt on his face. He dislodged her hand from his arm with exaggerated distaste.

“I’m afraid I must decline the offer,” he said. “I suggest you forget about what *I* might tell the cops and throw yourself at the mercy of Marge Labuschagne. After all, she knows all about it. And she’s right back in with the police these days.”

He reached over and opened her door, leaving her no choice but to get out. Then he pulled the door closed, turned on the engine, and reversed rapidly out of the car park. He roared off without a second glance.

Colette got back into her car, trembling. Bile rose in her throat, and she was overcome by vertigo. She rested her head on the steering wheel, breathing in the sour smell of her sweat-dampened hair. *Pull yourself together, think of Jasper.* She had to keep a clear head, for his sake. But now Crane had suggested a threat from another source – one she had not even considered. Marge Labuschagne, working with the police! Could she be trusted to keep quiet?

Colette wished she knew more about the legal aspects of patient and doctor confidentiality. She could feel old demons returning, knew they had never really gone, had just been biding their time, masked behind the medication, waiting for some fresh calamity to summon them back. Bringing confusion and dissociation and the familiar sensation of floating above, looking down on herself, as if at a complete stranger. The last words Andy had said to her came back, as if from the grave: *“You’re insane! Completely insane! They should have locked you up in that loony bin and thrown away the key!”*

Persy contemplated driving to St Francis’ to see Poppa, but decided against it. His eagle eyes would see that she’d had a shock of some kind. She parked in the car park behind the arcade off Fish Hoek Main Road. In a car opposite, a couple was having an argument. A worn, hippie-looking woman was clutching the arm of a man in a Madiba-type African shirt. Persy recognised him from somewhere – then remembered she’d seen him among the onlookers on Noordhoek beach. Another local weirdo; the South Peninsula was full of them.

She crossed the road, feeling nervy, the traffic noise sounding abnormally loud. Sometimes when she felt like this she had to fight an impulse to hurl herself beneath a passing truck or bus, anything to stop the inexplicable upsurge of terror. She bought a takeaway frankfurter roll from the German deli next to Woolworths, took one bite and, unable to stomach the rest, tossed it into a nearby bin. On her way back to the car she checked out the second hand furniture shop. Among the bric-a-brac displayed on the pavement she spotted the kind of small coffee table

she liked. If she cleaned it up really well, got all the paint and germs off it, it would look swell. She wished she had her own place to kit out, full of offbeat things. Not like Donny and Ferial's generic furniture. Everything moved straight from the shop floor to the flat. No imagination, nothing individual. Just follow the herd, join the dots.

Back in the car park, she started the car with certain reluctance. Last thing she felt like was going back to Donny and Ferial in Parklands.

She reversed as a Tazz pulled out, the driver not looking where she was going, heading straight for her. Persy hooted and the Tazz braked with a screech of tyres. For a brief moment she locked eyes with the staring, frightened eyes of the driver and caught a flash of her white face. It was the hippie woman who'd been arguing with the weirdo in the African print shirt. She watched the Tazz in her rear view mirror as it turned left into Fish Hoek Main Road and was gone. Jeez! Another close call! She'd best call it a day and head home before her luck ran out.

\*

Orlanda de Groot walked a little way behind her mother, who was pushing Dashiell in the pushchair. They'd had to wait until the sun was setting because otherwise the sun would burn them and they would all die of cancer. Orlanda did not like the beach. She hated the sand, the bright light and the loud noise of the sea. It frightened her. The big spaces were too wide open, the people like little matchstick dolls dotted here and there. She missed England, the up and down houses, the soft grey light and lowering sky, the streets full of people. They

passed the grumpy lady's house. Her untidy garden could be seen through the dark glossy leaves of the trees. Orlanda liked the lady whose name was March. She never told her mother, but a couple of times she'd gone to the gate and March had seen her and given her biscuits, and once even some chocolate. Orlanda had really gone there to see Bongo. She was not allowed pets, apart from the tortoise, because her mother said she had a 'dander allergy'. Now she could hear Bongo whining and whining. He did that sometimes when March went off in her car and left him alone in the garden, but he didn't do it for long. He would settle down by the gate and lie there, with his big wet black nose sticking out, watching people going by. If the postman came he would bark and growl and jump against the gate. But it was just a game because one day the lady had left the gate open and the postman came and Bongo had come out of the gate slowly, wagging his tail and the postman had patted him. But the next day the gate was closed, and when the postman came, Bongo barked and leapt on the gate again. Orlanda could hear him now, scratching on the front door. She heard the door open and March say, "Oh come in then you big stupid lug," but in a kind voice as if she didn't really mean to be nasty. That was the thing about her. She seemed grumpy but she was nice. Orlanda preferred that sort of grown-up to the ones who pretended they were good, but were really bad underneath. Like the dentist who smiled as he hurt you, or Daddy's friend Mr. Crane, whose eyes were like hard little marbles when he stared at her.

\*

"Oh my, it's sooo cold!"

“The temperature drops when they’re present. Keep calm. There will be no contact if you show fear.”

Gregory Crane had turned the air conditioner up as high as possible for the ‘guided meditation’ on Julian Duval. One of his party tricks, worked every time. People expected a spectral temperature to accompany visitors from the other side. The aircon in his old place had been a bit dodgy, second hand and made a hell of a racket, but the new unit was state of the art, like everything in this place, and utterly soundless. And freezing cold. He sat opposite Julian on the large Tibetan rug in a relaxed cross-legged position. “Close your eyes, please. Are you focusing on your visualization?”

“I think so, but I’m not sure what a lotus looks like actually. Can I think of a chrysanthemum? National flower of the Afrikaans *tannies*.”

Crane gritted his teeth. He was not in the mood for the little fool today. These charades were necessary to make a living at the moment, but they were an insult to his more serious occult practices. Unfortunately, most of his clients preferred this quick hit mumbo jumbo. He wondered, not for the first time, how his clients would cope with the ‘real’ voices. The voices that had first come to Crane when he was a child, in extremis, at his most powerless, in the clutches of Lance and the older boys at the Home. At those moments the voices would speak to him – mostly young boys, like himself, ghosts of those who had endured before him. It had comforted Crane to know that he was not alone with his humiliation and terror.

He noted the ring that had appeared on Julian's left hand since the last time he had been for a consultation. A narrow band of silver set with some sort of Eastern etching. Must be from that Arab-looking boyfriend of his. It was certainly not his usual taste. Julian usually wore preppy shirts and chinos. Only when he dressed for the cabaret, which he performed as 'Juliana' in full drag, did he dispense with the conservative Afrikaner.

"How are you feeling?"

"You sound like my therapist." Julian smiled, with his eyes closed.

"I didn't know you were in therapy. I have never found it effective."

"It depends on the therapist, I think. I'm seeing Marge Labuschagne. She's excellent."

Well, well. Crane marveled once more at the serendipitous nature of the universe.

Julian had first come to ask Crane's advice as to whether he should open the Bohemian Rhapsody, but Crane knew at once that there was another reason. And sure enough, after the right kind of sympathetic noises, all was revealed. Julian's father had died of a heart attack shortly after Julian had told his family he was gay. Julian felt responsible. Guilt. An alien concept for Crane.

So Crane brought out Shamil, the Ascended Master, who communes with the dead. And a right little money-spinner he was turning out to be. Julian had been back three times, hoping for a message from his father. Crane was well aware of the danger of exploiting his knowledge of higher worlds for gain, but once he had made his money from the Bellevue scheme, he wouldn't have to lower himself to

cheap theatrics any more. He forced his eyes to lose focus, so as to project a dreamy stare. Julian stirred restlessly. Time to reel him in. Crane lowered his voice a few octaves, and adopted a vaguely Eastern accent. “Shamil sends greetings and salutations.” He couldn’t keep up the deep timbre for long; after half a dozen sessions a day, his throat felt as if it had been sandpapered.

“He thanks you for your generous donation to the foundation and says your blessings will return a hundredfold.”

“Shamil has tried to make contact with your father again –”

Julian tensed. “And?”

“He has not yet been successful it seems, but he is confident that it will be soon.”

Crane hesitated, a bit of drama was essential. “Oh no . . .” He shivered. He didn’t have to pretend, the room was freezing cold.

“What is it?”

“It’s a warning. From Shamil. He says that the present comet portends dark forces at work in your life. Deception. People may not be what they seem. You must beware of intimate disclosures to a woman.”

Julian looked puzzled, “A woman? What woman?”

“Someone you go to for your personal problems? It could be your therapist.”

“Marge Labuschagne? Surely not!”

“Wait, Shamil is showing me something . . . Oh no . . .”

He made use of an overlong pause. Timing was everything.

“What? What is it?” Julian demanded anxiously.

“I see a terrible image, terrible! A man cut in half. Shamil says this woman was responsible for his death.”

“How ghastly!”

“He’s showing me a newspaper.” Crane closed his eyes, “It’s the Cape Times, and I can just make out the date. Twenty years ago. June 19.”

“What does it say?”

Crane shook his head and lowered his voice to a whisper, as though exhausted. “I’m sorry, it’s too disturbing. I had to break the connection.”

“That image – of a man cut in half,” Julian shuddered, “what does it mean?”

“My advice is you find that newspaper. Come back next week. Shamil can give you some spiritual protection in case.”

Julian hurried off, too distracted. But he left a generous donation and paid the consultation fee, which had already been recently hiked.

With any luck, Julian would spread the word. Before long everyone would know that Marge Labuschagne was unfit to be a therapist. She would lose clients. And support in the Noordhoek Action Group. NAG. Crane had to laugh at the acronym. How appropriate! That’s what she was. A nag, a crone, a troublemaker.

Well, he was going to put her in her place. She should have thought twice before crossing Gregory Crane.

## **Eighteen**

Marge hadn't outgrown her juvenile musical tastes of thirty years ago and now, as she peeled potatoes for supper, she listened to a medley of golden oldies: The Clash, Magazine, Siouxsie and the Banshees. Will was embarrassed by early Polaroids lying around that showed his mother in bondage pants and Doc Martens, but his friends had a nostalgic interest in her music, and even he gave the occasional nod of approval to a song. She was looking forward to spending the evening with her youngest son. He was not one for heart to heart talks, but over a good meal his natural conviviality always asserted itself and, using witty banter as a shield, he would, as he had done since a small boy, inadvertently or advertently let his mother in on what was happening in his life.

She was setting the table, with candles and a good bottle of Pinotage, when something in the garden caught her eye. A pale attenuated figure stood at the gate. She peered out of the French doors into the dusk, cursing her bad eyesight, but whoever it was remained motionless. She turned down the music and with Bongo at her side opened the front door.

The figure was gone.

She was not easily spooked, but calling Bongo to heel she felt a shiver of apprehension as she stepped out into the garden, remembering her earlier hallucination of Gwen Kruger.

The South Easter was up and clouds scudded across the sky. No sign of the comet tonight. Sand and dust whipped across the street, rustling the milkwoods in

a souging rush. Leaves, already brittle and discoloured from the dry hot winds sounded like Christmas tinsel as they skittered to and fro.

Then she saw Bongo.

Stock-still at the gate, hair standing up on his ruff, tail stiff. A low growl started up from deep in his throat. A shadow flitted past the gate.

“Who’s there?” Her voice was sharp with fear.

The shape moved into the light. It was a woman. Her voice was so soft, Marge could hardly hear her over the sound of the wind and trees.

“Dr Labuschagne? I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to frighten you.”

Marge went over to the gate, and the woman came into focus.

Colette McKillian. Looking frail enough to blow away in her wispy fragments of clothing. “I’m so sorry to just arrive like this, but I had to come and talk to you.”

Marge felt the first intimations of trouble. Colette could only have come about one thing.

“You’d better come inside.”

Colette looked embarrassed at the sight of the table with the two places and the lit candles. “Oh dear, I’ve interrupted your meal.”

“It’s okay, take a seat.” But it *was* annoying. And awkward. Having an ex-client see her large cluttered kitchen, her sitting room with its books and papers and cats everywhere, the not too fresh flowers on the table in the hall. It was the sort of situation a therapist dreaded: a distraught, unstable patient invading one’s personal space. Colette perched on the edge of her seat. She had grown so thin she

hardly dented the upholstery. She had lost her delicate pre-Raphaelite looks. There were bruised shadows around her eyes. She still wore her auburn curls long, but they were straggly and unkempt and shot through with grey.

“I’ve come about Andy,” she said, twisting her hands, and the Indian bracelets rattled on her thin wrists. “I heard you found him. On the beach.”

“Yes, I did.” Marge was suddenly longing for a cigarette.

“I identified him,” Colette went on. “The body I mean. He had no next of kin you see. It was horrible. Really horrible.”

“Yes, it must have been.”

Colette was the last person who should have had to identify Sherwood’s bloated body on a mortuary slab.

“I’m so sorry to impose like this, but I wondered whether you told the police ... about ... the consultation you had with us ... with me and Andy?” She could barely get the words out. Her anxiety was as palpable as another presence in the room.

“I told them that Andrew consulted me some years ago. But, as it was a confidential meeting, I didn’t mention you, or tell them what it was about.”

Colette closed her eyes with relief. “Thank you.”

“What is said in session is privileged. However, I do think the information would be useful to the police.”

“Oh no – no, I can’t do that.” Colette wiped her mouth nervously. “I have to protect Jasper – he knows nothing about my suspicions.”

“I understand. But his may not have been the only case. There may have been other, similar cases. They could have been the motive for his murder.”

“Murder!” Colette’s face had whitened. “The policeman I spoke to thought it was an accident.”

“There’s a possibility that he was murdered.”

“Then it must have been drug dealers.”

“Drug dealers?” Marge was confused.

“Andy had a drug habit at one time ...” Colette was agitated now, words spilling over themselves.

“Perhaps you should tell the police everything you know.”

Colette shook her head vehemently. “I can’t.”

“Gregory Crane spread the story around the whole Logos school. The police will invariably get to hear about it. Jasper will be better protected if the police hear it from you, rather than as car park gossip from another parent.”

Colette gave an anguished grimace and covered her face with her hands. Marge felt a stab of concern at her mental state. She was terribly thin and unkempt. Had she dropped her meds?

Will appeared suddenly in the doorway, pink cheeked and ruffle-haired, freshly showered and smelling of soap.

“Are you going out?” Marge tried to keep the tone light.

Colette stood up abruptly. “I had better go,” she said. “I’m so sorry for interrupting your dinner.”

Marge walked her to the gate. The wind had died suddenly, as it so often did at this time of night. A small car was parked in the street, under the trees. The milkwoods filled the night with the chemical scent of their sap. Thank heaven they only exuded it in the late summer. Sometimes it was overpowering.

“You seem distressed,” Marge said. “If you need to see someone, I can recommend a good person.”

“No, no, I’m fine. Really.” Colette struggled to get her key in the lock of her car, clearly anxious to be off.

By the time Marge got back to the house, Will was champing at the bit, wanting to go out. There went her hopes for a leisurely catching up. Instead she watched him bolt down his *Steak au Poivre* and *Pommes au Gratin*, between texting on his phone and ducking out to the garden to answer private calls on the pretext of “better reception”. She was slightly mollified by the careless kiss Will bestowed on her head on his way out. “That was awesome, Ma. You make the best steak ever.”

At least she still had her son in her life, no matter how intermittently. For the umpteenth time that day she thought of Gwen Kruger.

Imagining the woman’s face at the window that afternoon had been an unsettling reminder of the tragic outcome of a fatal misjudgment on Marge’s part. The fear she’d tried to bury since finding Sherwood’s body rose up like a spectre. Had Andrew Sherwood been wrongly accused, just like Theo Kruger? She could not shake the conviction that the two cases were linked.

As she cleared up, her thoughts returned to Colette McKillian. The woman was understandably worried about her son. Or was she worried that she may become a suspect if the police found out about her relationship with Andrew? A ludicrous thought. As if the police, or anyone, imagined that the nervous, whispery woman could be capable of violence. But then, her medical history might raise some questions as to her mental state. Even if Colette was not a suspect, she did have a possible motive for Sherwood's murder, and if what had come up in the session had any truth in it, then there might be other affected parties who wanted Sherwood dead. Not that Marge was at liberty to pass any of that information on to the police. It was frustrating. What she needed was a proxy who could pass on the information to the police without Marge breaking confidence. Unbidden, the myopic brown eyes and unreadable expression of Persy Jonas came into her mind.

Titus sounded surprised; as well he might be, seeing as she was calling him for the second time in as many days, after an absence of years. He was also mystified by her cryptic allusions. "I'm not getting what you're saying, Marge."

"I'm saying I have sensitive information that could help your investigation. But I cannot disclose what's said in session."

In the background she could hear his daughters laughing and talking at the top of their voices, bursting into song, along with some TV contestant. She'd interrupted precious family time. She felt a small hot stab of envy.

"I see. Let me get Detective Mhlabeni to ring you."

Mhlabeni. The fat, sweating incompetent with a *babbelas!*

“Why not Detective Jonas?”

“She was only filling in.” Titus could not resist a little dig. “As you pointed out, she is not very experienced.”

“Jonas seems more like someone I could work with,” Marge mumbled, uncomfortably aware of having shot herself in the foot.

“I see.” Titus sounded amused.

“That’s if you think I could be of use, of course.”

“There’s no question of that.”

“I’m not expecting to work on the case officially . . .”

“I don’t see a problem, then.”

His voice gave nothing away. She wondered if he ever thought about the Cupido case and of Theo Kruger and whether it had affected his chances of promotion. Titus should be Area Commissioner by now. Instead he was Commander in charge of the detectives at Fish Hoek station. A cushy position, low crime rate, well resourced. But surely, with his experience and abilities, he must have expected more.

“I’d value your input, Marge,” he said. “Even on an unofficial basis. I’ll see what I can do.”

## Nineteen

*She runs ahead, always more limber than he, faster in thought and action. He is always more cautious, slower to grasp things, looking to her for answers. Above their heads the black canopy of the overhanging milkwoods absorbs the fine rain and mutes the deep boom of the ocean.*

*She has to keep moving.*

*The dread rising, weighting her feet.*

*She knows what is about to happen, that she is powerless to stop it.*

*The road is darker and the trees overgrown, but the path is familiar. A map burnt into the retina of her eye. Now the fear overtakes her – fear of what is to come. Mercifully they are hidden by the black trees, hidden from the terrible sky, ablaze now with a portent from another world. A phenomenon of foreboding, with a tail of gas and ice burning in its wake. Then, from the undergrowth, the grinding monstrous sound bears down on her –*

Persy forced her eyes open to the blurred outline of her room. The image receded, then returned, while she fought to separate the clamped lids of her eyes, the real from the dreamed world. She made out the blurred shapes of the small inbuilt desk, the chair. The drawn curtains, lit a nightmarish yellow by the arc of her bedside lamp. She had fallen asleep with the light on. She clawed herself free of the suffocating softness of the duvet. It was hot and her skin was clammy. The terror still lurked. Terror with its roots in this recurring childhood nightmare. Sometimes weeks, even months, passed without it, but then it was back. She

would never be free of it. Sometimes the dream was long and muddled up with impressions of the present; this time the charging white four-by-four cab, mixed in with the comet that Charl Human from the Boma Bar had spoken of. At times she could wake herself as the dream began; other times she was trapped until the end. It was always accompanied by the terrible grinding noise. Stiff in the bed, she waited for her rapid heartbeat to subside while her sweat cooled and her skin grew icy. A memory returned from her childhood. Of lying in Poppa's narrow bed listening to a barn owl sounding in the nearby trees. She'd seen it twice, once swooping down at dusk flying low, dropping down suddenly and taking off again, a field mouse paralysed in its grip, and then again, eerily in the day, eyes staring sightlessly at her from the lower branch of the tree overarching the house. She thought she heard that hoot again, as bereft and isolated a sound as she had ever heard. She lay like that for another hour and then must have dozed off, because when she next looked at the clock it was seven. She had overslept.

She stumbled into the bathroom, scrubbed her hands and washed her face, then retrieved her weapon from its hiding place. She looked in on Ferial. Humped under the duvet, a bottle of Panado next to the bedside lamp.

“You ok?”

A grunt.

Ferial, who never missed a day of work, still in bed. Persy moved closer into the room. “Ferial, you okay?”

Ferial peered out from under the duvet, half her face showing. It was enough.

“What happened?”

“Ag – Donny, you know.”

No need to elaborate. The bruised and swollen eyes said it all.

Persy felt a surge of pity and hate, a sick sour taste, a leaden weight in her belly. She had slept while this was taking place in the room next door.

“Shit! Why didn’t you wake me?”

“Ag, it’s nothing. I gave him as good as I got.”

Persy doubted that. She and Ferial had the same slight build. She weighed about 50 kilos tops. She sat down heavily next to her.

“Jesus, Ferial.”

“What must I do?”

“I told you. Get a restraining order.”

Ferial laughed harshly. “It will make him more mad.”

“If you don’t do something, he’ll kill you one day.”

“Don’t lecture me. Please. Just stay out of it, you’ll only cause more shit for me.” She began weeping, her whole body shaking under the duvet. “I can’t take it any more.”

It was the first time Persy had seen a crack in her defenses. She felt relief. Would she finally listen to reason?

“Meet me at Caledon Square later. I’ll help you draw up the restraining order. Let’s put an end to this once and for all.”

Ferial’s muffled assent came from the pillow.

Persy patted her back softly.

“Don’t worry, I’ll help you. It’s going to be ok.”

\*

Marge's first patient of the day, Julian Duval, had not arrived for his 7am Wednesday morning session, fortunately, as it turned out, or she could not have accepted Ivor's unexpected invitation to do a morning walk. Whatever awkwardness there had been between them at the NAG meeting evaporated in the fragrant morning air.

Silvermine was covered in mist that was fast being burnt off by the sun.

They started along the top contour path, heading for the craggy viewing site from where they would see Hout Bay. By nine they should be off the mountain: the low-lying fynbos provided little shade. If one of them caught sight of an interesting erica or buchu, they called out to the other and an intense discussion on the scent, shape or colour of the plant ensued.

"Aren't you pleased you came?" Ivor asked, his teeth white in his tanned face in the shadow of the hat.

"Yes, of course, but I'm a little concerned about my no-show." She had a niggling worry that Julian might be deliberately resisting an imminent breakthrough. There was often a pullback, a last ditch effort to hold onto protective mechanisms. To keep painful realisations or memories locked down in the subconscious.

Julian, who referred to himself as a "queer *boereseun*" was the only child of a deeply religious and conservative Potchefstroom family. In therapy, he was coming to terms with grief and guilt over the death of his homophobic father. It was a delicate stage: Marge had to be cautious of even the slightest coercion.

Fortunately Julian had a supportive partner in Mustafa.

“Thank God for Mustafa, that’s all I can say,” he’d said at his last session.

“I think of him as a guardian angel, although don’t tell him that, please! He hates my mumbo jumbo.”

Julian had confessed to a weakness for charlatans and soothsayers, who played on his insecurities. In her darker moments Marge wondered if she were just another one. Psychoanalysis could sometimes feel like little more than over-determined guesswork or theorised intuition.

Marge and Ivor walked for a good hour and a half, mostly in companionable silence. They stopped at a small stream so that Bongo could drink. Marge scooped some of the red ochre-tinted water to her lips. Straight off the mountain, sweet and clean.

“Thank you for suggesting this,” she said. “Bongo needed a walk, but I couldn’t face Long Beach after Sunday.”

“I can imagine.” Ivor’s tone was sympathetic, but his light eyes, shadowed by the brim of his hat, were as unreadable as ever. “Have you heard from the police?”

“As a matter of fact, I’m assisting them with the case. Informally of course.”

He looked surprised. “I thought you were all done with that.”

“I have, but you know ... I thought I should offer. God knows they need all the skills they can get.”

Letting him know that she was still valued for her expertise.

“I hope you’ll be careful.” There was an edge to the warning. Was he concerned about her safety? She felt foolishly lighthearted at the thought.

“It’s purely in a support capacity. Nothing dangerous.”

Fact was, it was all hypothetical at this point. If Titus could swing things so that Persy Jonas was on the case, Marge might be able to discreetly steer the enquiry. Get Jonas to talk to Maureen Xolele. Then the police would be privy to information on Sherwood that Marge was unable to divulge. Information that could throw light on his death.

They had reached the top of the plateau, with its view of the noble, jagged peak of the Sentinel rising straight up out of the sea, guarding the entrance to Hout Bay. A wind had come up from the South, hot and gusting. Fishing boats were pulling in nets and lines, heading back to harbour. It was already too late for them to be out, the fish sinking deeper into the cooler depths of the ocean.

Ivor pointed out the seals clustered in a black inky mass on the rocks of Duiker Island, and the settlement in the valley, now sprouting ugly shopping malls and housing estates. “Look at that desecration,” his voice was tight with anger. “That was covered with yellowwoods and silver trees when I was a child. There was one road down to the beach.”

“I remember.”

“That will be Noordhoek, if we’re not vigilant,” he said bitterly.

“That’s why the Noordhoek Action Group is so vital,” she said.

“Sometimes I think it’s an unstoppable tide. People have no idea of the magnitude of what is being lost here, and couldn’t care less anyway.” She was surprised by his expression of anger. He was always so controlled.

“We may have to resort to killing people off, ” she said lightly, “before there’s no nature left.”

He shot her a sharp glance, then fell back on cool amusement. Marge had an unwelcome insight; Ivor’s elusive mysteriousness would always promise more than he could deliver. She generally avoided the facile labels of pop psychology, but it occurred to her that Ivor could well be described as a textbook narcissist. She tied her hair back under her hat and changed the subject.

“Will spoke about Hout Bay at a history seminar at the university.” Will had been so eloquent, his light hair shining under the lights, so confident up at the podium. He’d created a thrilling picture of the early Portuguese explorers rounding the Capo des Tempo, as they called it, and seeing the bay for the first time, teeming with forest and wildlife. Whether it was her sadness at growing apart from her youngest son, or melancholy at the sight of the ruined bay, Marge was assailed by an unexpected and desolating sense of loss.

“Everything okay?” Ivor’s tone was sympathetic.

She blinked back the tears – she had a horror of being pitied. “Allergies. It’s this damned wind, stirring up the pollen and irritating my eyes – I’d best be getting back, I have a patient.” She deplored her thin-skinned sensitivity, which kept intimacy at bay.

They set off at a brisk pace, Bongo leading the way. Marge kept a short distance ahead of Ivor, so that by the time he'd caught up with her she'd recovered her composure and he, oblivious of her dark thoughts, walked silently beside her.

\*

The South Easter was up again. Since October it had blown without ceasing. Litter flew around frenziedly, plastic and paper birds darting hither and thither, momentarily trapped against walls and then grabbed and whirled into the air. Fine gritty sand from the beach covered the pavements and the salt-smearred windows of the shops. Persy bent her head into the wind as she crossed Fish Hoek Main Road, her thoughts on the Sherwood case. Dizu said she was like a dog whose bone had been stolen, loathe to accept that it was no longer hers and move on. He thought it was thwarted ambition, but he couldn't know that it was a gnawing intimation of looming disaster that was driving her obsession. She felt as if something terrible was about to happen that only she could prevent.

This strong sense of foreboding had begun with seeing Sherwood's body bobbing in the water, and been exacerbated by the vivid nightmares that left her with a feeling of dread that subtly permeated most of her waking day. It was as if she was compelled by outer forces to investigate Sherwood's death.

Which was crazy.

She picked up the Cape Times from the vendor at the lights and headed for The Wishing Well, the coffee shop where she had arranged to meet Dizu for

breakfast. It was close to the station, and a good place to share information, out of earshot of the other detectives. The bottomless coffee was bad, but cheap.

Dizu was in their usual window seat, looking pleased with himself, grinning his head off.

“What’s up?” she asked.

“Just come from the station.”

Her coffee already ordered and waiting. She slid into the seat opposite him, his face very close suddenly. Warm, dark brown eyes. How did he keep his eyebrows so neat?

“You got in early,” she said.

“You know what they say about early birds.”

The waiter arrived with a tuna sub on a plate for Dizu.

“So, what’s the worm?”

“Dollery’s prints were in Sherwood’s car.”

She paused, her coffee suspended halfway to her mouth. “You lie!”

“Seriously,” Dizu happily unwrapped his roll, “we have, as they say, convergence.” And with that he halved his tuna sub in one bite.

“I knew it!” Persy said. “Dollery is up to his neck in all the shit around here. Does Mhlabeni know?”

“Yep. He’s on a Special Op in Ocean View as we speak. Looking for Dollery.”

“Talk about an ice cube’s hope in hell. No one will talk to him after that small fry was hit. ”

Some months earlier Mhlabeni had raided a tik dealer's den in Ghost Town in Ocean View. The small time operator had brought a charge of harassment against the police. He was knifed in broad daylight outside Ocean View police station after he'd been released on bail.

There were rumours of miscarriage of justice, that Mhlabeni stitched up the small fry as a favour to the heavyweights. There seemed to be evidence to back it up.

"I don't want to hear about dirty cops," Persy said. She was fighting battles on enough fronts without trying to bust her own kind.

"The system will collapse if we turn a blind eye."

"Stop being such a fucking lawyer, Calata. You gave that all up, remember?"

"Yeah. Remind me why again?"

She shrugged and opened the Cape Times, turning to the rentals section.

"What's with the classifieds?"

"Got to find somewhere to live."

"What's wrong with Parklands?"

"Its Donny, you know, my cousin? He's an asshole." Persy told Dizu what had happened to Ferial, how they planned to meet later to get a restraining order. "It's only a matter of time before Donny and I have a face off, so better I get out of there."

"Makes me feel sick about being a man, I swear," Dizu said. "Every minute of the day some maniac is taking out his frustrations on his missus and kids. You be careful, Persy. If he comes near you, call me."

She could tell he was upset. Dizu hated bullying. The strong preying on the weak. He took the main section of the paper, started flipping through the news. He was always interested in what the politicians were up to. The more dirt the better. Persy couldn't care less. It wasn't as if any of them had coloured's interests at heart.

"Jeez, look at the rents on these places."

"Where you looking?" Dizu asked.

"With what I earn, I can't be choosy. A room in a shared house? Retreat or Muizenberg would be convenient. Close by. And I can keep an eye on my grandfather in Grassy Park. But it's like hen's teeth finding anything in my price range in good areas."

Dizu turned the page he was reading to face her. "Check out this."

Persy leaned over for a closer look. The article was on the 'crime and trials' page. "KOMMETJIE MAN WASHED UP ON BEACH." There was a photograph of Sherwood in a Hawaiian style shirt, his face oddly featureless. The telltale line of palm trees and the Twelve Apostles stretching away into the distance told her it was Camp's Bay.

"He wasn't an oil painting," said Persy.

"He looks as mild as mother's milk to me," said Dizu.

"Not that mild," she said. "Someone killed him for a reason."

## Twenty

Sean Dollery was packing the stuff from the Schneider house into his shed. Nice new wide screen TV, a good digital camera, laptop, some odds and ends.

And the Luger.

Gregory Crane had been asking about a gun. He was an enthusiast. This one would appeal to his vanity, and it was not something that Sean could sell on the open market. Too traceable. But it was a nice piece. Maybe he'd keep it for himself. He was shitting on his own doorstep with this burglary, but it was too tempting not to, and besides, no matter what Klaus suspected he was never going to bust him, not as long as he was getting what he wanted from Charlene. Besides the German was too shit scared to do anything anyway, Charlene or no Charlene. He would call the cops of course, had to if he wanted his insurance payout, but what were they gonna do? This was his second job this week – the quick hit on the video shop had netted some cash, and he was feeling pleasantly flush. As soon as he finished he was going to go down to the Pick n Pay center in Sun Valley and work out at the gym, keep himself pumped, get some of his mother's fishcakes, by then her *vet lip* about the burglary would have worn off, then off to check out some new dogs at Pietchie's place. Dog fighting was becoming nearly as lucrative as drugs these days. In fact his day had been working out just fine until Mhlabeni's call.

They met out at the back of Samodien's butchery, in the yard, where no one would see them apart from Samodien, who was packing the meat and was as simple-minded as a snoek.

"So? What happened yesterday?" Mhlabeni asked, frowning.

"I scared the shit out of her. What more did you want?"

"And your prints? All over Sherwood's Mazda."

"Shit – it was those *laaities*, man –"

"The station is fucking gunning for you Dollery, the heat is on. There's a raiding party on the way, so make yourself scarce. What you got for me?"

Sean handed over the roll and Mhlabeni counted it expertly – eighteen per cent from the dogs and the drugs. Nice little business for the cop for doing fuck-all really. And he was starting to squeeze for another two per cent. You couldn't call his pathetic tip-offs and shit protection.

"You better sort out Jonas – she's got it in for me," Sean said. Let Mhlabeni do some fucking dirty work for a change. He was sick of being everyone's bitch. At least Crane paid well. As long as there was no blowback on that. If there was, Mhlabeni would have to earn his keep and sort it out. As for Persy, she was a *hardegat*, that's for sure. So small and light, but fast and strong. As a *laaitie* she could knock out boys twice her size. She was always faster than him. And tougher. She'd protected him when he was small and weak. He shook off the thought; not any more. He was no longer recognisable as that pathetic little *snotneus*. Those days were gone. No one would make him feel small and helpless

again. Ever. He was not going to be soft on Persy, that's for sure. She had betrayed him, was now a sworn enemy. She must expect no mercy.

“Crane wants you to put some pressure on some old bitch in Noordhoek. A shrink who's trying to block his business.”

Gregory Crane, that weird fucker. He creeped Sean out – that voodoo shit of his, like the blacks with their *muti*, the bits of string and cut-off ears. There were enough vestiges of Sean's Catholic childhood left for him to never dismiss out of hand the devil and his works. Crane had a lot to hide. He'd used Sean a few times to do his dirty work. He must be regretting it now.

“I'll sort her.”

“Just watch out, she's got a big dog.”

He grinned. “Don't worry. I know how to handle dogs.”

## Twenty-one

The detectives milled around, finding seats in Titus' office, preparing for the midweek briefing. Chester April took the last chair and Persy and Dizu were left standing against the back wall. There were never enough chairs in Titus' office, as they were always being moved to the boardroom and often disappeared. Anything not nailed down tended to walk out of the station. Dizu often joked that there were more crooks inside the average police station than out.

The religious paraphernalia on the wall of his office made it clear who was the boss in the Commander's life.

“If his children forsake my law, and walk not in my judgments; / If they break my statutes, and keep not my commandments; / Then will I visit their transgression with the rod, and their iniquity with stripes.”

Titus was an unabashed reborn Christian and a part-time pastor at his church. He looked relaxed and in control as he removed his jacket and hung it off the back of his chair. He rubbed his hands together. “So, report-back time, people.”

Each detective went through a progress report. Titus was hard on his team and expected good work. He was lavish with his praise and unstinting in his support, but he hated slackers. Usually Mhlabeni, Dippenaar and Chester April came in for a tongue-lashing. Titus filled the group in on the Sherwood case. “Besides Dollery's prints, forensics found three others, including Sherwood's. Coombes confirms Sherwood died from a blow to the head, not by drowning.

We're going for a full autopsy but the final coroner's report will take a while.

Jonas, what about his car?"

"Unlocked, no sign of forced entry, ignition fine. Looked like it had run out of petrol. Found some evidence of dagga and alcohol use. Sherwood had lunch at the Boma Bar in Kommetjie and left at about 3pm."

"O.K., good. Our priority now is to get Dollery in for questioning. Mhlabeni has been on a raiding party to Ocean View, but no luck."

Persy and Dizu exchanged looks. No surprises there. Titus got progress reports on the other detective's cases. Two cases closed, little headway on the rest.

It was time for prayers. If you were on Titus' team it came with the territory. Persy had retained enough of her Catholic upbringing to find a spark of recognition in the ritual. Hard-nosed types started off refusing to close their eyes or say amen, but their resistance never lasted longer than three or four weeks. The Commander's prayers had taken on an almost talismanic power – no one had ever been killed on his watch and though they would never admit it to each other, the detectives shared a superstitious belief in his prayers. When they gathered in a circle, holding hands, listening to his strong unwavering voice, even the most skeptical felt something. Maybe because, for that brief moment they set aside their differences and felt like a team.

"Dear Lord, please protect and assist these good people in their daily battle against evil. Amen." There was a chorus of hearty "Amen"s.

"Back to your mission, people. And God bless you."

As the detectives filed out, Titus called Persy to stay back. He closed the door. "Mhlabeni tells me you searched Sherwood's house, over his objections. You do realise that it could be a crime scene?"

Mhlabeni and his big mouth. This could mean disciplinary action, big shit. She had no option but to brazen it out.

"Sir, you sent us to investigate the theft of Sherwood's car. I wanted to check the garage for evidence of how the car had been stolen. I could only get there through the house."

It was a stretch and Titus knew it. "How did you gain access?"

"Keys were in sight." She lied.

He tapped his pencil, a sign of his annoyance. "Don't push it, Jonas, I'm not a fool."

"No sir."

"I know you're angling to work the case with Mhlabeni, but he can't stand you and I assume the feeling's mutual. And you are too inexperienced to do it alone."

If he gave her a damned case, maybe she'd get some experience.

"However," he continued, "you have a champion from an unexpected quarter. Marge Labuschagne."

She was sure her jaw had dropped.

"Something wrong, Jonas?"

"Of course not, sir."

He studied her carefully. “Good. Because I will let you take the case, on condition you work alongside Marge, albeit unofficially.”

Persy could hardly credit it. It just didn’t add up. Why would the old bag want to work with her?

“Mhlabeni will be around to assist and advise. For continuity.”

Talk about being handed a poisoned chalice. Marge Labuschagne *and* Mhlabeni. But if that’s what it took to get the case, she would have to suck it up.

“Be careful, you know how dangerous Dollery can be. You can use Calata as well if you need extra backup. Mhlabeni will brief you.”

As she went through the door he said, “I should warn you that Mhlabeni has not taken this well.”

Mhlabeni leaned back in his seat and scratched his balls lewdly. “You must have given Titus a fucking good blowjob.” He threw the Sherwood file at her.

“Good luck with that fucken *moffie* in the morgue – if he’s even got round to the P.M. He’s got so many bodies he doesn’t know his fucking arse from his elbow half the time.”

Mhlabeni had no respect for Coombes, the District Surgeon. Mhlabeni was homophobic for a start. And he had a general loathing for Forensics, who he blamed for failing to back up his cases even though it was usually due to his own mismanagement or laziness.

“Any luck with the raid?”

“Been from the fucking *Blokke* to Ghost Town and back ten times today looking for that fucken *poes* Dollery!” Mhlabeni spoke four vernacular languages, but couldn’t open his mouth without an obscenity and never said please or thank you.

Persy picked up the file and opened it. She recognised her own legs, cropped off at the waist, her new Pumas, the corpse in the foreground, obscenely swollen.

The pornography of violent death. There were two statements in the file.

“McKillian is the ex-girlfriend who did the ID,” said Mhlabeni. “She’s a fuck-up, a head case. She knows *fokkol* and hasn’t seen Sherwood for years.”

“What about the neighbours who reported him missing?”

“Senile old pensioners just moved in next door, say they don’t know him.”

“They recalled his car registration number accurately.”

“Curtain twitchers. Fuck all else to do in Kommetjie.”

She left his office with the file, feeling his eyes boring into her back.

Prick.

Before she took the file through to Calata, she would go to the bathroom and scrub her hands. Soothe away some of the nagging anxiety that had shadowed her every step since Sunday.

## Twenty-two

Persy followed Henry Coombes down the hospital corridor. Strip lighting flickering, most of the tubes burnt out, tiled walls and the ever-present smell of disinfectant. Henry was hyper from lack of sleep, violet papery skin beneath his eyes. Rattling on about the Australian visa he was waiting for – he'd accepted a job offer in Brisbane. Another highly experienced pathologist set to emigrate.

“I can't work in these conditions any more. There is no way I can do my job when I have to look at this many bodies a day.”

The mortuary assistant drew back the plastic cloth covering Sherwood's body. Coombes's stubby fingers moved expertly over the corpse. They had been lucky to get Coombes without unreasonable delay, considering the shortage of forensics staff. Ginger-haired, pale-skinned and brilliant at his job; like Persy continually fighting prejudice from the cops, who never passed up an opportunity to mock him for being “queer as an eleven rand note.” To quote Mhlabeni.

“We are looking at immersion for a couple of days at most I'd say, judging by the bloating.”

He prised open Sherwood's mouth, which had an oddly slack, formless look.

“The body decomposed fairly quickly due to the heat.”

The scene at the beach came back to Persy with startling clarity: the stench of rotting flesh mingling with the sulphurous smell of kelp washed up all along the beach, thick trunks of amber, the darker leaves torn up by the tide. Sea lice scurrying over his head, inside his clothes, over the puffy hands. The water had

pushed his T-shirt up under his armpits, exposing a swollen belly above Mr. Price jeans. No watch or jewellery. Nothing in his pockets either. Everything sucked out by the sea.

“Couldn’t make a dental ID, unfortunately,” said Coombes. “Not a God-given tooth in his head. Dentures must have got washed clean out of his mouth.”

He gestured for his assistants, also gloved and suited, to assist him. “Let’s turn him over.”

The body, heavy, spongy, came away from the trolley with a sucking sound. Coombes pressed his fingers into the thick swollen flesh at the back of the neck. “He got banged about a bit. Wound to the back of the skull. Judging by the tissue damage, it happened before he was immersed.”

“So he was dead before he went into the sea?”

“Ja. He got bashed about after death. He could have fallen. There are lots of broken bones.”

Persy shivered.

He noticed and gave a grim smile. “Only perk of a mortuary. Good aircon.”

Coombes, trying on the gallows humour, knowing it was her first case.

“Caucasian male, whose age we now know as 48, weighed 73kgs.

Approximate time of death between nine and midnight on Friday night. Cause of death: brain haemorrhage caused by several blows to the head with a heavy object. We found fragments of what looks like cement and brick in the skull, but don’t hold your breath for a fragment ID anytime soon.”

Coombes moved around to the other side of the trolley. He picked up Sherwood's puffy hand and turned it over. Dark bruises suffused the palms.

"Pre-mortem abrasions on hands and knees as if victim had stumbled and fallen before death. Post-mortem injuries, left leg, six ribs and clavicle broken. Right femur fractured, wrist of left arm broken. Signs that the body was manhandled, possibly dragged on a rough surface. We found chips of what looked like rusted metal in some of the abrasions, and bits of tarmac. He could have been transported in a rusty vehicle for example, and dragged along a road." Coombes rubbed his eyes tiredly. His skin looked greasy. Persy knew his diet. Coffee, Coca-Cola, fast food; same as hers. And she would not be surprised if he used other, less legal stimulants. He worked hard and, as rumour had it, played hard too. Burning the candle at both ends.

"He consumed a lot of alcohol, probably over hours and up to the time of his death. Remains of fish and potato in his stomach, probably fish and chips about eight to nine hours before he died – lunch, I'd guess."

Persy remembered what Duncan the Rasta had told her about Sherwood having the Friday lunchtime 'special' at the Boma Bar.

"When can I see a final report?"

"Three, four weeks, soonest. I am under tremendous pressure here with backlogs. But I will do the best I can."

Persy looked down at the corpse's pallid face, noting the age spots on his bony forehead, the wisps of fair hair receding along his hairline, his almost colourless lashes. Having never heard the timbre of his voice, his laugh, or seen

him walk or eat or smile, she should be unmoved by his death. He was a mere facsimile of a human being. It was easier to envisage a marble statue springing to life than to imagine this body animated. Nevertheless, she was surprised to feel anger and a deep sense of grievance at the indignity of his death. What malice or passion or fear would cause someone to do this to a fellow human being?

When Marge heard from Titus that he'd handed over the case to Persy Jonas, she immediately called the station to speak to her. She was subjected to the usual annoying transfers and clicks on the phone, followed by an electronic rendition of 'Greensleeves'. Finally someone called Phumeza answered and told her that Jonas was at the morgue and gave her a cell number. At least one person in the place was efficient! Persy answered on the first ring.

"So, Detective. You can't escape me it seems." Marge could not resist a slight crowing.

"Seems not." A little gratitude would not go amiss. But it was time to put egos away. She needed Jonas. "Let's get on with it, then. You are interviewing Yoliswa Xolele at 2pm. I've emailed you her details."

The silence was so extended Marge wondered if Persy had rung off. But she replied, in a voice bristling with hostility, "Just to fill you in, ma'am. We have a suspect, and should have him in custody soon."

"Really! Who?"

"A local drug dealer called Sean Dollery. His prints are all over Sherwood's car. It looks like a drug deal or hijacking gone bad."

“That sounds pretty circumstantial.” Marge couldn’t hide her skepticism. “Yoliswa Xolele has put aside the time detective, and I think you will find what she has to say instructive.”

“Under the circumstances I think it’s a waste of time.”

If Jonas wanted to play hardball then so be it. “Detective, as I understand it we are in a working partnership. Don’t you think that seeing as I got you on this case, you owe it to me to follow up my leads?” Emotional blackmail it was called. And she a trained psychotherapist for Pete’s sake!

“I hear you, ma’am.” The girl’s voice gave nothing away. The damn girl was defended to the hilt, that’s for sure. Marge recalled the brown eyes blinking imperturbably behind those glasses. Always alert to hidden pathologies, she knew there was a lot more to Detective Persy Jonas than met the eye. Still, the girl had managed to bring out the worst in Marge.

Round one, measured in terms of dignity, to Jonas.

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The Silvermine Mountains surrounded the Logos School on three sides. Half a dozen prefabricated classrooms encircled a grassed playground that looked like a village green shaded by large oaks. Persy wondered how a small independent school had managed to come by such valuable real estate. Her cell rang and Dizu’s name popped up on her screen. “We just got a report of a burglary in Kommetjie. Klaus Schneider’s house.”

“Charlene Dollery’s employer?”

“One and the same. Sounds like an inside job, so guess who’s a likely suspect?”

“What was taken?”

“The usual. New TV, camera, laptop, clothes – and a weapon. Schneider’s handgun. A Luger.”

“Who’s going with you?”

“Mhlabeni.”

“Shit. I should be there.” Following up Dollery, their prime suspect, instead of bowing to some whim of Marge Labuschagne’s. Her first murder case compromised by an old busybody out to relive her past glory.

In the small reception area a butterball of a coloured woman in a headscarf was on the phone, relaying the gruesome details of some relative’s terminal illness with much gusto. Persy checked out the children’s drawing and photographs displayed in glass cabinets attached to the wall. Among them was a series of spectacular photographs of a fire. Blazing buildings against a night sky, silhouetted fireman battling the flames, blackened ruins.

“Sorry to keep you,” the receptionist was off the phone.

Persy pointed to the photos, “Terrible fire – was that here . . . ?”

“Yes. The school was razed to the ground. Seven years ago now.”

The woman came over to the glass cabinets. “It was a blow. We weren’t insured.”

The woman introduced herself as Mrs. Yasmin Fortuin – the receptionist and headmaster’s wife. Persy told her she’d come to see Yoliswa Xolele.

“She’s still with a class. She should only be a few minutes.”

Persy indicated the surrounding buildings. “You’d never think there’d been a fire here.”

“We rebuilt it. From scratch.” Yasmin Fortuin went over to her desk and took out an envelope. She extracted a wad of photographs and came over to Persy, shuffling them and handing them over one by one. They were of a building site: people with wheelbarrows, spades and trowels. “These are teachers and parents from the community. From Masiphumelele, Ocean View, Kommetjie, all over. Black, white, coloured. Such a beautiful thing to see the whole community pulling together.”

Persy tried to look interested, but she was eager to be off, wondering how much longer she would have to wait for Yoliswa Xolele.

“I suppose you’re here about Andy?” Yasmin Fortuin handed her a photograph. “That’s him, right there.” Persy peered at Sherwood’s entirely unmemorable face. Smiling, his light eyes and sandy eyebrows blown out by the light. The image was briefly overlaid by a flash frame of his bloated face in the morgue. Life taken in an instant. A cold sweat broke out on her brow and the back of her neck and with it, a sense of foreboding. She flipped to the next photo in the pile. Two men, one very elegant with fine Indian features and dark straight hair, posing in a well-cut jacket and white open-necked shirt. He looked distinctly out of place among the building team. “Is he a teacher?”

“Oh no! That’s Asha de Groot,” Yasmin said. “Talks with a real plum in his mouth. Very posh. He’s our most generous funder.”

Persy's attention was caught by the shorter man next to him. He appeared to be in costume, a peasant in a play perhaps: baggy trousers and boots. His foxy face under the battered felt hat looked familiar. She'd seen him among the onlookers at the beach, the same man she'd seen in the car park arguing with the hippie woman. Small world. Or too much of a coincidence? "Who's this?"

"Gregory Crane. He was our legal adviser and a trustee for a while." Clearly Yasmin Fortuin did not like Gregory Crane, and looked about to say why when she was interrupted by the shrill ring of an electronic school bell.

"It's break time. You can see Yoliswa now."

A group of children of various races and ages were earnestly engaged in digging, planting and watering a flourishing vegetable patch. White butterflies darted between the wild dagga and flowering rosemary bushes. Soft light to lend the scene a nostalgic, pastoral quality, a snapshot of idyllic childhood. The sound of birdsong was close up over the distant brush of the sea. There was no sign of a teacher. Persy could not believe she was wasting her time in the go-slow zone of a primary school. As if she had nothing better to do!

A graceful older girl in a traditional Xhosa skirt and headdress rose from her crouching position among the children and came towards her. As she came closer Persy saw that she was not a girl, but an elegant woman in her early thirties. Her dark skin shone with a light film of sweat from her gardening exertions. Tiny silver earrings in the shape of proteas glinted in her ears. She extended a hand. "Good morning. I'm Yoliswa Xolele."

“Detective Jonas.”

“My classroom is right here.”

Persy followed her into a small wooden cabin. A canvas awning shaded the verandah from the sun. Through the open double doors the children were in clear view. Inside was stuffy, hot and dim. Child-sized wooden chairs were arranged around low tables on which were scattered an assortment of crayons, puzzles and toys. “Make yourself comfortable if you can.” She grinned, showing a gap between her front teeth. “The children are less likely to interrupt us here.”

She filled a kettle at a small sink cluttered with glass jars filled with paintbrushes. “Marge said you wanted to ask me about Andrew. I will try to answer your questions, but I didn’t know him well.”

Yoliswa’s face managed to be openly friendly and impenetrable at the same time. *Just like Dizu*, Persy thought. He could also be unreachable. Standing on his dignity. But in the next instant he’d flash his killer smile and be all charm again. Marge followed Yoliswa out to a shady tree in the garden, her impatience fast fading as Yoliswa poured fragrant tea and cut fresh carrot cake to accompany it.

“May I ask that whatever we discuss remains between you and me?”

Yoliswa handed Persy a cup of tea and a plate of cake.

Giving easy assurances usually didn’t bother Persy, but the young teacher’s forthright gaze demanded an honest response.

“If it has nothing to do with the investigation it won’t go further, that’s all I can promise.”

Yoliswa's finely boned hands tensed in her lap. Persy guessed that she'd hoped for a more reassuring response. "It's not only about Andrew. There's also a child involved. And the child's mother." She took a deep breath. "However, Marge said it was very important that I tell you, and I trust her."

Persy was impressed by the woman's quiet eloquence. "First let me say, there were no charges brought against Andrew. He was the school administrator here, seven or eight years ago and in a relationship with our music teacher, whose child was in my class at the time. A seven-year-old boy. The music teacher became ill. Depression. She went to a clinic to recover. After she came out she broke it off with Andrew. Later she came to see me, very upset, and wanted to know if I had noticed anything unusual in her son's behaviour. He was a quiet boy and he had got quieter and more nervous, but I had put it down to his mother's illness and hospitalisation. She told me that she suspected that Andrew had sexually abused the child. I immediately told the principal, Joel Fortuin."

A small girl came crying into the room and buried her head in Yoliswa's lap. Yoliswa stroked her hair soothingly "What is it Orlanda?"

Orlanda raised a tearstained face. "Josh pushed me off the swing!" She looked Indian, but had a snooty English accent.

Yoliswa excused herself and took the child back to join the others.

Her distinctive voice, with its warm timbre, carried across the garden to Persy. Orlanda looked fragile and self-conscious in contrast to the robust looking children who were all barefoot and of varying shades of skin colour. Yoliswa

returned, smoothing down her apron. “Orlanda has come all the way from England. She is not used to our rough and ready African ways.”

Persy realised that she liked Yoliswa Xolele. And more importantly, trusted her. They picked up the interview where they had left off.

“Did the school investigate the allegations?”

“The mother didn’t want the child to go through the trauma of being examined. It put us in a difficult situation; we had no grounds to dismiss Andrew without any evidence, but we have over two hundred young children in our care that we dare not put at risk. Andrew vehemently denied it. He said the music teacher had imagined it due to her breakdown and asked for a professional to come and mediate. So I called Marge. She interviewed them, separately and together. Her report was inconclusive. But she recommended that we not leave any of the children alone with Andy. Understandably the music teacher resigned, and took her son out of school.”

“And Sherwood?”

“The thing is, Andrew had a special gift with children. They adored him. But after that we made sure he was never left alone with a child. But then the school’s legal adviser got to hear about it.” The foxy-faced man from the photograph in the foyer. The curious onlooker at the beach.

“Gregory Crane?”

“Yes, that’s right. I thought he was Andy’s friend, but he spread the allegations around. Of course it led to car park gossip. It’s pernicious but you can’t stop it. June de Groot, who happens to be the wife of our most generous

benefactor, Asha de Groot, demanded we fire Andrew immediately. Orlanda is their daughter. Andrew resigned, which came as a relief. I don't know what the truth was, but our first responsibility was to protect the children. Andrew took it very badly. He became a heavy drinker and never found regular employment again."

"I will have to speak to the music teacher."

"If you must. But please be sensitive." Yoliswa's direct look was a challenge to Persy not to mess up. "I'll get her number for you. Her name is McKillian. Colette McKillian."

University of Cape Town

## Twenty-three

Colette McKillian's hand trembled as she watched the dark red drops spattering like blood in the creamy yellow. She was adding vanilla essence to the beaten egg for the French toast for Jasper's lunch. He was in the living room, stretched out on the sofa watching MTV. She discouraged TV watching during the week as a rule, but she didn't want him hanging around in the kitchen noticing the state she was in.

She had just put down the phone to Yoliswa Xolele, who had told her about the visit from the detective from Fish Hoek Police Station.

"She wanted to know why Andrew had left the school. I'm sorry Colette, I had to tell her."

Colette's arm had juddered in the socket, as if she'd had an electric shock, and she'd nearly dropped the phone. "How could you? It's completely unethical! I shall write to the education department!" Knowing she never would. When had she ever stood up for herself, apart from that one time, and that had proved catastrophic. All she wanted was for it all to go away. To be able to sleep at night again, to know peace of mind. Peace of mind. When had she ever known that? Not even before Andy, if she was honest. Those dark walls had been threatening to close in on her for as long as she could remember. Only vigilance and constant medication kept them from completely crushing her.

She shot a look at Jasper to make sure he had not heard her outburst. Like most boys his age, he seemed permanently switched off, but he often surprised

her with what he did seem to notice. Often, weeks later, he would come out with something that made her realize that he was still the sensitive young boy he had been before the hormonal fog. But recently he had changed, completely. All shut up inside himself, a sullen, hard-faced stranger. When he stood near to her, she was uncomfortably aware of his physical mass. His height, his broad shoulders, the male smell of him. The hands that had once been dimpled and chubby now looked huge and violent, the knuckles sharp and threatening. Passing his room with its door shut fast to keep her out, she would be taken aback by the sight of his running shoes abandoned in the hallway, the laces viciously tangled. They looked as if they belonged on the feet of a giant.

Lately he had taken to wearing only black and his wrists were always covered in those wristbands that tennis players wear, though he did no sport. He must think her stupid. She had found a Stanley knife in his room and once when he was coming out of the shower she had seen the gash-like symmetrical cuts on his wrists. She'd read up about self-mutilation. Children did it if they could not bear their own pain. The physical pain was a release from unendurable emotional pain. Some experts thought it was a fad, or boredom, that teenagers craved dangerous activities out in nature, away from prying eyes, that it was a substitute for rites of passage rituals. Was it only that? Had he used it only to cut himself? Or had he, as she imagined in her darkest moments, used it for other, more murderous tasks?

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Charlene Dollery opened the door at the first ring. Dizu suspected her of having been waiting for them. "Mr. Schneider's walking the dogs. I'll phone him

to say you are here.” She was well-preserved, early forties, big breasted in a tight yellow top, lots of glittery make-up, hair straightened into a stiff bob. She tried to keep them on the doorstep, but Mhlabeni pushed on the door rudely and she backed into the passage. Dizu followed him in. “We got a report that you came in to find the house burgled.”

“That’s right. Klaus – Mr. Schneider, he stayed over in town on the weekend. Then when I comes in, I sees everything is gone, the new home TV system, sound system, *alles*.”

“Did you check the alarm?” Dizu asked. They followed her through the house, checking the alarm’s passive remote system.

“The alarm was on. Klaus set it himself.”

The place was a fortress, with surveillance cameras in every room.

“What about the cameras?”

“They was working. But now when we look, the tapes is blank.’

Bet they were, thought Dizu.

“Who else knew the codes?”

“Only me. And Boniface. The Malawian. I told Mr. Schneider not to show him the codes. You can’t trust foreigners.”

This was rich coming from the mother of one of Ocean View’s most notorious thugs.

“Ja, ja and where can we find this *kwere kwere*?” Mhlabeni joined in the unquestioning xenophobia.

“Vrygrond. There by Muizenberg. I got the address.” She scribbled it down.

“Sean been around?” Dizu said.

She looked up sharply. “Sean had *fokkol* to do with this!”

“He must know the codes. I’ve heard that he makes himself at home around here.” Mhlabeni said.

“My boy’s turned over a new leaf.” She handed Dizu the scrap of paper.

“Ja, like in the compost heap with only more shit underneath.” Mhlabeni said.

“Police harassment!” She protested to Dizu.

“Where’s that pretty boy of yours, hey?” Mhlabeni asked.

“Working.”

“Is that so?” Mhlabeni was enjoying himself, winding her up. “And what ‘work’ would that be?” Standing too close to her. Dizu felt a knot in his stomach. Was this the way Mhlabeni treated Persy?

“Can we look upstairs?” Dizu broke the tension.

They followed Charlene up a spiral staircase into a living room area furnished with leather sofas. Wide sliding glass windows, walls covered with framed gold records. The room was crammed with bits and pieces of musical equipment, a drum kit, a couple of electric guitars, a marimba and ostentatious African art. A mess of torn out spaghetti wiring that had once gone into the home theatre and sound system was strewn across the carpet.

Dizu turned his attention to Charlene. “I’d like to ask you a few questions, ma'am.”

“What for? I had nothing to do with it.”

“This concerns another case. A murder.”

She looked blank.

“Did you know a man called Andrew Sherwood?”

“Never heard of him.”

Dizu kept his tone polite. “We have evidence that Sean was involved. Where was he on Friday night?”

Charlene was stiff with wariness. “He was here with me of course, watching the TV.”

Mhlabeni gave his mirthless chuckle. “Watching TV with his mommy.”

Charlene bristled. “You calling me a liar?”

“You must admit it’s not much of an alibi,” Dizu said.

Charlene folded her arms. “It’s the truth. Ask Klaus. I’ll go phone him to come back from the beach.” She clattered heavily down the stairs.

“She’s lying.” Mhlabeni had wandered over to the bar, which took up most of the floor space in the room. “She’s Schneider’s bitch. These Germans enjoy our local chocolate.” Dizu decided to ignore the crudity. Mhlabeni checked out the wet bar in the corner. “My kind of place,” he said. He lifted a bottle of whisky off the bar counter, and put it back down with distaste. “I don’t do statutory rape.” He reached for a bottle of Laphroaig on the shelf. “Only sixteen years old or over for me.” He unscrewed the bottle and took a slug, then winked at Dizu.

Dizu went out onto the balcony to escape Mhlabeni. He leaned on the chromed railings and admired a view of the long white stretch of Long Beach, the ocean beyond ending at Chapman’s Peak, with the Sentinel beyond that and, even further, the curve of Hout Bay.

Another view afforded only to the privileged few. Below him, surfers caught the curling waves, while on the beach the inhabitants of Kommetjie walked their assorted dogs along the water's edge. Dizu spotted a man he assumed was Klaus Schneider making his way up the beach towards the house, his white bull terrier straining and drooling on a leather leash.

“What is it with whites and their dogs?” Mhlabeni had come up behind him. His jaws worked, a mixture of envy and frustration. “They feed these animals better food than we eat in the townships.”

Dizu knew it was not an exaggeration, although hardly true in Mhlabeni's case. With the amount of kickbacks Mhlabeni pocketed, his kids must eat like kings.

Klaus Schneider was an aging rock music producer and promoter, several decades older than the hipster he still imagined himself to be. He wore his thinning hair in a ponytail, a Sex Pistols t-shirt that accentuated his *boep*, and tight jeans that bagged over his shrinking shanks. He had little intelligence to contribute about the burglary. He expressed some consternation over the missing gun, but otherwise couldn't get them out of the house fast enough. He pressured them for a police report number for his insurance claim. He seemed unfazed when Dizu changed the subject to Sean Dollery. “Can you confirm Mrs. Dollery's statement that Sean was here on Friday night?”

“Ja, I can. Absolutely. I was in there in the bedroom watching DVDs with Charlene and Sean was downstairs also watching, in the TV den.”

“Could he have left the house without you noticing?”

“No. I was up and down getting food from the kitchen, so I don’t think even one hour could have passed without me seeing him.”

Charlene looked smug as she let them out. Dizu couldn’t hide his exasperation. “We’ve been looking for Sean for nearly a month. If he has nothing to hide, why is he avoiding us?”

She snorted derisively, hands folded over her boxlike breasts. “He’s not stupid.” She gave them a knowing look. “He knows you will arrest him for things he hasn’t even done.”

“Tell him murder is a serious offence.” Dizu said. “Far more serious than burglary.”

Charlene said nothing and shut the door in their faces.

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Caledon Square Police Station. Persy sat outside in the Nissan waiting for Ferial to pitch. The South Easter had set up a relentless howl; she’d had to keep the windows closed to keep the dust out and the Nissan was turning into an oven. She was sweating in her T-shirt and chinos, and her feet were constricted and swollen in the Pumas. Slipslops would be nice. She remembered Titus’ face the day she’d come into the office in her slops and Bob Marley T-shirt. Just to wind him up.

Her phone rang. It was Dizu, calling from the station, reporting back on his visit to Schneider’s. “No sign of Dollery. Charlene and Schneider are lying their heads off.”

“Could be an insurance scam. Why else would Schneider cover for him?”

“Schneider doesn’t need to risk a scam.” Dizu said. “He’s loaded. Mhlabeni thinks Schneider’s protecting Dollery for Charlene’s sake. Meanwhile Charlene’s doing her best to pin it all on Schneider’s Malawian gardener.”

“That’s the great thing about Malawians,” Persy said wryly. “They make such good scapegoats.” She told him about her meeting with Yoliswa Xolele.

“Think there’s a connection to Sherwood’s death?” Dizu asked.

“Not really. It’s ancient history.”

“Why does Marge Labuschagne think there is?”

“I’ve no idea.” Persy felt a spasm of irritation. She hoped Dizu wasn’t going to buy Marge Labuschagne’s bullshit theories. That’s why cops shouldn’t go to varsity. They lost their instincts – it was all theories.

“It was a waste of time,” she said tartly, “but it may be worth checking out the school fire. Something not right there. ”

After Dizu rang off, Persy watched through the window as missiles of tin cans and plastic bottles careered down the street. Leaves shriveled by the heat and shredded into confetti swirled in little tornadoes and eddies. White plastic bags clung to the fences, occasionally ballooning into exotic blooms. South Africa’s national flowers. Workers on their way home, bent into the wind, clutching parcels and bags, the women holding down their skirts. Persy checked the clock on the dashboard. Twenty past five.

Still no sign of Ferial.

She would have knocked off work an hour ago. Was she going to chicken out? Persy had offered to accompany her to Caledon, close to where Ferial worked. But yet again she was being taken for a sucker. Her phone rang. Marge Labuschagne's number came up. Not who she felt like talking to.

“Did you meet with Yoliswa?”

“Yes.”

“Excellent. Meet me at The Red Herring at seven o' clock for a report back.”

Before Persy could reply she'd rung off. First Ferial stood her up and now she was at Marge Labuschagne's beck and call, being treated like a child. A tight hard knot burned in her chest. What did the woman want with this case anyway? What was she trying to prove?

## Twenty-four

“Come away from that bloody window, woman, and stop snooping.”

“There she goes, out again. I haven’t seen Ivor Reitz over at her place for ages.”

“Maybe his therapy’s kaput.” George turned over his page of the Cape Times. All about the bloody comet again. Who could care less? Not a single line about the armed robbery at his shop. Crime was so everyday, only murders were worth reporting. And as for the police, he wasn’t holding his breath. Bunch of morons.

“Where’s the flippin’ sports section, woman?”

“They do not have a professional relationship, believe you me. They used to sit there with a bottle of wine laughing their heads off.”

George Tinkler had to agree with Fiona for once. He had seen them together. Marge Labuschagne half screened by the milkwoods, Reitz sitting in the sun bold as brass, glass of white wine in his hand. Wearing those expensive looking sunglasses of his. George thought he was a bit of a playboy. Difficult to know whether to despise or envy the bugger. Mystifyingly, he seemed to genuinely enjoy Marge Labuschagne’s company. Every now and then he’d lean forward as if listening intently and then throw back his head and laugh wholeheartedly.

“It has to be platonic, I can tell you that. He’s not going to go after her when he’s got that hottie Morgana at home.”

“Sex isn’t everything, you know.”

*Not to you maybe*, he thought bitterly, recalling her bulk turning away from his amorous advances more often than not.

It was the Tinkler's 25th wedding anniversary, which George found depressing. Maybe if they'd had a couple of kids who'd be at varsity now it would feel less as if he had wasted most of his life. They had already had one argument today. Fiona was nagging him to pop over for a quick sundowner at the Bohemian Rhapsody. George hated the place, a total rip-off, filled with fairies and ex-'Rhodies' as they called themselves, pensioners fleeing Zimbabwe, eking out their days in Fish Hoek, drifting in for the cut-price Pina Coladas. Also, he was not crazy about that Julian character. Fiona adored him, of course. Like most women, she was flattered by a poofster's attention. Besides, he hated Moroccan food. The last thing he felt like was that hotchpotch of unappetising spices. What was wrong with a good rump at the Cattle Baron for heaven's sake?

"Ivor Reitz is avoiding her. He must also have heard how she drove that innocent man to suicide."

"What are you rabbiting on about, woman?"

"Theo Kruger, remember. The story Julian told me? That poor man who threw himself under a train. Goodness George, it just goes in one ear and out the other with you."

"I'm not bloody interested. He was a poof wasn't he? They're all unstable."

Fiona's eyes were glued to the window. "Shamil told Julian to warn everyone about her. One day she'll have no patients."

"Who the hell is 'Shamil'?"

“He’s an Ascended Master.”

“Come again?”

“Oh never mind, George, you wouldn’t understand.”

Damn right he wouldn’t. More rubbish cooked up by that that charlatan Crane. Of course Fiona was lapping it up. And with her big mouth it would be all over the peninsula by tonight. She’d been shook up after the robbery and a bit quiet for a couple of days, but now she was blabbering more than ever.

“Don’t say anything about Shamil,” Fiona said. “The Christian types think it’s satanic.”

No wonder! If Gregory Crane was not up to the devil’s work, then heaven knows who was. But then there was not much to choose from between Christianity, the Devil, or even Baal for that matter. George found religion laughable. No sane or intelligent person would buy into that superstitious claptrap. George’s bedside reading at the moment was *The God Delusion*.

“Don’t worry about me, woman, *you* keep your trap shut. Labuschagne’s the type who’d sue for defamation.”

He found the sports section. The Stormers. What were the bloody fools up to, playing like damn girls again. He sighed. It was enough to turn you off rugby for life.

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Persy spotted the not very attractive back of Marge’s head in the woody confines of the Red Herring. The place looked like a glorified student hangout. Not the kind of place she would have expected Marge to frequent, but then it was

around the corner from her house. She'd get an ice-cold Coke and go over there and pretend to bow to the older woman's supposedly superior analysis. The corner table where Marge had elected to sit was small and she filled a great deal of it. Not only was she wearing a fairly copious caftan, but she had also piled the adjoining table with books and folders and a large worn leather satchel, similar to the kind hippies use to move their contraband around.

Persy ordered her Coke and slid into the seat opposite. Marge looked up briefly, marking her place on the page with her finger. "Hang on, will you, I'm just finishing off Coombes' preliminary pathology report. Phumeza kindly emailed it to me."

Jesus. Who gave Phumeza permission to hand out police reports to all and sundry? Persy cleared away an empty coffee cup and a plate with a smattering of what looked like cake crumbs. There was also an ashtray with several bent *stompies* in it. She had a good mind to slap a fine on the management for breaking the smoking by-laws. Her Coke arrived just as Marge slammed the file shut and fixed her with a gimlet-eyed stare.

"Right. Let's get down to business. What makes you think Dollery is responsible for Sherwood's death?"

Persy fought a rising irritation. "His fingerprints are all over Sherwood's car and he has no alibi for Friday night."

"The motive?"

"A drug deal gone wrong, probably. People like Dollery don't have deep psychological reasons for doing things."

Marge fixed Persy with an intense look. “Everyone has deep psychological reasons for doing things.”

Persy wished they were at a table instead of boxed into this narrow space. She felt trapped in the little booth. She squirmed, hyper-aware of the cracked vinyl pressing into her back, the woody darkness of the walls.

“Something the matter?” Marge’s light eyes were fixed on her.

“It’s stuffy in here.”

“So, you spoke to Yoliswa.” Marge’s interrogatory opening degenerated into a spasmodic smoker’s cough. Persy waited for it to end.

“It was seven years ago. I can’t see what it’s got to do with this case.”

Marge shook her head in an annoyingly exasperated way, as if she thought Persy was brain dead not to have made the connection. “Predatory paedophiles don’t stop offending. If Sherwood was one, there will be other victims, which means a motive. It’s worth investigating,” she rasped with the last of her cough.

“Yoliswa said you couldn’t make a case against Sherwood.”

Marge hunched forward. “That doesn’t mean it didn’t happen. It’s difficult to get to the truth when it involves a child.”

Persy didn’t like the way Marge was staring at her. In fact the conversation was making her uncomfortable in some indefinable way, as if they were talking in code. On the surface it appeared to be about Sherwood, but underneath it was about something else.

“So you thought Sherwood was guilty but you couldn’t prove it?”

“I’m not saying that.” For a moment Marge looked uncertain, as if she was on shaky ground, but she soon rallied. “Predatory paedophiles are expert at deflecting their deviancy, or disguising it, or hiding it. They are among the most cunning of all deviants. You know why? Because they don’t really believe that what they are doing is wrong.” Marge tapped a cigarette out of a crumpled pack. A lighter flared, sparking a sudden blue in her eyes. She blew smoke out of the side of her mouth, but it drifted back and hung above the table. “They lack empathy and have a moral bypass about the rights of the child. They convince themselves that they’re liberating the child’s natural sexuality. The way theirs was, usually.”

This was clearly one of Marge’s bugbears. Persy had heard it all before. Sexual abuse was so widespread it was like a national sport. She was tired of a subject that was taking them nowhere. A bad guy was a bad guy. No justification for it. No ambiguity. It was time to move the conversation back to the present investigation. “I want to speak to your friend, Mr. Reitz, if you have his details.”

Marge frowned. “Why?” Ash dropped off her cigarette and lay in an accusing tube on top of the autopsy report.

“Sherwood had packed boxes in the garage. Looked like he was planning to move out, and I wondered if he said anything to Reitz, seeing as he was his landlord.”

“Ivor hasn’t mentioned it to me.” Persy picked up on a certain vulnerability. *She has the hots for the guy.*

“If we knew where Sherwood was going, we might find a lead to Dollery.”

“What is it with you and this Dollery character, anyway?”

“I hate gangsters, full stop. Especially ones who prey on their own communities – we don’t have electric fences and private security like you whites.” It was a cheap putdown, but what the hell, she wanted to prick Marge’s self-satisfied bubble.

“What made you decide to become a cop?”

Persy was taken off guard by the sudden change of tack. “Excuse me?”

“There’s a theory that people who find the world chaotic become cops. They get a sense of control from restoring order to the world. That’s why the police service tends to attract the guilty. Or the punitive.”

“Sorry,” said Persy, “but I don’t get it.” But she did. There was a sudden build-up of pressure behind her eyes.

“It’s a theory, that’s all.”

“It’s a bullshit theory.” Persy mustn’t rise to the bait. All she had was her self-control.

“I didn’t mean to offend you.” Like hell. Marge looked like some sort of evil genie through a violet haze of smoke. “I’ll speak to Ivor about the boxes.” She stubbed out her cigarette.

“I’d better speak to him.”

“Ivor’s a friend of mine. I can find out a lot more than you would.”

Persy felt heat flush her neck and face. “I need something that will stand up in court.”

Marge turned imperious in an instant. “I have put more killers behind bars than you have had breakfasts. Be grateful that I’m here to help you.”

The woman was insufferable. Persy slid out of the banquette and got up, heart hammering. “You are not officially on this investigation, ma’am, nor are you my superior.”

“I am just trying to help – ” Marge protested.

“Bullshit.” Persy looked down at the startled face. “You’re piggybacking on my investigation to find out if Sherwood molested some kid or something. It’s a waste of my time and it’s irrelevant to this case. There’s a killer out there, we know who he is and my job is to put him behind bars. If you don’t like it, call the Captain. As you said, you got me on the case, I’m sure you can get me off.” She slapped some money on the table. “For the Coke,” she explained and stalked out, gratified by her glimpse of Marge’s abashed expression.

*Well*, Marge thought, watching Persy’s slight figure vanish out the door. The girl had more balls than Marge had given her credit for. She’d thrown down a challenge, gambling on the fact that Marge needed her. Maybe when she realised that she needed Marge as much as Marge needed her, they could finally begin working together as a team. Either that, or the perpetrator would get away with murder.

## Twenty-five

Persy had felt it coming on since the morning, pressure building up behind her eyeballs, dreading going back to the flat, to face Donny and Ferial, feeling at odds with everything, as though she were in the wrong skin, twitchy and nervous. The meeting with Marge had only made it worse; she'd been hanging for a drink at the Red Herring, even just a beer to take the edge off, but would never risk drinking with the psychologist. Fuck no, the woman was just waiting for a crack to appear so she could get in and mess with Persy's head.

It was dusk – the beginning of the long summer twilight. She could stop in somewhere around Voortrekker Road, but she couldn't wait that long. She headed in the general direction of Grassy Park where there was a shebeen she knew, but she'd been there one time too many and people might notice, make comment. The yellowing sulphurous lights faded up like pale flowers on their stalks. They lit up the car in flashes as she drove down to the beachfront, passing over the bridge at the lagoon and onto the circle that would take her to St Georges drive, past the Marina and Capricorn Business Park. Everywhere in this area were the signs of densification, as developers loved to call it. Concrete matchboxes with dodgy foundations, built on shifting dunes. Greed gobbling up the natural beauty of Cape Town. Once past the new developments, she was back in familiar territory. Lavender Hill. Here lived the forgotten ones in the ash brick flats with their washing lines, their wind, their heat and sand, their despair. Persy had relatives there. People she would be happy never to see again, though Poppa still had

contact with them. That brought her to the last time she'd seen Poppa. He'd been sitting in the garden outside the frail care facility at St Francis' Home for the Aged. One of the nuns had been watering twiggy geraniums in the borders. The South Easter had cracked the earth in the flowerbeds. The lawn was scrappy and windblown, a pepper tree hugged the wall. Only oleanders, poisonous and indestructible, flourished.

Poppa was playing chess with another patient, Maria Erntzen, with whom he had struck up a friendship. Persy saw with a pang that the light cotton sweater she had bought him at Woolworths hung from his shoulders in a way it had not even the week before. They'd said that the cancer would do that, eat him away from within. His skin was papery in the sunlight; there were more blotches and signs of age on his face. The hand he put out to move his bishop on the board was as light as a bird's claw, the skin discoloured like crumpled purple tissue paper.

But he was having a good day; she'd seen that immediately, in the way his eyes lit up at the sight of her, and the smile that spread across his face, briefly banishing the cadaverous impression.

“Persephone!”

He had chosen his granddaughter's name from the Greek myths. As a child Persy listened entranced to his stories of the gods of Mount Olympus, the Battle of Troy and the adventures of Odysseus. He, alone of his family, was literate, the product of the church school attached to St Francis in Simon's Town. With further education and opportunities who knows who Poppa could have been, who any of the men and women of his generation could have been.

Maria Erntzen looked up from studying the chessboard. “You saved me, my dear. This wicked man was just about to checkmate me!”

She was a bird-like, dark skinned woman hunched by arthritis. She had retained her thick black hair, now lacquered to a stiff sheen.

Persy bent to kiss Poppa’s cheek, dry as a dead leaf against her lips.

“How’re you, Poppa?”

“Fine, my darling, just fine.” His frail hand gave her arm a series of tentative pats. “It’s such a beautiful day.”

In the absence of any stimulation the old people zeroed in on the weather. And their ‘ops’. Not Poppa though, he never discussed his illness, never complained. When she tried to discuss preparations for what was inevitably to come, it was always the same reply. “Don’t worry, my girlie. Jesus looks after me. Jesus takes care of everything.”

His devoutness had infuriated Persy’s mother, who’d hated the lit candles in their red glass flickering on the sideboard of the house in Ocean View, the gruesome crucifix above the TV. She’d especially objected to the shrine that Poppa had set up of Mary, with her dolorous eyes turned up to heaven. She had sworn at him, saying that the priests were liars and gave people false hope. Persy could hardly remember her mother; she was left with an impression of erratic moods and drunken outbursts, a murky miasma of violent misery. And then she was gone. And it was just she and Poppa. There were big holes in Persy’s memory around her mother’s leaving, and she especially struggled to remember anything of her brother. He was like someone standing just outside of her field of

vision. If she shifted her eyes to look at him closely, the spectre would vanish. She associated him with a strange terror, with her mother's violent outbursts of grief, her unreasoning hatred. All she could remember of him were the green sandals. Maybe the image had stuck in her head because she had once worn them, before they became his hand-me-downs. They were pistachio green, made of cheap rubber. Made in China.

Poppa heaved his frail frame from the chair, his arms shaking from the pressure like brittle twigs in the wind. "Some tea, my darling?"

"I'll get it, Poppa, don't get up".

He sank back frustrated, breathing hard. He found the dependency harder to bear than the pain.

In the small kitchen Sister Clare was washing up. A large, energetic woman in her sixties, with the skin of a girl. She'd been born in Ireland but had been ministering to people in Grassy Park for thirty years.

Persy laid out a tin tray, the painted surface worn away by years of scrubbing, while Sister Clare nattered on about how Maria Erntzen was a Godsend for Poppa. "They get so lonely, you know. Everyone forgets about the old people."

Persy felt a surge of guilt. She saw Poppa as often as she could, but with long hours overtime and living in Parklands she was lucky if she got to see him more than twice a month. She laid cups and saucers on the tray, some sachets of sugar and an aluminium spoon. It would have to be dried milk. She unpacked a cake from her plastic carrier bag – the nuns seldom had treats and the home was run on frugal lines. There was little left over for luxuries like cake.

“You know that you must prepare yourself, my dear.”

Persy avoided the concerned blue eyes.

“He’s a strong old man.”

Sister Clare put her hand on her arm. “This disease spares no one. If you need to talk, I am always here.”

“I suppose I should make arrangements.”

“We will look after him here. And he has done his will and all the rest of it.”

Of course he had. Poppa never wanted to be a burden to anyone.

“Just say all you want to say to him, my dear. While he can still hear you.”

Persy picked up the tray, feeling fear clutch at her throat. Poppa was the only constant she had known. If he went, everything that was real and solid in her life would be stripped from her. A black chasm loomed, a solitary life filled up by work. She took the tray outside to where the old people were bent over their game as a cloud scudded over the sun, blotting it out and throwing a dark shadow over the garden. She had overheard him deep in conversation with Maria Erntzen.

“She’s a good, fine girl. Not like her mother, who spent her life in the shebeen, drinking and sleeping around.”

Now driving through Muizenberg, Persy remembered the old bar in the village area. Why not? No one would know her there, she’d seen coloureds coming out before, so it was mixed. She couldn’t imagine cops would drink there. She swung the car around, doing an illegal u-turn at the intersection, feeling the familiar restlessness in the hollow pit in her belly, the creeping terror that was just a breath away.

Muizenberg was quiet now the rush of traffic was gone. The outline of the ugly sixties pavilion was sharp against the metallic sheen of the darkening sea. She parked in Church Street and walked to the old corner bar. A widescreen TV blared out Formula One racing. A couple of white guys with young black girls, Rwandans or Nigerians, were playing pool. An old neighbourhood bar still with its regulars dating from before Muizenberg's so-called 'Rejuvenation', although as some wag had said, 'every year Muizenberg is going up. Until the South Easter rides into town.' She ordered a double vodka with lime and ice. On the barstool closest to her, a man in a cheap anorak bearing the logo of an autospare company was sunk in misery. He looked at her blearily over smeared empty glasses and an ashtray full of *stompies*. A thick smog of blue smoke hovered beneath a pressed tin ceiling, yellowed by nicotine. This was not a place that observed the smoking by-laws. She ordered a double vodka and lime, and took her drink and sat near the door. As the first gulp went down she felt an easing of her anxiety. No one seemed to notice her. Good. The roar of the Formula One race drowned out all other noise. She called to the barman and ordered another double. "Can you turn that down a bit!" she shouted, indicating the TV. He shrugged noncommittally. A tall man sitting on the other side of Anorak got up and turned the sound down. Went back and sat at the bar, not looking at her. Youngish, late thirties, slightly pitted face, in tight jeans and a black T-shirt. One of the black girls came over and he draped his arm loosely around her, familiar. Could be a pimp, but didn't look the part. He was older than she'd first thought, strong thighs parted on the bar

stool, roughskinned big hand. A builder then, some sort of workman. Drinking beer, not too pissed.

The black girl was hitting on him for something. Was he dealing? Unlikely, as Nigerians had the monopoly in Muizenberg. He was aware of Persy watching him and met her eyes over the girl's head. It was just a matter of time now. She was onto her third double before he approached her, a bit stoned maybe, eyes slightly drooping, strong smell of smoke as if he'd been near a wood fire, and underneath, the tang of sweat. The male animal. Trawling the watering holes looking for prey. Fine, let him think he was the predator.

He was a carpenter and his name was Raoul. He worked in the village making furniture. "All custom made stuff". He made out that it was his own business, which Persy doubted.

"And you?"

"I'm studying. Technikon, food technology," she lied smoothly.

She didn't want to talk really, so she let him rabbit on, about all the important people who bought his furniture, and which *larney* restaurant at the Waterfront had ordered two hundred grand's worth.

He bought her another drink and then they played pool, sizing up each other's bodies. He was a crap player but she let him beat her. Then they played doubles against a seedy white guy in his fifties and his too young black girlfriend. Raoul leaned over her, pressing into her back, guiding her shots, his big calloused hands covering hers. The faces of Marge Labuschagne, Poppa, Mhlabeni, and Sean

Dollery dissipating into some warm background space, taking her anxieties with them.

The last one to leave – as always, was the small faceless presence, the sound of his voice playing reproachfully at the back of her mind.

‘Wait for me, wait for me.’

\*

Will snuck in to the house in the early hours of Thursday morning as the sun was coming up. No sign of his mother, but she had taken to working late. He’d heard her the night before, typing away, Bongo probably lying at her feet with his head in his paws. She was all energised, enthused almost; it was working the crime beat again. She was incorrigible. But she’d been great the last couple of weeks. He realised that he was not minding this week at home as much as he imagined he would. Not that he was around very much. Weirdly, he was beginning to enjoy his mother’s company; it was like the old days. Fleur Brident would not meet with her approval maybe, but then again her judgment was seldom way off the mark. He wouldn’t mind bringing home someone she would admire for a change. Like Persy Jonas. He could see his mother had a grudging respect for the girl, despite their differences. And Persy was quite hot for a cop – in an understated sort of way. Nice eyes, even behind the glasses, and a neat little shape.

She would be more of a challenge than he was used to, but why not? He was getting tired of private school WASPs.

Maybe he was growing up at last. As he sat down heavily on the bed, he heard the sound of an unfamiliar vehicle, big one too, idling, right below his window by the sound of it. He registered the sound of a door opening, and Bongo's unmistakable bark, caught short in a yelp of surprise and pain. He jumped up, feeling suddenly sober, and peered down at the road. In the early light he made out what looked at first like two men wrestling, one trying to force the other into the back of a white twin cab. Then he realised that it was one man; the other was Bongo, with some sort of sacking over his head. Will took the stairs two at a time, yelling, "Mom! Mom!" and yanked open the front door, setting off the alarm, just in time to see the man slam the back door of the cab on Bongo and leap into the passenger seat. With lights off, the vehicle took off and disappeared in the dark, the sound of its engine gaining speed as it turned out of Keurboom into Oak, and roared off.

"They've taken Bongo!"

Persy had put the cell to her ear without thinking, and now in the early grey light she struggled to get out from under the remains of the night into the beginning of a hangover, a throbbing head and dry mouth.

"Can you hear me?"

Persy was as confused by the gravelly, vaguely familiar voice, as she was by the digital numbers on the unfamiliar bedside clock.

"I heard you." But she was struggling to make sense of it. Was Marge Labuschagne calling her at 5am, on her day off, about a *dog*?

“Will saw them take him away in a van. They stole him!”

Next to Persy lay the body of a sleeping man, naked, cock flaccid on his thigh, Samoan tattoos up his calves. She could hardly recall the sex, a blur of gasping and rolling, of her head thumping rhythmically against the bedhead. Dimly a name came back to her... *Raoul*.

“I know it’s not a priority, but can you help me?” Marge Labuschagne sounded on the verge of tears.

“I’ll see what I can do,” Persy said through a dry mouth. She punched off the phone, cursing as the after effects of the vodka kicked in. Next would come the remorse. She slipped out of bed; her jeans lay across the floor, her T-shirt, panties. Usually folded so perfectly and hung up. Sign of one of her ‘breakouts’ as she referred to them. She began to dress hurriedly, but was alerted to a presence in the doorway. She swung round and saw him: standing on one leg like a stork, four or five years old, a round puff of a head with the soft corkscrews, shorts past his knees. The sight knocked the breath right out of her. “What do you want?” she whispered. The alcohol was like a cloud blotting out the sun.

“Heyyy, Barnabas,” slurred Raoul from behind her, and then the boy was running towards and past her, leaping onto the bed, where he bounced up and down. It was not him – how could it be? This boy was older, his skin lighter, a pale coffee. *White mother*. She thought.

“This is my boy,” Raoul was watching her from the bed. “Say hello to the pretty lady, Barney.”

Persy pulled on her jeans, smelling the swampy smell of sweat and sex from the night before, Poppa's words coming back at her. *"Not like her mother, who spent her life in shebeens, drinking and sleeping around."*

She got out of there. Never wanting to see Raoul again, or the kid, wanting to forget she'd ever clapped eyes on them. Later, she would remember that when she'd first seen the boy standing there on his one skinny leg, her eyes had gone to his bare feet looking for the green sandals.

In Ocean View the sun was up, but there was little sign of life. Persy drove through Lapland, passed Nu Destiny Funeral home with its fake Greek columns at the front door, through the narrow streets with their ricky ticky houses and their streets named after English garden flowers. Daisy, Petunia, Daffodil. No sign of anyone. Only dogs, everywhere, mostly small, dust-coloured *braks*, some beloved by their owners, most without a home. The SPCA came around every so often doing mass sterilizations but it never seemed to make any difference. They proliferated regardless. Once there'd been dealers on these corners, but as business flourished the gangsters had moved on, into rented houses in Ghost Town, close to the spaza shops. One stop shopping. And for the real high flyers there was Beverley Hills and one of the newer smarter houses up on the east side of the township with its spectacular views of the sea. A TV star who'd grown up in the township had built a house on the elevated East side. No one in white Kommetjie could top his view. When she was a child, Kommetjie had been a hole in the wall, a tiny fishing community with a sprinkle of holiday homes. Now with

real estate being what it was, these views were prized, and along with it even Ocean View was having a mini property boom.

She came to Marine Primary and into Milky Way, then into *Die Blokke* – the ash brick council flats with their criss-crossed lines of flapping washing strung between the tenements. Some of Dollery’s connections lived here. Dawn on Thursday morning and the place was quiet, peaceful almost. Too early for the *hoekstaanders*. A radio played somewhere. A lone woman in a hairnet hung out her washing. Persy pulled up alongside her.

“Pietchie here?”

Pietchie was one of her more reliable snitches.

“*Nee*.” The woman shook her head. She wouldn’t say even if he were.

Without some sort of tip-off she would never find Bongo. The dogs were moved all the time; fights were never held in the same place.

She turned and headed south into Ghost Town – so named because it had been built next to, and if the local myth was to be believed, on top of, a cemetery.

She spotted the small wooden huts perched on the slopes of the rocky outcrop and headed for them. The more devout Rastas, the “holy ones” had taken to the hills, far from the madding crowd, where they could smoke their zol in peace and commune with nature. Most of them were harmless, but there were the ‘Wicked Rastas’. As a force they were well organised, had been known to intimidate even some of the heaviest gangsters in the area. No one was ever all good or all bad in Ocean View. Just people trying to get by.

She pulled up at the bottom of a steep rocky track, got out of the Nissan and began climbing the track to the nearest hut. The reek of dagga hung in the still air and dub thumped hypnotically, reverberating off the mountainside. The temperature was rapidly rising with the sun. A man who Persy recognised from the Boma Bar emerged from the hut carrying a guitar. Nothing would get past his eyrie on the hill.

“Duncan, is it?”

“Ja – Detective – what have I done now?”

“Not you. I’m looking for a dog. German Shepherd, big male, black face, well looked after.”

He cackled, showing his brown teeth and flexed a stringy arm for Persy. She recognised some faded prison tattoos. “Thought maybe you were after another kind of dog.”

“Meaning?”

“Sean Dollery.” His shrewd eyes watched her.

“If you have information about Dollery, you’d better pass it on.”

He winked. “Knick Knack paddy whack, give a dog a bone...”

Stoned bullshit. She was so *gatvol* of it, had it her whole life.

She grabbed him. She was a lot smaller, but he was taken by surprise, his reflexes slowed down by his early morning pipe. She pushed her face up against his. He flinched.

“Listen to me – I can take you in and in an hour I’ll let you go. But then everyone in Ocean View will think you talked. Including Dollery.”

“Okay. Okay. Take it easy, my sistah. Sheez . . .” She let go of him. He tried to restore his dignity by adjusting the neck of his grubby T-shirt. “I saw Dollery in Andy’s car on Friday. With the two boys.”

She felt a surge of excitement which quickly abated. He was stoned out of his gourd. She couldn’t hold too much store by him. “What boys?”

Duncan realized that he’d given away more than he’d meant to. He shrugged, face all closed up, eyes glazed. Dagga paranoia had set in. She would get no more from him. He scuttled back to his hut. From the doorway he shouted back at her, “If you looking for a dog, try Samodien the butcher. At his shop, or his new place in Beverley Hills.” And he disappeared behind the tattered cloth, printed with Peter Tosh’s face, that served as his door.

She drove down to Samodien’s and parked around the corner.

She got out. No twitching curtains, most people still asleep. She lightly mounted the two steps to the entrance of the shop and looked in, past the CLOSED sign in the window. Lights off, shop empty, counters washed down and the long glass cabinet thin on displays. Red painted concrete floor, a blackboard with specials written on in chalk. Mince and liver this week. Meat packed away, apart from some boerewors and what looked like tripe in a dish. No sign of Samodien. Or dogs.

She got back in the car and drove to Beverley Hills. It sounded smart for a handful of big jerry-built houses with badly fitted aluminum windows, warped doors, a half built wall or bit of roof still waiting for tin. Done on the cheap by

local contractors, without plans or council approval. She'd heard that Samodien's new house was the one on the top of the rocky outcrop. Best view and pretty remote – cut off from the others. She drove up the steep dirt road that ended at a cul-de-sac. A beaten up refrigeration van with a spraypaint job that said Samodien's and a silver-grey Golf GTi with tinted windows were parked in the road. No sign of the white twin cab Marge's Will had seen from his window. She parked and got out.

The house was a short walk over open veld to the top. It looked as if Samodien had aimed high but run out of cash. Taped up plastic sheeting had blown loose from the glassless window frames, exposing unplastered brick and a half built staircase to nowhere. She climbed over rocks, past a big electrical box humming menacingly in the still air. She looked down over the township and Kommetjie to the scalloped shell of the Kom, the beach, and far out at sea, the low dark shape of a tanker. As she neared the top of the hill, she heard the dogs and the men's low voices, punctuated by occasional shouts and curses. She skirted a half built rotisserie braai and pizza oven, beyond which she could see a group of men with their backs to her, crouching or standing around an empty pool, completely engrossed by what was inside.

She approached quietly, cautiously, but she needn't have bothered, because the snarling and growling drowned out any other noise. The stench of dog and blood was overpowering. She drew her weapon, even though it was madness to go in alone – they were likely to be packing knives at least, if not guns, and all she had was the advantage of surprise. But she had no option. If Bongo was in there,

he could be torn apart at any moment. “SAPS!” she shouted out. Only Samodien heard. He whirled round and shouted. She recognised the two Williams boys, mean motherfuckers, and a man she’d never seen before. They slowly raised their arms, but their eyes were everywhere, looking for her backup. Keeping her gun trained on them, she edged towards the pool. Inside was a hell pit. Two dogs were locked together in mortal combat, slick with saliva and blood. One was Bongo, hardly recognizable, fighting off a snarling Boerbul that was savaging his stomach and forelegs. The tiles of the pool were awash with gore and blood. The visceral violence of the scene filled her mouth with bile and a fury stronger than her fear.

She aimed at the Boerbul. “Get that fucking dog out of there,” she said, “or I’ll shoot him!” She was counting on them wanting to hold on to the dog; on him being too valuable to get into a gunfight over.

One of the Williams’s leapt into the pool, almost slipping on the blood, and viciously jabbed a needle into the Boerbul’s haunches. The animal seemed to slacken off and then stumbled, dazed, bloody ribbons dangling from his jowls. Bongo backed off warily, but his hair was standing up on his back and he was panting and whimpering. Samodien approached her, hands out. “I don’t want trouble.”

She raised the gun. “Then take your dog and fuck off!”

The Williams’s had managed to get a choke chain and muzzle on the Boerbul and were dragging him up the stairs of the pool while he made choking, gasping sounds. Samodien scooped up the money and slunk off, hoping to be overlooked, maybe. They all disappeared down the concrete steps. She heard the vehicles start

up outside and roar off. She was alone. Slowly she descended the steps into the empty pool, nearly choking on the stench of faeces and the animal's fear.

Slowly she approached Bongo. He lay on his side, panting heavily, his ribs heaving from the effort of breathing. White and purple guts, flecked with blood, spilled from where he'd been ripped in his belly. She called his name softly. He looked at her and she could have sworn that in that moment he recognised her. She approached him warily, gingerly extended a hand and gently stroked his head. He licked her hand gratefully.

She got onto the SPCA, who warned her not to touch Bongo; the local vet would be called and hopefully dispatched immediately. Then she called the station at Ocean View. Half these cops were probably in on the fighting, but what the hell, she would give them Samodien and the Williams's names. The evidence was all here. Let's see if they'd have the guts to round them up.

Now to phone Marge. And hope like hell the dog would make it.

## Twenty-six

Dizu sat in Titus' office going through the back cases, looking for the Logos School arson case. As if he did not have enough paperwork. The department only had three terminals between them and there was always a queue for the computers. Sometimes it was just easier to keep a notebook.

Persy had called in earlier with news about Marge Labuschagne's dog, and to tell him she was at the local veterinarian's surgery.

"Why didn't you call me?"

"It was like four thirty in the morning."

Being evasive. On her own, busting up a dogfight! What was she thinking? She didn't trust him, didn't trust anyone actually, held everything close to her chest, letting no one in. Sometimes he thought she deliberately put herself in dangerous situations, pushing things as far as she could. Persy had problems, he knew that. Bad stuff in her past, maybe, not that she ever spoke about it. Whenever he tried to dig deeper, he got pushed away.

He found the arson case. Eight years old nearly to the day. It was Mhlabeni's case. Shit, just his luck. Well, he'd better get the docket from downstairs. He went down the mustard coloured hall, some joker's idea of friendly community policing, the force trying hard to shrug off their old apartheid image. Bright posters in English, Afrikaans and Xhosa decorated the walls, extolling the virtues of the SAPS. Crude cartoon-like drawings about domestic abuse, Aids and exhorting the public to join the police community forums.

Downstairs the charge office was quiet. Mhlabeni was on the computer. Probably downloading porn, Dizu thought sourly. The young female constable behind the desk had a great smile, but no English. They greeted each other in Xhosa. Dizu shook his head, another affirmative action case, but jeez, sometimes he wondered at the standard of intake they were getting out of Police College these days.

He knew he was the subject of speculation at the station. And suspicion. He got approached regularly behind Titus' back by upper management, who wanted to fast-track him into management structures where he could be a poster boy – maybe in public relations, or a spokesman. Offering him fat salaries and benefits. A lot of his varsity friends were in jobs they hated, just for the *waBenzi* lifestyle. No way he was going down that road. They couldn't get used to the idea that he loved his job; loved being a detective and being on the beat. As a kid he'd watched Kojak and Columbo on TV. Later, bored out of his wits doing law at varsity, he devoured crime novels: Chester Himes, the Harlem writer, and was thrilled by the South African James McClure and his South African detective, Zondo.

The docket on the Logos school fire was surprisingly thin. It consisted of brief statements from Yoliswa Xolele, Joel Fortuin, the head teacher and Asha de Groot, who was described as a 'concerned parent'. Someone named Gregory Crane had been present at the interview, reportedly to give a legal perspective. The arson forensics was thin and inconclusive. The fire had started in the milkwoods separating the houses from the township of Masiphumelele, on the

eastern border of the school. Included was a statement from one of the residents, Philip Makana, who reported seeing vagrants cooking fish under the milkwoods in the late afternoon. Maybe a few embers had been left burning on the fire as the drunken fish eaters slept off their dop. Fire hazards were everywhere in this heat-parched landscape. Strong South Easter, hot temperatures. The school's wooden and prefab buildings were like dry kindling. The fire had happened during the school holidays so, miraculously, no one was hurt, but the school was gutted. There had been no arrests.

Dizu studied the photographs. The school was a smoldering ruin. And as it was uninsured, no assessors came sniffing around looking for holes in the story. Dizu closed the file after making a note of Makana's name. It was not a substantial report, but then Mhlabeni was hardly known for his paperwork, having learnt his craft at a time when it was the last skill you needed. Sometimes his results could be good though, better than most. And he spoke five of the national languages. An East London hardass. Dizu knew the type; his father's parish had been harassed by enough of them. He shrugged off the thought; he did not want to think about his father, or the unresolved tensions between them, the disappointments and resentments.

Sean Dollery heard from Pietchie that Persephone Jonas had been at *Die Blokke* looking for him. That she had been speaking to the Rasta man. That filthy old Duncan must have blabbed about Samodien's. Duncan would say anything against him. Sean hated him, but would rather leave the Rastas alone; they were

shit stirrers despite the peace and love kak that they talked. He should never have agreed to steal the shrink's dog – again, Mhlabeni's dumb-ass idea. *Always trying to intimidate. Always fucking things up for Sean.* He should have known that an old white bitch like that would not rest until she got her dog back. Now he had Samodien freaking out about the cops crawling all over his business, taken in for questioning. Wanting to know, why do we pay Mhlabeni if not to keep this *kak* from our door? Samodien was not someone to get on the wrong side of. Dog fighting was big money. Sean didn't want to fuck it up.

One of the runners who hung around Phoenix Center had heard that cops had been testing Sherwood's car for prints. It was all closing in on him – and why the fuck should he be the one to take the heat?

Persy Jonas was sticking her nose in everywhere, she'd even got Mhlabeni to go hound his mother at Schneider's place, jeopardising her job. What was their problem? Mhlabeni said Jonas was a law unto herself. She wasn't getting the message to leave him alone. Mhlabeni would like Sean to take her out, do his dirty work for him. But Mhlabeni didn't know Persy, how their families had got moved off the farms. That made him think of Poppa. They didn't make them like Poppa any more. He could be a bastard with his holier than thou shit, but he had *integrity*. Everyone in the community respected him. Sean chewed over the mystery of it: how was it that he, Sean, had to *buy* respect from these motherfuckers, while that dirt-poor old fisherman got it for free. Not that Poppa hadn't had his fair share of shit in life. Persy's mother running off like that. No, things were not cut and dried between Sean and Persy, and that bothered him.

Persy had that same thing Poppa had. She got respect, even though she looked like a kid herself. Sean was feeling bad and the bad feeling was seeping into him, making him weak. He was fucking up, he was being *soft*. He wanted to forget about Persy and what bound them together.

Even more worrying was the *laanie* black cop's warning to Charlene. *Tell him murder is a serious offence.*

And now they'd got his prints off Sherwood's car.

Well Sean Dollery was not going to go down for someone else's fuckup, that's for sure.

University of Cape Town

## Twenty-seven

Philip Makana, witness to the school fire, was easily located at his shack on a finger of land jutting out into the wetlands. Dizu found him cooking pap over *wyngeres* in a pot on which a wire hanger had been fashioned as a handle. The squatter had a view to die for, looking out over the wetlands to the Sentinel and Chapman's Peak. But that was the only upside to his particular domicile. The waterways surrounding his shack were clogged with heaps of stinking effluence. His washing drooped on a line. Tattered overalls and a grey T-shirt. His gammy leg was wrapped in filthy brown bandages tied up with plastic bags.

"We call this place Robben Island," he quipped. "Maybe one day I will also be free and live in a big house in Houghton."

Dizu knew immediately that as desperate as Philip Makana's circumstances were, he was a man of principle. The story he told differed completely from the report in the original statement. He was clear about what he had seen. He had seen a "white man and a coloured youth" looking suspicious on the school grounds. The youngster was carrying a can of petrol and a bag that he had hidden in the bushes. Philip recognised him as a young 'thug' who sold drugs in Ocean View.

"Do you know his name?"

"Yes – and I told that to the police. They call him Dolly. Something like that."

The white man he'd seen at the school. And around Fish Hoek.

“He walks like this.” Philip Makana stood up and waddled like a duck, “*a stok in die hol*.” He cackled brokenly to himself. Dizu asked about his statement to Mhlabeni, about the *bergies* making a fish braai under the trees. Makana flatly denied ever telling that tale because he “did not lie”. Mystified, Dizu stared at the statement in the docket. He asked Makana to tell his story again, which he did. No deviation, no change. A star witness. Either he was a liar who had rehearsed his changed statement of eight years ago, or he was a star witness with astonishing recall whose original statement had never made it into the report.

\*

Whisky, butter, toilet rolls, aspirin, olives. Lots of meat for Will, who happily showed no signs of leaving quite yet, dishwashing liquid and cheap shampoo. The Cape Times. The Long Beach shopping mall catered for a motley cross-section of South Africa: Ocean View, Fish Hoek, lower middle class Sun Valley and the poshies from Noordhoek and, increasingly, Kommetjie. The usual mass stores – Mr. Price, Pep, Pick n Pay. Shops selling ersatz fairies, a bookshop, a Chinese takeaway. Retail clothing chains with cheap, brightly coloured clothes. The sales were on, stores hoping for the last meagre pickings now that Christmas was over and kids were back at school. Marge planned to do a quick shop and then visit Bongo at Dr. Pillay’s surgery.

“He’s one lucky dog,” Dr. Pillay had said. “Got to him just in time.” Dr Pillay was the young and beautiful local veterinarian who specialised in equine medicine. She was good with all animals, but horses were her passion. “Thanks to that plucky little policewoman.” She looked at Marge over the anaesthetised form

of Bongo while she stitched him up. “She’s lucky she wasn’t torn to pieces as well.”

Later, groggy from the anaesthetic, shaved and stitched, Bongo had licked Marge’s hand pathetically. “You stupid lug, you gave me such a fright.” Marge couldn’t hold back tears of relief. She had been surprised by how she’d panicked over the damn animal.

When she’d rung Persy to thank her, the girl had tersely shrugged off the thank yous. “I was only doing my job.”

Which was rubbish, of course. “Thank you, anyway. Bongo is a pain in the arse, but I’m terribly fond of him.”

Jonas had shown guts, going to rescue Bongo like that. She would like to do something to show the girl how grateful she was. If only she weren’t so damn prickly and competitive.

Marge put Persy out of her mind and focused on the day ahead. She had to get everyone’s signatures for the petition opposing the Bellevue development. She would see Ivor tomorrow and get him to sign it, and drop off one each for Yoliswa and Hamish.

She was preoccupied with these thoughts as she wheeled her trolley out of the supermarket, so she didn’t see Julian until she literally bumped into him.

“Hello Julian! What happened to you on Wednesday morning?”

His face displayed a curious combination of hostility and embarrassment, as if she’d caught him doing something vaguely illegal. “I’ve decided to stop therapy.” He said aggressively.

“Oh?” Marge was completely taken aback. Julian had never shown the slightest sign of dissatisfaction up to now. On the contrary.

“Yes. I think if there’s not a real understanding between therapist and client, these things can do more harm than good.”

Marge kept her tone cordial. “I thought we had that understanding, and were making good progress.”

“I’m rethinking the whole therapeutic process actually.” Julian’s whole demeanour had become decidedly hostile. “I think it’s potentially very damaging.”

“May I ask what’s made you feel this way?”

“I’d prefer not to talk about it. Now, if you’ll excuse me, Mustafa is waiting for me in the car.”

And with that, Julian was gone. It was inexplicable. What had come up in the last week to make him so angry? He must be resisting a breakthrough. There was no other explanation. Unless was it financial? Marge could always work something out, surely Julian knew that? Not that she was exactly in a position to subsidise clients. In fact, another client had just cancelled her therapy without explanation. Two sources of income lost in one month. Seems it was contagious – but that was not the point. It would be an opportunity lost if Julian left therapy now. Should she press him for an explanation? She couldn’t hound him. He had to come of his own free will. She realised that she was extremely annoyed. To suspend the sessions without warning or explanation was inconsiderate and disrespectful. Not what she’d have expected from the well-mannered Julian. She

carried on pushing her trolley to the car. The encounter had left her feeling insecure. If she were to be honest, she was not entirely comfortable with transactional analysis. Her fascination was with the criminal mind. The transgressors. The result of growing up in a house full of criminals.

Literally.

Her father, a committed Christian and *verligde* Afrikaner, had started a halfway house for ex-prisoners. Having no funding apart from charitable donations, her parents had opened their own home to newly paroled offenders, many of them black, and tried in all ways possible to reintegrate them back into society. The Labuschagnes were soon haemorrhaging friends. They were even barred from their own church. The police did raids under the pretext of checking a *dompas*, harassing the parolees and intimidating Marge's father, Ryno.

Marge's mother's favourite story was the one about Marge and Obed Mutswana. When Marge was nine or ten, Obed, who had just been released after doing fifteen years for murder, moved in with the family while Ryno attempted to get him back into society. He took a shine to 'Margie' as he called her, and they spent a lot of time together. Obed, alone of all her friends, was willing to accede that Marge was, in fact, a boy. He spent a great deal of time teaching her to whittle, chop wood, build dens and start fires. Neighbours and friends were incredulous that Ryno and Eleanor Labuschagne were so cavalier with their child's safety as to let her fraternise with a murderer, and a black man to boot. Obed had promised Marge that he would buy her a Lucky Packet from the OK Bazaars for Christmas. These were prized cardboard boxes, blue ones for boys,

pink for girls. Eleanor promised to drive them, but she was busy and kept putting it off, though Christmas was fast approaching. On Christmas Eve, Eleanor discovered Obed and Marge missing. Her first impulse was to call the police. But Ryno Labuschagne persuaded her to wait. "Imagine if the police set up a search for a black man with a white child. He'll be lynched. No, trust me, Obed will bring her home safely," he said.

After an hour and no sign of her child, Eleanor picked up the phone to call the police. From the window she could see her husband waiting patiently at the gate, staring down the long avenue of jacaranda trees. But his hands were clenched tightly at his sides.

And then they appeared, at the end of the road, small figures in the distance, walking towards them. Marge barefoot in her khaki shorts, skipping ahead and then turning back to wait for Obed, who carried the blue Lucky Packet in one hand.

A dark thought moved like a cloud over the happy memory. If only she'd remembered her father's lesson, and not prejudged Theo Kruger. In her desperation to find Clyde Cupido, and her vaulting ambition to break the case, she'd made a fatal error of judgement. One that she would have to live with for the rest of her life.

## Twenty-eight

Persy ran down past the Milnerton golf course, sea on her left, wind whipping the straggling dried out palms, litter trapped in the scrubby groundcover. Past the pyramid-shaped townhouse development and the bay that was being whipped into sea horses by the wind. Eight o'clock at night, but the sky above the western horizon was still bright with sunlight. It would not be completely dark until nine, and the postcard view of Table Mountain was still visible across the bay. Her one hamstring was killing her; she hadn't been stretching after her runs the last couple of days. Stretching always felt like a waste of time, until she felt herself stiffening up. It was a relief to get out of the flat and run away the remains of her hangover, her tensions and anxieties about the Sherwood case, the visceral terror that had nearly overwhelmed her at the dogfight.

She'd got back to the flat earlier and everyone was at work, no one there. She'd showered and taken a couple of painkillers and slept for an hour or two. No sign of Donny or Sayeed. Ferial, holed up in the bedroom, had said nothing about not turning up to sign the restraining order and Persy did not have the energy to block her. A grim atmosphere, filled with resentment and tension. It could go anywhere. When Donny returned he would be either contrite or vindictive. Persy hoped for Ferial's sake it would be contrite, though she didn't know if she could stomach his usual crocodile tears. If Donny followed his usual pattern he would stay away tonight, hiding himself, ashamed to face them. The next day the cycle would just start again.

Back at the flat, she ran up the stairs. At the front door she caught her breath, stretched. She took out her key and put it in the lock. Before she could turn the handle the door swung open and she was pulled in and slammed up against the back of the door. Donny's dilated pupils stared back at her. Drunk, with the acrid burn of tik on his breath. Her 50kgs versus Donny's 87kg of hard muscle.

It was a fight she was never going to win.

Faintly, she could hear Ferial's pleading. "Leave her please, Donny, don't hurt her!"

Donny thrust his forearm under her chin, got the other hand in her hair, pulling her head sideways. He stuck his face into hers. "Think you can get my woman to put a fucking restraining order on me, you fucking bitch *hoer-kont?* Eh? Eh?" Spittle flecked her face.

He took his hand from her hair and thrust it between her legs. The squeeze made her nearly pass out. She tried to kick, scissoring her legs, but his chokehold only tightened on her throat.

He threw her across the room. She felt her back hit the new LCD TV, the small cocktail table with the Mr. Price at Home lamp, all these pathetic artifacts of Ferial's respectable life. No matter where you ran, the Flats came to claim you.

As he leapt over the sofa, coming for her, she knew with awful certainty that he was going to kill her. She rolled sideways, avoiding his bulk, this one time her smallness worked for her, and crawled behind the sofa. He slammed the sofa at the one end, but the back of it sloped at an angle, affording her a narrow gap between the base and the wall. If not, the impact would have broken her ribs. She

broke out from the other side just as Donny tore the whole sofa from the wall and Sayeed came in the front door – his look of terror telling her that he was going to be of no use to her whatsoever. She darted behind him, using him as a buffer, but Donny was already at the door, blocking off her escape. She edged around Sayeed and made a dash for the bathroom, praying that the flimsy door would hold for the couple of seconds she needed. To her astonishment Sayeed ran at Donny, letting out a yell in some strange language – then she remembered – his Qi Dong, or whatever it was. His moves were largely ineffectual, but distracted Donny for the critical seconds she needed to get to the bathroom, slam the door and jam the flimsy bolt into place.

Down on her knees she scabbled around the back of the vanity cabinet, ripping off the loose tile and grabbing the wad of cleaning rag wrapped around her service pistol. She scrambled to her feet as Donny hit the door, splintering the frame. She backed into the shower, feeling the cold tiles against her ribs, her weapon out and her hand steady, pointing it at him. Donny came through the door and stopped, his face contorted with rage. It took all her nerve to hold the gun steady. Ferial and Sayeed were staring, frozen, from the passage behind him. “Get out of the flat!” she screamed – Christ, why didn’t they use their brains and get the fuck out of there!

Donny hardly took a moment to consider before launching himself at her. She pulled the trigger, shattering his kneecap from three feet away. He would never walk the same way again. She dodged him as he staggered and fell against the

glass wall of the shower, shattering it, and fell down on the tiles, hitting the tap and spraying water everywhere.

She had to climb over him to get out of the bathroom. He grabbed her ankle and she pistol-whipped him across the head, hearing it crack like a shot. She raced to her bedroom and retrieved her phone. She could hear him cursing, trying to get up. She got onto Milnerton station.

“I need back up,” she said. “Domestic disturbance.”

She waited for them in the entrance to the building with the bewildered security guard. The van took twenty minutes to arrive. Two uniforms. They couldn't have been less interested in her statement.

Sayed was collected by his sister and taken away, silent and shocked. Ferial had rushed back upstairs to attend to Donny and his injuries.

Paramedics brought him down on a stretcher. Ferial went with him into the ambulance, holding his hand. There was a gash on his head where Persy had pistol-whipped him. He would probably lay a charge against her and she would have to prove that she had struck him in self-defence. It was going to be a long protracted mess and she was going to be the loser. Ferial would not be a witness and Sayeed would probably back out as well, not wanting trouble.

She went back up to the flat to try and restore some order, clean up the blood. Then she'd pack her stuff and get out of there.

## Twenty-nine

Persy went down to Fish Hoek beach, hoping to shake off the uncomfortable night spent in the sick bay at the station, where she had tossed and turned until five thirty. The beach was empty. Early light tipped the Hottentots Holland Mountains on the other side of False Bay; the sea rosy towards the horizon, blending to grey green where wavelets broke softly along the shoreline. It was cold, but she could not have endured another moment in the sick bay with its vile smelling blankets and single lumpy pillow. She had spent a sweaty, restless night, Donny's attack on her replaying in her head, waking in a half-sleep with the after image of him coming at her through the splintered bathroom door.

She pulled off her trainers and slipped off her chinos and T-shirt.

Underneath she wore the serviceable navy Speedo she carried with her in the summer, in case she ever managed to get to the beach. Her feet sank into the wet sand, the gritty coldness pushing up through her toes. The air, fresh with a tang of salt, chilled her flesh to goose bumps. By mid-morning the South Easter, the so-called 'Cape Doctor', would start up again, gently at first then gathering velocity. But for now there was a hush to the still air, as expectant as the moment before a whisper.

Before she could lose courage she took off, running into the shallows, braving the first cold impact on her ankles and shins, water spraying from her pumping legs. When the water was up to her thighs she ducked under the next wave. Surfacing, she let out a loud yell, then submerged herself again. She came

up face first into a breaking wave that knocked her over and sent a peppery burst of water up her nose. She staggered to her feet, fighting the pull of the tide, shaking her hair so that it whipped around her face and stung her eyes. Then she slowly waded out beyond where the waves were breaking, enjoying the strength of her arms and legs, the burn of salt in the back of her throat. She floated onto her back, and gazed through salt-streaked eyes at the sky as it warmed to a roseate glow, lightening and brightening the bay. The soft swish of surface water in her ears muted the deeper boom of the depths below. She blended with the ocean, a sea creature in her natural habitat. Donny's attack, the recoil of the service pistol in her hand as she shattered his knee, Ferial's blank stare from the back of the ambulance, faded like images in a half-remembered film, and the ever-present anxiety that permeated her every waking moment seemed to abate.

She didn't hear the splash until a rubber bathing cap in a strange tangerine shade surfaced beside her. The eyebrows, squashed by the cap, made the swimmer look a bit like a Sharpei and Persy was momentarily unsure until she heard the trademark gravelly voice.

"Two great whites in the bay this morning. Just thought you should know."

She found herself briefly locking eyes with Marge Labuschagne, then the older woman dived beneath the waves and struck out with powerful strokes, heading for Sunny Cove.

Persy waded back to the beach, light-headed and vertiginous. Marge Labuschagne, of all people! Trust her to spoil the mood. There had recently been a fatal attack by a Great White shark just a hundred meters into the sea on this

very beach. Best not to take a chance, especially as the shark spotters were not on duty yet.

She fell face down onto her towel, panting, feeling the first rays warming her skin and drying her hair. She tilted her head from side to side; there was a delicious pop as the warm water ran out of her ears. She sucked the end of her hair, relishing the saltiness. Despite Marge's unwelcome intrusion, her relaxed mood continued, as if last night's violence had been washed away.

She scanned the ocean. Far away beyond the safety line, the tangerine cap appeared, bobbing rhythmically, moving surprisingly fast towards the rocks.

After a shower in a utilitarian change room reeking of salt and urine, Persy dressed and went out into the sunlight. She perched on the low brick wall separating the beach from the tarmacked car park, reluctant to head back to the station. Already hot, too hot to be wearing the trainers, wishing again she could wear sandals to work. Imagining Mhlabeni's face if she swished into the station wearing the silver high-heeled sandals she'd once bought on impulse and never had the guts to wear. If she were honest, though, she was more interested in how Dizu would react, whether she could shake his amiable imperturbability.

She spotted Marge slowly picking her way through the shallows to the beach. Knackered after that swim, thought Persy. She was carrying a bit of fat around her hips and thighs, a pear shape run amok, but otherwise Persy had seen fifty-year-olds who looked a damn sight worse. She looked strong and healthy, not middle-aged and mumsy – more like a powerful matriarch. But her invasive manner was

peculiarly disturbing. For the first time Persy acknowledged that Marge unsettled her.

Marge bent to pick up her towel off the sand and headed for the ablution block. Persy wanted to scurry off and avoid her, but too late, she had been spotted. Marge swerved slightly on her path, making for her. Damn!

Marge pulled off the tangerine bathing cap, “I feel like a fool in this stupid thing.” She shook out her salt and pepper bob, then began towelling herself vigorously. To Persy’s astonishment there was a rather crudely executed Anarchy symbol tattooed on the older woman’s upper arm.

“Good swim?” Persy asked, for something to say.

“Marvelous – cold though.” Marge gave a rather disconcerting grimace which Persy realised was an attempt at a smile. “I haven’t had a chance to thank you face to face.”

“Thank me?”

“For rescuing Bongo.”

Persy had forgotten about Bongo, his rescue having been entirely eclipsed by her encounter with Donny. “Oh, yes. How is he?”

“Recovering well. Thanks to you.”

There was an awkward silence. A shift had happened and neither knew what position to adopt.

“You’re up early,” Marge said.

“I slept at the station.”

“Night duty?”

“No.” Persy gave a mirthless laugh. “I was evicted last night.”

Marge stopped towelling and gave her one of her unnerving stares, deep frown marks between strong brows. “Boyfriend trouble?”

Persy jumped down from the wall. “Family.”

“You’ve had quite a week.”

You don’t know the half of it lady, Persy thought, wanting to get away.

“Can’t you stay at the police hostel?”

“It’s full.”

Persy’s earlier lightness vanished at the thought of what the day held in store. Homelessness, having to get her stuff from Ferial’s place... the fact that she did not even own a bed.

“I may have something for you,” Marge said. “One of the members of our Noordhoek Action Group, Hamish McCormac, needs someone to look after his caravan. He’s off to surf in Jeffrey’s Bay or somewhere.”

Persy felt an aversion to any favour that came via Marge. “Thanks – but I’m okay. Take me an hour or two on the phone to find somewhere.”

“You don’t know Cape Town, my dear, if you think you will *mos* just find a place like that. Not by tonight at any rate.”

The superior know-it-all tone grated on Persy! As if she wasn’t feeling insecure enough without Marge Labuschagne rubbing it in. For a moment she was utterly lost, almost panicky. No matter how unwelcome she’d been at Ferial’s, at least she’d had her own room, somewhere to escape from the stresses of being a

working cop. The public had no idea of the stresses. Always hitting on you, hating you. She felt defeated and unexpectedly close to tears.

Crazy. She looked away. Marge Labuschagne was the last person she should let her guard down with.

“I’m going to speak to Hamish,” Marge said determinedly. “It’s a good temporary measure until you find a place.”

At that moment having the older woman take charge came as a relief.

“Ok. Thanks,” Persy said awkwardly.

Marge made a gesture of dismissal. “The least I can do. Now I’m off to change. Hate for anyone to see me like this – twenty kilos overweight and still growing. Yuck.”

A pleasant sense of anticipation came over Marge as she worked in the vegetable garden later that morning. The sun was warm on her back, the heat tempered by a cool breeze off the Atlantic. She would make Will’s favourite steak for dinner, and to accompany it a green salad freshly picked from the garden. The birds had been at the gooseberries, pecking them out of their little latticed purses, but there were enough for desert. They would be good after the steak with some of that Italian ice cream in the freezer. She cut swathes of flowering fennel for the dresser in the living room while enjoying a comforting sense of being needed once again, of being the one who fed and nourished and was involved in the small pleasurable details of family life. Exhausting, of course, but how she missed it!

She'd rung Dr Pillay earlier and been told that Bongo was progressing well, which led to thoughts of Persy Jonas. Her courageous rescue of Bongo and her moment of vulnerability on the beach earlier had brought about a tentative thawing between them and had softened Marge's attitude towards the girl. A pain barely acknowledged, lying just below the surface every day, rose up in Marge. Unthinking friends would say: "Thank God I had a daughter," or "My daughter is such a treasure to me," or "Sons go off but daughters never leave you."

She'd had a daughter: Elizabeth Jane, delivered 25 August, stillborn at 42 weeks after an agonising labour. The shadow child haunted her. She sometimes made her presence felt at an unexpected moment like this – on a sunlit morning in the vegetable patch – bringing a hollow aching for a ghost child, for what could never be. Marge forced herself to focus on the evening meal as she headed for the kitchen. It was then that she became aware of the sound of gushing water. Had she left a tap on somewhere? It appeared to be coming from the road.

She peered over her fence and saw a steady stream of water running off from the Tinkler's garden and rushing down Keurboom road. Half the street awash. It was the last straw really. Bloody water going night and day, depleting the underground rivers. The selfish stupidity of it.

She marched over to the Tinkler's house. A thin plume of smoke rose over their wall, accompanied by the smell of *braaing* fish. She buzzed the intercom set into the pretentious little portico. Her rage reached fever pitch at the sight of the twin tubs of neatly clipped camellias flanking the gate. Who the hell had time to do things like that? Some people should get a life.

Fiona Tinkler, looking chunky in a crisp striped shirt, white slacks and moccasins, opened the heavy gate. Her blonde-streaked hair was elaborately fashioned to give the illusion of non-existent volume. All in all a detestable sight.

“Morning.” Marge tried to put a pleasant face on.

“Can I help you?” Fiona’s tight-lipped Herschel bray did not improve her mood. Marge detested snobby private schools, those tightly defended laagers of white privilege. “Yes, actually. It’s about your water usage.”

“What about it?”

“Your water runs night and day.”

Fiona bristled. “For your information we’ve got our own borehole.”

“That’s no excuse to waste water. You’re depleting the alluvial streams coming off the mountain.”

Fiona’s already florid face flushed a deep red. “What I do with my water is none of your damn business.”

“It’s everyone’s business actually.”

“Oh, put a sock in it will you?” Fiona spluttered, “So I waste a bit of water, so what?”

“That’s a selfish and indefensible attitude – ”

“Don’t be so fucking self-righteous.” Fiona moved to close the door. “At least I don’t drive my patients to suicide!”

Marge jammed her foot in between the door and the lintel. “What did you say?”

Fiona tried to push the door closed while Marge tried to prevent her. For a couple of minutes they engaged in an undignified tussle. This is ridiculous, Marge thought, and backed off.

Fiona slammed the big wooden security gate shut in her face. From behind the wall came muffled crowing. “Julian Duval warned me all about you! Murderer!”

University of Cape Town

## Thirty

Sunny Acres Caravan Park formed a barrier between a low-cost housing development and a sprawling nursery that abutted Masiphumelele. Eucalyptus and wind-shredded palms sheltered a dozen or so caravans and park homes from the South Easter. Hamish's caravan was unmissable, festooned as it was with hanging buoys, chimes and pot plants, among which were dotted sculptures of vaguely Eastern and African influence. The place had a surprisingly permanent look: the wheels of the caravan had been removed and a cement foundation laid that extended to a small *stoep* with wooden balustrades.

Hamish was older than he'd sounded on the phone, weather-beaten and informal in shorts and a baseball cap. He described himself as a "biodynamic agriculturist" and said he was off to "Jay Bay" to surf for the rest of the summer, via a large trance party in the Outeniqua Mountains. Persy introduced herself.

"Marge tells me you're a cop?" He grinned widely.

"Detective."

He choked with laughter, a *neh neh neh* sound like a small animal sneezing.

"What's funny?"

"Hey, nothing, I'm cool with it." He wiped tears from his eyes. "Live and let live and all that."

Inside, the caravan was set up with a bunk bed and a small kitchen with a gas cooker. Hamish was renting it out *voetstoots*, or as is, completely furnished, including linen. It was almost cosy, if decidedly unhygienic. Persy knew she

would have to scrub the place from top to bottom or she would not be able to sleep a wink. But it would do for now. Hamish showed her around his garden, a small unkempt fynbos garden dense with aloes, king proteas and pelargoniums, enclosed with a low picket fence. Bees covered a Cape honeysuckle in full flower and Persy felt her spirits lift. The smell of *boerewors* wafted over from where neighbouring caravanners tended a *braai*.

Hamish followed her gaze and shook his head disgustedly. “That’s the only hassle with living here. Stench of animal carcass every night. I’m a full-on vegan and it’s like torture for me.”

Persy decided not to mention how much she loved a good *braai* and how she planned on making one the minute he drove away in his Land Rover. A mangy one-eyed cat rubbed itself against her legs. Hamish scooped to pick her up. “Hi there, Gaia. Come to say hello to the nice lady detective?” He chortled, still finding it hilarious.

“You’ve got a cat?” She was dismayed.

“Yeah. Could you feed her?”

“I’m allergic to cats, but I’ll do my best.”

“Don’t worry – Gaia’s like really independent – just put her food out there in the tree and she’ll be totally cool with it. There’s a cat flap under the bed, but hey, she never uses it. I leave a window open for her. And watch out for baboons.”

After the battered Land Rover had pulled off, surfboards strapped to the roof, Persy unpacked her small bag, then visited the nearest Superette and stocked up with cleaning equipment.

Rubber gloves on, she proceeded to scrub away at the caravan even as she fretted about the time she was wasting. She should be out looking for Dollery, although in all likelihood she would be wasting her time – the only way she would find him was through a tip-off and no one in Ocean View would ever betray him. It would take a turf war or a stupid mistake and he was too smart to get caught that way. Best to go out there alone and draw on her goodwill and contacts. Mhlabeni would only complicate things for her, rumoured as he was to be on everyone's payroll.

Every time she went back to Ocean View there seemed to be more small-time corner dealers; a scourge tearing her community apart. No one, especially in government, seemed to give a damn. It was easy to feel bitter, *Coloureds always getting the short straw*. They'd built Cape Town with the sweat of their ancestors, made up of *strandlopers* and Bushmen and slaves from Asia, Indonesia, Africa and Madagascar – her great grandfathers and great great grandfathers. Slaves for centuries in the wind and sun. So many years after liberation still no one gave a damn about them.

She caught herself. She didn't want to become embittered and burnt out like so many of her colleagues, but at times she thought it had already happened.

She was lucky to be at Fish Hoek, one of the quieter and better-resourced stations in the Western Cape, if not the country, but there was no getting away from the fact that being a South African cop was a dangerous vocation at best, a death wish at worst. She preferred not to examine her reasons for becoming a detective. She'd overheard Poppa say that it was because of what had happened to

their family, but he'd never brought it up directly with her. He never wanted to speak about the past, or even think about it. Occasionally it occurred to Persy that her obsessions and compulsions and the nightmares that plagued her might be linked to what had happened, but maybe not. She'd learned to live with waking up at night shaking and sweating three or four times a month. More often if she'd had had a bad week or forgotten to take the sleeping pills. Sometimes whole months went by when she thought she was okay.

The next hour and a half was spent methodically scrubbing the caravan and putting her washing into the rusting washer and dryer in the concrete utilities room near the park's office. She tossed in her new trainers, which were still stained with Bongo's blood. Driving out of the park she couldn't help noticing how slack the security was. Apart from a boom at the gate, which was open most of the time, there was only a six-foot vibracrete wall topped by barbed wire – an optimistic but ultimately doomed defence against the encroaching shacks of Masiphumelele.

Not that there was much to steal at Sunny Acres. She checked out the remains of the battered truck on bricks in the neighbouring campsite. A feral looking, tow-headed boy was in the windowless cabin pretending to steer non-existent wheels. His father sat watching him, clutching a beer on the steps of their decrepit caravan, a worn tracksuit hanging off his thin shoulders like a cheap suit off a wire hanger. He gave Persy the evil eye as she passed in the Nissan. Unemployed, down to his bones white man. More and more a common sight these days.

The story of the dogfight was all over the station. Titus called her in. “What’s going on, Jonas? First you get attacked on the road, then you raid a dogfight. Both times without back up. You’re not running a solo operation out of my station, you hear?”

“Yes, sir, I’m sorry.”

She didn’t want Titus taking the Sherwood case away from her. How could she explain that she was not looking for shit, but that lately for some reason she had become a magnet for other people’s bad energy?

Later she went over the case with Dizu. Mhlabeni was off duty, to her relief.

Dizu looked unusually ruffled, his shirt was actually creased! Persy found it curiously endearing. He didn’t bring up the dogfight, for which she was grateful. Instead he told her about his meeting with Philip Makana. “His description of the school arsonist sounds like Dollery.”

“And the white guy?”

“Makana had seen him before in the school grounds.”

“What’s in the report?” Persy asked.

“Put it this way. Its not as if Mhlabeni left no stone unturned. It’s a very slim document.”

Dizu went over to the organogram that was fast becoming a near unreadable spaghetti of connections. “Main suspect: Sean Dollery. Arsonist, burglar and dealer,” Dizu said. “He has his hands in so many pies I’m surprised he has time to scratch his balls.”

“There’s too many links between Sherwood and Dollery to ignore,” Persy agreed. “Plus we have his fingerprints and we could probably get Duncan to testify to seeing him in Sherwood’s car in Ocean View on Friday.”

“Then why do I feel that we’re still not getting the full picture?” Dizu said. “Look at all the stuff that happened seven years ago: the fire, the acrimony between Crane and Sherwood over the building developments, the sexual misconduct accusations. Marge Labuschagne may have a point. We should speak to Colette McKillian.”

Persy frowned. “Labuschagne has some personal axe to grind. Her theories are a waste of time. We should be chasing up the two boys Duncan saw in Sherwood’s car on Friday night. They could link Dollery to Sherwood.”

“What about Gregory Crane?” Dizu rocked back in his chair, hands behind his head. Relaxed, but not backing down. “He spread the story about the alleged abuse of the McKillian boy. Maybe he had a motive to kill Sherwood.”

Persy was getting irritated. “Why go off on a tangent when we have real evidence on Dollery?”

Chester April stuck his head in the door. “I’m leaving early this afternoon.”

“Thanks Chester, but I won’t be needing a lift anymore. I’ve moved out of Parklands. Found a place nearby.”

“That was sudden,” Chester said. Persy shrugged, not wanting to discuss it with him, but after he’d left she could not avoid Dizu’s questioning look. She would have to tell him about Donny. She watched him tense up as she went

through the events of the night before, culminating in the tardy response from the Milnerton Police Station.

When she finished, Dizu burst out. “Why didn’t you phone me? I would have put that bastard’s stupid face up his fucking arse!” The outburst was so uncharacteristic that Persy was speechless for a moment.

“I could handle it, okay? I left the flat. And I’m never going back. I don’t want to end up dead at my tender age.” She tried for a light tone, but knew it would all come down on her sooner or later: Donny, the dogfight, the ambush on Kommetjie road.

“Where did you sleep last night?”

“I came into the station and slept in the sick bay.”

“You’re living in the sick bay!”

“Actually,” she said sheepishly, “I’ve moved into a caravan.”

She explained how she’d met Marge Labuschagne on the beach and been put on to Hamish. Dizu wore a strange, stiff look on his face. “Well Persephone, you are full of surprises.”

His waspish tone annoyed her. “Why are you pissed off with me about this?”

“Because I’m your partner. We work together. Watch each other’s backs.

Now I find I’m right out of the loop.”

“Hey, it’s my personal life, okay? Nothing to do with the job.”

“Point taken.” Dizu went quiet. Phumeza came in just as things were getting weird between them.

“Got the report from the Marine Institute.” Phumeza handed the envelope to Persy. “Sherwood’s body could not have been dumped at Kommetjie. According to the tides on that day, he would have washed up at Scarborough.”

Persy quickly paged through the report. “But Scarborough’s in the opposite direction to Noordhoek.”

“Yep. And here’s Colette McKillian’s address for you.” Phumeza held out a slip of paper to Dizu. Persy pretended not to notice him take it. And he accused *her* of running her own investigation! He’s as stubborn as I am, she thought. And as touchy. Perhaps Detective Dizu Calata was not as imperturbable as he would like people to think.

\*

Marge had calmed down considerably from her altercation with Fiona Tinkler by the time she arrived at the Bohemian Rhapsody. She was still angry enough to go in guns blazing, but it was a delicate situation, considering Julian was an ex-client. Besides, she would have to keep her cool if she wanted to get to the bottom of the matter.

Mustapha came over to serve her, running his hands through his tar black hair. A heavy silver earring gleamed against his dark skin. “What can I do for you?” he asked with the usual mixture of pity and contempt he bestowed on all the punters.

“I’m here to see Julian.”

“You are just in time for the show.” He inclined his head towards the curtained doorway that led into the small cabaret theatre adjoining the bar. Strains

of what sounded like Nina Simone filtered through. She parted the curtains into the darkened theatre, where fragments of light from a mirrored disco ball played over Julian, or rather Juliana, on the small makeshift stage. He was strapped into a Dior New Look-style dress and high heels, with a pageboy wig, false eyelashes and red lips. An image both glamorous and faintly risible. He was delivering “I’m Feeling Good” with a fair amount of panache and a large dose of irony. ‘*Birds in the sky-y-y, you know what I mean*’

The Rhapsody’s clientele, several post-prandial drinks in, were feeling appreciative and the applause at the end of his performance was rapturous. As the punters moved off into the restaurant Juliana vanished behind a curtain to the side of the stage and Marge went through after him. Juliana, now Julian, was seated at a large makeup mirror, wig off, removing his makeup. Despite her anger she had to acknowledge that he was a very good-looking man. And an acutely sensitive one. She decided to adopt a light tone. “Those must be murder on the feet.” She nodded at the expensive slingbacks that he’d kicked off.

He looked surprised and faintly hostile. “What are you doing here?”

“I was tempted by the lamb tagine special.”

“I hope you’re not hounding me.” He turned back to the mirror and wiped off the rest of his make-up. “There are rules about therapists and patients.”

“As I recall, you terminated our professional relationship.”

“So I suppose you want to know why?”

“You can tell me if you wish, but you’re not obliged to.”

“Ok, then. It’s because the last thing I need is a homophobic therapist.”

“That’s a serious accusation, Julian. And completely untrue.”

“You threatened to out some poor *moffie* so he threw himself under a train. I read about it in the Cape Times.”

Marge realised with a shock that he was referring to Theo Kruger. “That’s not the full story, Julian.”

“He was a queer though, wasn’t he?” He watched her in the mirror.

Marge took a deep breath. “I was cleared of any professional misconduct.” Which was true, not that it had helped to take away the guilt. Nothing would. She’d known Theo Kruger was in a fragile psychological state but had exploited it nevertheless.

“Where did you get this information, if I may ask?”

He hesitated. “From Shamil. My spiritual guide.”

Marge must have looked as dumbstruck as she felt, because he was immediately on the defensive.

“Be as skeptical as you like, I was too. In any case, it’s all there in the newspapers.”

“Where did you come across this – this Shamil person?”

“Shamil is a spiritual entity channeled through Gregory Crane.”

Julian was intelligent and well-informed. How had he become mixed up with Crane of all people? She forgot her professional façade for a moment. “I’m surprised at you Julian – surely you don’t take that stuff seriously?”

Julian looked away. “I knew you’d have a closed mind about this. But Shamil can make contact with my father.”

Marge was dismayed. Couldn't Julian see that Crane was exploiting his unresolved feelings about his father? The very same issue they had been dealing with, successfully she'd thought, in his therapy.

"Maybe you're even unaware of it yourself," Julian continued, "but I'm sensitive to these things. I sense you have reservations about my sexuality. For whatever reason."

"That's simply not true!" she protested.

Or was it? After all, she had leapt to conclusions about Theo Kruger, a perfectly innocent man. She thought suddenly of Persy and the way she had assumed that hers was an affirmative action appointment. Did she harbour prejudices of which she was completely unaware? She would be unusual if she didn't – but she would examine that later. Right now she had to put an end to the rumours.

"I shall speak to Gregory Crane or whoever he pretends to be. In the meantime I must ask you to please refrain from talking about this until I've had a chance to explain my side of the story."

Julian shrugged off-handedly. No doubt he wanted her to leave.

"Before I go Julian, I must say something. I strongly recommend you continue with therapy. You don't have to see me. There are plenty of good people around."

"Thank you for the advice." He was frostily polite. "Now if you don't mind, I would like to change out of my costume."

Marge left, noting on her way that Mustafa did not return her goodbye wave.

Well, that had been a disaster, Marge thought. Julian no longer trusted her and was unlikely to take her advice. And now she had a situation on her hands. Crane had started a fire and Fiona Tinkler was fanning it. Her mind went back to the earlier client who had terminated her therapy with no explanation. Was the story already all over the valley? If that was the case, it was only the beginning of the fallout from Crane's campaign to discredit her.

\*

Crane had been thinking about Collette McKillian a lot lately. Seeing her in the carpark in Fish Hoek had set his thoughts going like a clock, ticking away. The Sherwood investigation was stirring up a hornet's nest, and who knew what could come out and sting you. Collette was unstable and could become a serious liability if she went into one of her downward spirals. Crane had been through such moments himself. Pain could obliterate every part of your being, annihilate you, or you could decide to survive. Which meant making a choice: he'd chosen to excise those weak and needy parts of himself. Colette, on the other hand, had chosen to do the opposite. She'd embraced the weak and looked for others to take care of her, which seemed to be the female way.

He'd been hard on her when they'd met in the car park. Maybe too hard, but he couldn't control the well of anger that rose in him every time he saw her. She'd rejected him when he thought no one would ever do that again. Not that he wanted her, never that. She had only been a means to an end, but that she had thrown him over still rankled. And then to come sniveling for favors, as if he had not done enough already. Well, he had the power now, though he would be lying

if he said he were not worried. She would never go to the police – but they might go to her. Dollery had said the female detective was a problem. That she was determined, and would not give up.

Yes, Collette was the weak link, no doubt about it. He'd better get over to her place and remind her of what was at stake. And if she seemed incapable of holding it together, then something serious would have to be done.

University of Cape Town

## Thirty-one

Persy had left Dizu waiting outside in the Nissan, happily listening to a Bucs game broadcast. They'd agreed it would be best if Persy interviewed Colette alone, woman-to-woman. Less intimidating.

The semi-detached Victorian in Kenilworth had a tall pepper tree and a six-foot spiked wall obscuring it from a busy road. Persy was buzzed into a narrow garden where straggly petunias and woody lavender struggled to make headway against the shade of the tall tree. Faint strains of classical music could be heard from inside the house. The front door, painted soft lavender, opened tentatively and a white face appeared behind the security gate, large staring eyes darting around. Persy recognised her immediately as the same woman who'd been having an argument with Gregory Crane in the Fish Hoek car park and nearly driven into her. She looked less like a hippie today, in a girlish chiffon and velvet shift in pink and magenta and delicate silver sandals.

Persy showed her ID. "Detective Jonas. I called earlier."

"Oh yes." Colette struggled with the security gate, hands fluttering nervously as she tried to fit the key in the lock. Finally she got the gate open and Persy followed her into an open plan kitchen-cum-living room dominated by a grand piano. "I teach music," Colette explained, "at my son's school." She turned off the music. The sound of rush hour traffic from nearby Rosmead Avenue rushed in. "Do you play?"

“No.” Persy smiled politely. Music lessons were an unimaginable luxury. The shiny black piano was practically the size of the house she’d lived in with Poppa. She was always dealing with these unthinking assumptions on the part of whites. It was like living in a parallel universe. Colette invited her to sit at a glass coffee table on which clusters of rose quartz crystals were carefully arranged. Persy had to strain to hear the woman’s whispery voice.

“I gave my statement to Detective Mhlabeni,” Colette said nervously.

“Yes, I’m following up on information from Yoliswa Xolele. Apparently there was some trouble between you and Andrew Sherwood. Over your son.”

Colette held herself very still. “That’s confidential information.”

Persy remembered what Yoliswa Xolele had said about Colette’s fragile mental state. “I know it’s a sensitive matter, ma’am,” she said gently. “But this is a murder investigation. I understand you made certain allegations.”

Colette twisted the bracelets on her arm over and over. “I never laid a charge.”

Persy was becoming increasingly exasperated. She was wasting valuable time on this neurotic woman. To please Dizu, who seemed to think Marge Labuschagne’s crackpot theories had some merit. “Tell me what happened, ma’am.”

“I ... I was hospitalized, with – psychiatric problems. Andy took care of my son until I was well enough to come home. When I got home I became paranoid about Jasper.

He seemed withdrawn – I think, but I really can't remember now. I spoke to Yoliswa about my – suspicions. Marge Labuschagne interviewed me. And Andy. She couldn't find anything. I've since realised that I'd overreacted."

"You're saying you imagined it?"

"Yes. And it would be awful if my son found out."

"Found out what?" A teenage boy had appeared in the doorway. Colette was up in a flash.

"Jas! What are you doing home?"

"The movie was booked out."

Jasper McKillian was a tall hulking presence, pale skinned with shaggy dyed black hair and a piercing through his top lip. He wore a T-shirt that said 'Criminal' with an illustration of handcuffs. His eyes took Persy in and she felt a disturbing flash of sexual attraction.

"Please excuse us, darling, it's a confidential matter," Colette said.

Jasper ignored her and padded past into the kitchen. He had the adolescent's strange combination of awkwardness and grace. They heard him open the fridge and pause, immobile, as if waiting for them to resume speaking. Colette tensed on the edge of her chair, hands clasped together.

There was the sound of the fridge closing. He reappeared in the doorway with a beer in one hand.

"You know I don't like you drinking," Colette protested feebly. "You're not even sixteen." *Sixteen!* Persy had taken him for at least eighteen.

He popped the tab and took a long gulping draught without taking his eyes off Persy. “You a cop?” he asked, wiping his mouth with his hand.

“Yeah.”

He pushed himself off the doorjamb and headed for the door and ruffled Colette’s hair in passing. “Chill, ma,” he said, and loped off down the passage. Loud music blared briefly and then a door slammed shut, rattling the quartz crystals on the table and muting the beat. Colette waited for a moment to make sure he was not going to reappear before she spoke. “I don’t want him to know what happened with Andy. I feel stupid about the whole thing.” She ran her hand wearily over her face. “I wasn’t well at the time. I’m still under observation, you know. It’s tough raising a child alone.” As if Jasper were a small boy rather than a hulking full grown male, Persy thought.

“You know Gregory Crane?”

“Greg?” Colette got her familiar panic-stricken expression. “Yes, we used to be friends.” She flushed. “I made the mistake of telling him about Andy. He was indiscreet with the information, which made me very angry. We don’t speak anymore.”

“But you met with him on Tuesday afternoon. In the car park in Fish Hoek.”

Colette’s eyes widened. “Did he tell you about that?” She began fiddling with the rows of bangles, jangling them on her thin wrists. “I – I did, yes. I asked him not to bring up the – rumours about Andy and Jasper again.”

“Sherwood’s garage is filled with packed boxes. Any idea where he was going?”

“No – no, I have no idea.”

“In your statement you said that you were home on Friday night.”

“Yes, that’s right. With Jasper. We were together here all evening.”

Persy had to wait until half time. Chiefs 1 – Pirates 0. “They’re playing like *moegoes*.” Dizu complained. No matter how many times Bucs were butchered Dizu never wavered in his support. He switched off the radio and Persy filled him in on the meeting with Colette.

“She’s backpedalling on the molestation story. Claims she met with Crane to ask him to keep quiet about the whole thing. She’s more or less saying that she wasn’t in her right mind when she made the accusation.”

“She knows that if anyone has a motive, it’s her. In fact she’s the only person so far who has,” said Dizu.

“I can’t see her killing a fly. She’s a nervous wreck.”

“What about the boy?”

Persy recalled Jasper’s panther-like lope to the fridge, the knowingness in his eyes. “He’s a possibility, but he has no motive. His mother’s kept the whole story from him.”

Dizu started the car. “Let’s swing past Boniface Osman on the way back. See if he’s got the Schneider’s flat screen TV and sound system in his shack.”

Crane pulled up in time to see the girl detective get into the car. The black cop had been waiting for her. They sat in the car for a while and then they drove away. So, they had identified Colette as the weak link. His fears were justified.

“Oh, it’s you!” She couldn’t hide her shock at seeing him at the door.

“Hello, Colette. Can I come in?”

She was wondering why he was here. Doing that awful thing with her hair, pulling it over her forehead like a curtain. He closed the door behind him, trapping them both in the narrow hallway.

“I saw that policewoman leaving. I hope you haven’t alerted her to anything.”

She looked petrified. “No, of course not.”

He walked through the nasty little flat into the lounge, taking in the pathetic sticks of furniture. Her arty Bohemianism disgusted him. If she could only see the way he lived now. He thought triumphantly of the views from his new place, the gleaming floors and the clean lines of his designer bedroom. He would like to rub her face in it, to gloat. Who did the stupid bitch think she was, throwing him over? When he looked at her big eyes staring out of her pale face his rage threatened to suffocate him. He consoled himself with the reminder that she was as crazy as a coot. A sane woman would never have broken off with him. “What did that cop want?”

“Nothing. I mean, nothing important.”

“Don’t bullshit me. She came here for a reason. What was it?”

“She knows about the allegations at the school.”

“Well, I didn’t tell her. It must have been Marge Labuschagne. She’s as thick as thieves with the police.”

“It was Yoliswa Xolele.”

“Well, just keep your mouth shut. In case you got some crazy idea in your head to offload.”

“I wouldn’t do that!” Her eyes darted about like a frightened rabbit’s.

A slouching teenage boy came in, some sort of woolen hat pulled over his head. Spotty. Loathsome. Reminded Crane of Lance, from the orphanage. Same barely repressed violence. “I’m going out,” he said.

Colette had shrunk into herself. “You remember Jasper?”

“Yes. Hello, Jasper.” He couldn’t believe that little cherub had metamorphosed into this big galumphing lout.

Jasper glanced at him, muttered “hullo” rudely, then turned away and made a quick exit. Colette looked pleadingly at Crane. “He’s a good boy, he’s just going through a difficult stage.”

Crane doubted that. Colette would never be able to distinguish between reality and her own mad imaginings when it came to Jasper.

The front door slammed behind the boy. Colette looked after him anxiously, as if willing him back. That was her problem, Crane thought. She doted on the brat. Always had. Nothing she would not do for him.

\*

Vrygrond was hidden from motorists on Prince George’s Drive by new low-cost townhouse developments and Capricorn Business Park. Squatters lived in

shacks and rundown brick houses, sometimes ten to a room. Desperate people from all over Africa. So desperate that even Vrygrond was better than where they had come from. Zimbabwe, Congo, DRC, Rwanda, Somalia, Nigeria. Fleeing wars, mutilations, rape and death.

It was dusk, and there were no streetlights. The False Bay side of the peninsula lost the light earlier than the Atlantic side, the sun getting lost behind the mountains. The van's headlights picked up streets filled with people scurrying around in the fading light, illegal migrants back from piece jobs or car-guarding at the shopping malls.

Boniface Osman lived up to his name, sweet-faced and wide-eyed in a clean polo shirt and neatly pressed jeans. He shared his shack with a friend. It had all the hallmarks of the home of honest Malawian 'houseboys' or gardeners: two well-kept bicycles chained up next to the house, two neatly made pallets on the floor, clothes hanging on the walls on wire hangers, a brand new Taiwanese sound system with all the whistles and bells. Strong smell of Axe deodorant and cheap fried meat. Boniface showed them in and gestured for them to sit on a couple of car seats covered in nylon blankets.

He was nervous, but clear-eyed and forthright.

"Yes, I know the code for Mr. Schneider's alarm. But I not rob him – you can phone my work. Mrs. Payne, my boss, she will tell you I was staying in her cottage on Tuesday night. She like me to stay there for security, when her husband is away."

Mrs. Payne, who employed Boniface at a furniture restoring shop in Wynberg, had lifted him to work the next morning. That was his alibi, watertight if verified. Persy was inclined to believe him.

He worked in Schneider's garden over the weekends, and occasionally on a Friday when he was not needed at the shop. Persy quickly latched onto this detail. "Did you work at the Schneider's last Friday?" Persy asked.

"Yes, I was there."

"Did you see Sean Dollery at the house?"

"I see him later in the afternoon. Watching the TV and then in the night."

Persy was puzzled. "At night?"

"I stay at my girlfriend in Masiphumelele on the weekends. On Friday night I am going by bicycle to the café to buy bread. I see Mrs. Dollery's son go past me very fast, in Mr. Schneider's white Toyota twin cab."

No doubt the very one that had nearly run Persy off the road.

"What time was that?"

"About nine."

Persy and Dizu exchanged looks. So much for Sean Dollery's alibi.

## Thirty-two

The winding mountain road to Scarborough looked down over white beaches and an azure ocean that extended westwards and blended, horizonless, with the sky. It was one of Marge's favourite drives, but she was not looking forward to what lay ahead: a face off with Gregory Crane. She had called ahead to make an appointment, not saying what it was about, not wanting to alert him. But he had been suspicious.

The hamlet of Misty Cliffs was made up of a few dozen holiday villas that clung to the steep mountainside and descending down to the road. The collision of hot air and cold Atlantic current formed a fine spray, refracting and diffusing the sun's glare so that everything shone with an almost narcotic luminescence. Being on the Atlantic side of the mountain the sun would remain high until long after seven.

The driveway was so well hidden from the road that Marge missed it and had to make a sharp U-turn. She accelerated up a steep paved driveway that ended in a leveled parking bay set below the house. Crane's Mercedes was parked there, looking newly washed in stark contrast to her dusty ten-year-old Toyota sedan with its ominous signs of rust beneath the windscreen. She cut the engine and looked up at the aggressively modern African-style house with reed-covered decks and cut stone details. Slatted shutters made of indigenous hardwood flanked the sliding glass windows. It was the sort of house that got featured in fancy architectural magazines – a monstrosity in her opinion. As she mounted the stone

steps to the entrance the heavy wooden door swung open and Gregory Crane appeared, wearing loosely tied yoga pants and a singlet that showed off the body of a thirty year old, taut-muscled and sinewy. Only his rather cadaverous face showed signs of an age that by Marge's reckoning was nearer to her own. A pungent smell of incense wafted to meet her. She was thoroughly pissed off, but it would not do to let him know. With Crane everything was strategic.

"Come in," he said. "I've been waiting for you."

He led her into a large open room with sprung wooden floors and floor-to-ceiling windows that looked out on an intoxicating blue green vista, the house seemingly suspended between sea and sky.

"Nice set up," said Marge.

"It suits my purposes." He was relaxed and fully confident in his guru persona. He handed her a small cup of what he called "Tranquility Tea".

"Business must be booming."

"I do okay. Take a seat." He sat down cross-legged on some rugs set around a low Balinese style table. Marge hunkered down opposite, acutely aware of how overweight and unfit she was these days.

"I believe you are assisting the Sherwood murder investigation. Any leads?" Crane's deep-set eyes were a strange non-colour.

"The police have a suspect. A drug dealer from Ocean View."

"That doesn't surprise me. Sherwood was in and out of the NA program at the Phoenix Centre."

Now that she came to think of it, Colette had also mentioned drugs but Marge hadn't taken her seriously. There was also the pathology report – no teeth – a sure giveaway. Had Sherwood been a junkie?

“I'm not convinced,” she said. “I think Sherwood had enemies closer to home.”

Crane's eyes hadn't left hers. “What can I do for you, Marge?”

“I would like to talk about – Shamil, is it?”

His face showed nothing. “What do you want to know?”

“Who is he, exactly?”

“Shamil is a spiritual entity who has selected me as a channel to communicate with certain individuals.”

“Can I talk to him?”

“He can't be conjured up like a rabbit from a hat. He specially selects those he wishes to talk to.”

“Is that so? Is he also in the habit of spreading rumours and defaming people?”

He shrugged. “I can't control what he says.”

She'd had enough of playing games. “You are attempting to ruin my professional reputation and are exploiting emotionally vulnerable people like Julian Duval with this mumbo jumbo.”

Crane's voice was very cold. “I would hardly talk of emotionally vulnerable people if I was you. What did you do to Colette McKillian? She's in and out of

clinics like a revolving door. As a result she's a very disturbed woman. Imagines all sorts of things."

"Colette McKillian was never my client. I saw her once, if it's any of your business." Marge realized too late that Crane had put her on the defensive.

He put up a hand to silence her. The atmosphere had subtly altered, as if the air had shifted. "Someone is here," he said.

A hush as palpable as noise had filled the room and at the same time it had become very cold. Crane's face had the impassivity of an Easter Island statue. "There's a message for you from the other side." His voice had changed in pitch and tone. A crawling sensation moved over Marge's skin. She'd foolishly laid herself open to this by coming here. "This person passed traumatically." Crane continued.

An irrational fear took hold of her. What if it was Theo Kruger? Accusing and vengeful, bringing a lonely scream from his personal purgatory.

"It's a child."

The sea sounded unnaturally loud, as if the waves were breaking right up against the house. Marge felt as if she had slipped into the half paralysis of a nightmare. "His name begins with G, or a C," Crane continued. "No. A double C. He asks why you stopped looking for him."

A vacuum seemed to have formed in the room, sucking in oxygen and the light with it, so that a grey blankness enveloped her. It was not so much a presence as an absence. An absence filled with malevolent intent. Into this, the

clear tones of her cell phone rang out. Will's face, bright as a flame, flashed on the screen. Crane's eyes snapped open, as blank as a doll's.

Will's voice seemed to come from another world, a world of happy normalcy.

"Mom? Where are you?"

With great effort she managed to speak. "In Misty Cliffs."

"I'm leaving now to go out." There was a pause. "You okay, Mom?"

Will. Usually so switched off, had picked up on something.

"Yes. See you soon, darling."

Marge struggled to her feet, feeling slightly foolish. And shaken up.

Crane had moved away, a gliding shadow, taking the greyness and the vacuum with him.

She found him waiting at the front door. It was open, ready for her to leave. She stumbled out into the fresh air with an overwhelming sense of relief, as if she'd narrowly escaped some threat. Crane watched her from the doorway, motionless as a snake waiting to strike. Her earlier brief terror had subsided and been replaced by an intense loathing of Crane and his shenanigans. "I'm warning you, Gregory. Stop spreading these rumours to my clients, or I shall bring charges against you."

"Hardly rumours, my dear. Published facts. In more than one newspaper."

And with that the door swung shut.

Marge was trembling when she got into her car, taking gulps of fresh air.

Crane was correct. There was nothing she could do to put the genie back into the

lamp. The story of Theo Kruger was in the public domain. She was left with a pervasive sense that some violation had taken place in that room, that Crane had transgressed an invisible law. He was a dangerously amoral narcissist, at best. Or were these labels in themselves indicative of a failure of imagination, a denial of evil?

Crane was a buffoon and a charlatan, she had no doubt. But she could not have imagined what had happened in there. Whatever he had conjured up in that room was beyond his control. He'd raised demons of his own making, and he might not find it so easy to send them back.

University of Cape Town

### Thirty-three

Waking up the next morning in the comforting familiarity of her own home, Marge wondered at how she had allowed herself to be manipulated by Crane. She took his reference to CC to mean Clyde Cupido. Naturally he would know all about the Cupido case if he'd been nosing around in reports of Theo Kruger's suicide. He'd know that Clyde had never been found and was presumed dead. What had he hoped to achieve with his tasteless, macabre pretence of being the dead child? That he would frighten Marge out of opposing his development plans? Talk about queer twisted logic! If anything, he'd made her more determined to get as many people as possible to sign the petition.

However she tried to rationalize it, though, she hadn't imagined the evil that emanated from him. It had been a horrible experience, but she had found out one useful piece of information. Andrew Sherwood had a drug problem.

It was Saturday, but she called the Phoenix Rehabilitation Centre and asked Stephen Raubenheimer, the director of the centre, for an appointment. She had done some counselling work there in the past and he didn't ask questions when she told him she was assisting the police with their investigations into Sherwood's death.

While she was on the phone Will emerged sleepy-eyed from his bedroom, trailing an anaemic blonde he introduced as Fleur. The two of them sloped through to the kitchen where Will got started on a fry up. After she finished her

call Marge kept out of their way. Will was always supersensitive about his girlfriends and thought she did not approve of them, which was true.

It was best to keep Will in the dark about Gregory Crane. He would only fuss unnecessarily and worry about what she was getting into.

She caught them coming out of the kitchen laden with mugs of her best Arabica coffee and what looked like every egg in the house scrambled and piled high on their plates. “Are you still up for watching the comet from Chapman’s Peak later?” She addressed Will.

He exchanged looks with Fleur. “Uh – we’re going to the Brass Bell to meet some friends. Maybe next time?”

“It will be gone soon!” She yelled after them as they traipsed back up the stairs to their love nest. She overheard Fleur say, “But your mother’s sweet, nothing like you described.”

She closed her ears to Will’s sarcastic reply.

Driving to collect Bongo from the vet she reminded herself that it was natural and healthy that children grow away from their parents and no longer wanted to spend time with them. A tight ball of hurt lodged in her throat at the thought.

What was wrong with her? She was being *ridiculous*.

Bongo was recovering well, if you ignored the patches of shaved pink skin disfigured by red Mercurochrome and black stitches.

“Some love and affection and he’ll be back to his usual sunny self,” Dr Patel said. But something had gone out of Bongo’s eyes. He cowered when Marge bent to pat him and resisted getting into the car. Once home he limped to his basket

and lay there apathetically, his tail not even twitching when he got one of his favourite calf's hooves to chew.

Marge left for the Phoenix Rehabilitation Centre in a surprisingly buoyant mood – ever since she'd begun working on the Sherwood case she'd felt energised. Truth was that she was bored with the neurotic navel-gazers who made up the clients in her practice. That wasn't fair, because some had serious issues, but there was nothing like a good criminal case to make her feel *useful* and keep the loneliness at bay.

The rehab centre stood slap bang in the middle of Kommetjie on the main road to Scarborough, facing a small row of village shops. It looked more like a rundown hotel than an expensive drug and alcohol rehabilitation facility rumoured to cost a few thousand rand a day. As Marge parked she spotted a stoned looking Rasta sloping into the Boma Bar, guitar slung over the dreadlocks that hung down his back to his waist. "Great place to put a drying-out joint," she muttered to herself.

Four youths in hoodies and baseball caps half sat, half lounged on the low wall that flanked the centre, taking the sun. Small-time dealers by the look of them. Waiting for someone inside to crack and sneak out for something to ease the pain. Vultures, thought Marge. Wherever there was human pain you found them hovering.

The reception area was yellow-walled and fussy, with fake flowers in mass-produced vases and faux wood paneling. It looked more like an old age home than a clinic. Stephen Raubenheimer was a burly redhead with baggy eyes and the tired

and self-deprecating manner of many former addicts. He led Marge from the reception area into a glassed-in conservatory and gestured to some faded striped canvas seats. “Take a seat,” he said. “This is our recreation room. It’s not a barrel of laughs in here.”

She would have to agree. A pool table with bumpy baize and an out of focus TV constituted the recreation. A couple of teens with the husk-like look of people in recovery sat dead-eyed over a game of rummy.

He took his place opposite Marge, clutching some files. “I found Sherwood’s file,” he said. “I even have the outpatients register.” He opened the file. “Andy was in here for multiple addictions. Dope, speed, booze, sex. The usual. All addictive behaviours are linked – it just comes down to what opportunities present themselves, basically.” Despite the chunky thickset build that gave Raubenheimer a leaden, slab-like quality, he was sharp and spoke with reassuring authority. “The group sessions helped, if only to moderate some of those behaviours. We didn’t know twenty years ago what we know now about addiction. In that sense, Sherwood was a bit of a guinea pig.”

“What do you mean, twenty years ago? He only came to Kommetjie about seven years ago, and worked at the Logos school.”

“Oh no! Andy’s been in and out of programs for years. In fact he was one of our first patients. I’m amazed that I even have the remains of this file, quite honestly. We usually destroy them after ten years.”

A suspicion was growing in Marge’s head, one gaining traction every minute. “Did Sherwood have any sexual dysfunction?”

Raubenheimer frowned. "I avoid labels, but I suppose I can tell you. Now that he's off the record, so to speak. Sorry, that was in bad taste. Sherwood was bisexual. He was attracted to boys as well as girls. Not that I'd call that dysfunction."

"Underage boys?"

Raubenheimer shrugged. "He didn't elaborate."

Marge felt the same excitement she felt when a patient was nearing a breakthrough, when the subconscious becomes conscious, when a pattern emerges and a picture, formerly murky and barely comprehended, begins to take shape.

"Going back those twenty years ... was Sherwood allowed out on a day pass to leave the facility?"

Raubenheimer gave her a questioning look. "Well, let's see... as I said, I have an outpatients register from then." Raubenheimer flipped through the book. "Funny how it's easier to find records when they're not computerized. Okay, got a date for me?"

Marge gave him the date and watched him run his fingers down the register. They were disfigured, purple and swollen, a legacy from having needled into the membranes between the fingers.

"Here we are. He checked out on the 14<sup>th</sup> for a weekend pass and was back on the afternoon of June 16<sup>th</sup>. Soweto Day."

"Any way of finding out his movements on that day?"

"No, but we encourage our clients to exercise. Most of them walk Long Beach to Noordhoek and back."

Marge felt as light-headed as if she hadn't slept. It was too much of a coincidence. Her brain went into overdrive joining dots, making connections.

Raubenheimer went back through the files. "He's been back and forth for treatment over the years. I think he battled to sustain sobriety. We put him into the buddy system."

"Buddy system?"

"An addict who has been clean for five or more years becomes a buddy and you check in with them regularly. Same as AA. He dropped his buddy, though, about seven years ago according to this. Must have had a fallout. It happens."

"I don't suppose you can remember who his buddy was?"

"Remarkably I can, because he was such an odd character. His name was Gregory Crane. Weird guy. Had a rather serious cocaine problem, but he got clean and became some sort of yoga guru. Happens a lot, people swapping one obsession for another."

*Gregory Crane.* He seemed to pop up everywhere.

Marge stood up with thoughts swarming in her head. "Thank you. You have been very helpful."

## Thirty-four

In the end help came in the unexpected form of Fiona Tinkler from the Fanatix Video Store. Dizu took the call.

“The robber’s here,” she said. “I’ve locked him in the shop.”

Persy and Mhlabeni were off duty, so Dizu and Chester April took a van and hared down to Fish Hoek Main Road. Fiona Tinkler came running over as they pulled up, looking brawny in navy pants, a nautical striped shirt and yachting shoes. There was no sign of her former nervousness. If anything she seemed exhilarated by her brush with a dangerous criminal. “He came in here to hire a movie. The cheek of it! Bold as brass he was. I recognised him by his voice – and his hands. George is playing golf, so I was on my own here. I never thought I had it in me to apprehend a criminal. I’m usually a real scaredy cat.” She gave a high-pitched giggle bordering on hysteria. “Oh, I shouldn’t laugh, it isn’t funny is it? But I feel ever so proud of myself. Never knew I had it in me, really.”

Since the robbery Tinkler had upped the security with roll-down metal shutters; these were down and the door was locked. Fiona unlocked the door and they followed her into the shop. At the far end a metal security gate barred the way into the Adults section. “I waited until he went into the porn section, then I slammed the security gates shut and ran out and locked up the shop,” she said. “Left him there to stew.”

Dizu recognised him instantly. He'd stared at enough WANTED photographs of him at the station. Chiselled cheekbones, slant to his eyes from his Malaysian heritage, glaring at him through the bars of the security gate.

Trapped like a rat in a cage.

"The Christian contingent objected to that section," Fiona chattered on, "so George put in the security gate with a buzzer. Stops the teenage boys from wandering in to have a squizz."

*Hallelujah for the Fish Hoek holy rollers*, thought Dizu as he took out the handcuffs and waited for Fiona to unlock the gate.

"Hello, Sean," he said as he cuffed him. "We've been looking all over for you."

If it were not for the cuffs and the leg irons, Sean Dollery could have been at the gym. He slouched in a chair, wearing top-of-the-range sports gear, looking buffed and polished. Persy's heart thumped in her chest and she could taste adrenaline in her mouth. How long had they been looking for the fucker? Two, three months?

How many years since they'd spoken face to face? Since before she'd gone to Police College and he'd started on the streets as a *hoekstaander* for the local merchants.

Persy took a seat opposite him. Dizu stood near the door watching, feeling tense and over-protective. She looked so damn small, blinking behind her glasses, narrow shoulders hunched.

“Hello, Sean.” Sounding cool apart from the slight tremor on his name.

Sean looked her up and down insolently. His eyes were like black water, fathomless and cold.

“We have some questions for you.”

He yawned boredly. “I’ll only speak to Mhlabeni.”

Persy stared back at him. “It’s my case, so you will have to speak to me.”

“Mhlabeni. Or my lawyer. You choose.”

“The woman at the Video Shop identified you as the man who held her up at gunpoint on Monday.”

“She’s a fucking lying bitch.”

“Where were you on Friday the fifth of January between six and midnight?”

He looked past her and shot Dizu a look of pure hatred. “Ask your friend over there. He came and harassed my ma. She told him. I was with her there by Schneider’s house. All day. And night.”

“So you didn’t see Andrew Sherwood?”

“Who?”

“We have witnesses who saw you in his car.”

“*Whaaat?* Who told you that fairy story? Oh, I know! Your Rasta friend.” He laughed. “That old *daggakop*? Can’t remember his own mother’s face.”

Dizu wondered fleetingly how Sean knew it was Duncan who’d passed on the information. But then Sean had eyes on every corner of Ocean View. Foot soldiers in his expanding empire.

“You killed him and then dumped the car when it ran out of petrol.” Persy keeping on him.

Sean looked mock offended. “Don’t play games. Why would I steal that old jalopy?” He switched his attention to Dizu. “Persephone likes games – we played cops and robbers in the streets as *laaities*. So what’s changed, hey?” He laughed, lifted his cuffed hands and made a shooting motion at Persy. “Bang. Bang.” His face hardened. “Fuck you, don’t try and catch me out, bitch.”

“Sherwood was murdered. We found your prints in his car.” Persy was trying for tough, but she was rattled and it showed. *Easy girl*, Dizu thought.

“That means no bail,” she went on. “You’re going into Pollsmoor with the awaiting trials.”

Dizu saw the flicker behind Sean’s eyes. So even Sean had fears. And Persy knew how to exploit them.

Sean switched his attention to Dizu. “You her boyfriend?”

“Leave him out of it, Sean!” Persy’s hands were clenched under the table.

Sean ignored her. “I can tell you somethings about her. Want to hear?”

Persy was on her feet. “Shut up, motherfucker!”

Dizu said. “Persy, can we speak?”

Sean grinned at them as they left the room. In the corridor, Persy was shaking.

“What’s going on in there?” Dizu kept his tone neutral.

“The bastard’s fucking with my head.”

“He’s got a hook into you somehow. You’re letting him get to you.”

“Yeah, well it works both ways.” She took off her glasses and rubbed them on her shirt. Her eyes looked naked, exposed. Like a young child’s. Dizu felt a stab of anxiety. “Is there something I should know?”

Her face closed up instantly. “What do you mean? No!” The wall was up.

“Let me take over, then.”

For a moment she looked about to protest, then seemed to almost fold against the wall as if she had no strength left in her legs. “Jesus, ok then. If you think I’m fucking up.”

Dizu went back in, Chester at the door. Dollery was leaning back, riding his chair, looking relaxed. As Dizu took the seat opposite, Sean said “You *naaing* her?” A small smile on his lips.

Dizu was appalled by his sudden rush of anger. He would like to smash that pretty face in. He took a breath. *Centre yourself*. “The facts are these: we have your prints. We have two eye witnesses, one placing you in Sherwood’s car at around five on Friday night, another who puts you in Schneider’s car around nine thirty on the Kommetjie road heading towards Noordhoek. If you tell us who else was with you in Sherwood’s car, we can talk about a possible deal on the armed robbery.”

“You’re a *laanie* one hey? Not a common or garden kaffir.”

Dizu forced his face to remain neutral. He could not afford to take Sean’s bait.

Sean shrugged. “Bail. Or I say *fokkol*.”

“It’s a murder charge and we have prints. Why should we agree to bail?”

Dizu was fishing, picking up on Persy’s lead, playing on Sean’s fears. Of what exactly? Claustrophobia? “We could keep you here at the station until a bail hearing, or ship you out to awaiting trial in Pollsmoor. Not much negotiating goes on there.” Dizu stood up, as if losing patience. “But it’s your decision. I have to go.”

Dollery stared at him, working the odds. Dizu could almost see his brain humming. He had lost protection by going out as a maverick operator; the prison gangs would show him scant mercy. He’d be crammed into a cell for weeks, sleeping in shifts, pressed up against the worst the Flats could throw up.

“Ok. I was in Sherwood’s car. But I didn’t kill him.”

Dizu sat down again, slowly.

“Two *laaities* tried to score off a *hoekstaander* there by Marine Primary,” Sean said. “I went down there to check them out thinking, if they’re rich white boys I can hit them up for something. Then I check they’re in this old Mazda.”

“Recognise them?”

“*Ja*, one’s the school teacher’s *laaitie*, Fortuin from there by the Logos school. His friend was a white. Never saw him before. They wanted smoke. I organized a connection.”

“Who’s the connection?”

Sean shrugged.

“You mean you’re the connection.”

“I didn’t kill anyone. Don’t try to hang a murder on me. Now give me my phone call.”

“Listen carefully, Sean. This is what we have on you – murder, armed robbery, car theft, illegal chop shop, drug dealing, dogfighting, the Schneider’s burglary... the list goes on.”

And at last they had some hard evidence. A positive ID from Fiona Tinkler, the prints on Sherwood’s car, Duncan’s testimony for what it was worth. And Philip Makana, an eyewitness linking Sean to an arson case, even if it was seven years old and likely that Duncan the Rasta and Philip Makana would be shredded by a good lawyer. Fiona Tinkler was their only credible witness, but there were still no guarantees. Dizu had seen enough people walk on a lot more than they had here. But they could not afford to let Sean Dollery slip through their fingers. If they did, in two or three years he would control Ocean View.

“So you sold them the smoke, then what happened?”

“They dropped me off there by my ma’s employer Schneider, about five o’ clock.”

“We have a witness who places you in Schneider’s *bakkie* on the Kommetjie Road at nine thirty Friday night.”

Sean hesitated for a split second. “I was going to Long Beach McDonald’s. *Wie sê* buying a hamburger is against the law?”

Dizu continued to grill Sean but got no more out of him. He meticulously took down his statement and got him to sign it. “For your sake, your story better check out.”

Dizu went out to find Persy. She was pacing outside in the corridor, looking agitated. He filled her in.

“Let’s go see the Fortuins,” she said, “see if his story checks out.”

Chester came out of the interrogation room, leading Dollery down to the holding cells. Sean smiled slightly as he shuffled past, then turned to look back at Persy. “How’s Poppa?” he asked.

Dizu sensed Persy stiffen beside him. Over Sean’s face passed a fleeting, unreadable moment, immediately suppressed. “Be sure to pay him my respects.” At that moment, Dizu could have sworn that Dollery meant it.

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## Thirty-five

Joel and Yasmin Fortuin lived in a crescent some way from the beach, but within walking distance of Sherwood's house.

Joel was waiting for them in the street in a pale pink three-button shirt and long Bermuda shorts: the uniform of a preppy teenager, an inappropriate fashion choice for a middle-aged coloured man who resembled a rugby lock with a few years and a few extra pounds on him.

"We need to speak to your son, Mr. Fortuin."

Joel looked worried. "Is my boy in trouble?"

Persy briefly explained why they were there as he led them into a small, neat garden of a modest two-bedroomed house built in a vaguely Moorish style. A Weber *braai* and small pool spoke of aspirations to a middle-class lifestyle that Joel Fortuin must be struggling to meet on a teacher's salary at an independent school. A mouthwatering smell of biryani wafted out from somewhere in the house.

"Please, let me speak to my wife first," Joel said. "She is very emotional. She'll blow her top if she thinks Ryan's in trouble with the police."

He led them around to a small garage abutting the house inside which was a hive of activity. A small cottage industry made up of women from Ocean View was furiously cooking samoosas, sausage rolls and chicken wings. This was where the extra cash in the Fortuin household came from. A round woman in a

headscarf came over, wiping flour on her apron and smiling welcomingly. Persy recognised the receptionist from the Logos school.

“Yasmin,” Joel said carefully, as if placating a child, “these people are police detectives. They want to speak to Ryan.”

She slapped her hands over her mouth, eyes wide with alarm. She turned to a slightly built teenage boy who was removing a dish of *bobotie* from the big commercial baker’s oven. “Ryan, what have you done?” She swatted him furiously with a dishcloth, her voice rising several octaves. “What have you done now Ryan? What?”

“Nothing, ma, I swear!” Ryan was a light-skinned boy of 15 or 16. His big Afro was pushed back off his face by a day-glo Alice band. He looked confused and frightened.

“Are you going to arrest him?” Yasmin burst out. “You know what the gangsters will do to a boy like him? Do you?”

Persy indicated that Ryan should come outside into the garden. Yasmin tried to follow them out. Her husband took her arm firmly, but she shook him off.

“Where you taking him? He’s just a child!”

Persy tried to be reassuring. “One or both of you can be present.” Ryan caught his father’s eye and shook his head violently. Joel took Yasmin’s arm and guided her gently but forcefully back into the garage. “My son will tell you whatever you want to know.” He called to Persy over his wife’s head.

“Everything Ryan, you hear me!”

Back in the garden they sat down at the plastic patio table on the stoep. “Are you going to arrest me?” Ryan’s one eye was slightly squint, exacerbating his air of terrified bewilderment.

“Not if you tell us the truth,” Persy said.

Ryan locked eyes with Dizu, who he seemed to find less threatening than Persy. “Please don’t tell my dad. He’ll kill me. And my mother will go ballistic. She’s like, hysterical. Everything’s a train smash with her.”

Persy was not interested in the Fortuin family’s histrionics. “Tell us everything you did last Friday.”

Ryan licked his lips nervously. “I got back from school about three. Then Jasper came to sleep over.”

“Jasper?” Persy asked

“McKillian.”

Persy and Dizu exchanged looks. Both thinking, *small world*.

“He used to be at school with me at Logos? He left when he was, like, eight, but we stayed friends. His mom dropped him off, just after three. We stole some of my dad’s beers and vodka – ” He hesitated.

“The truth, Ryan.” Persy said.

“*Ja wel*, we met this dude on the beach. Duncan.”

“The Rasta?” Dizu asked.

Ryan looked surprised. “How did you know?”

“Let me guess. You scored some weed.” Dizu said wryly.

Ryan looked relieved that it was out. “*Ja*. It was very strong. Then we walked back to my house. When we like passed Andy Sherwood’s house Jasper got all weird. He hated him.”

“Why?” Persy asked.

“Because I like overheard my parent’s saying that Jasper left the school because Andy like molested Jasper. I told Jasper and he like freaked out completely.”

“So you’re outside Andy’s house. Then what happened?” Dizu asked.

“There was this crummy old Honda Ballade there and Jas said, ‘That used to be my mum’s car’ and then he said, ‘Why don’t we prank him?’ Y’know, like pretend to steal the car, freak him out for a laugh.”

“And then?” Dizu pressed. It was like drawing blood from a stone. Persy drummed her fingers impatiently.

“We forced the door and Jas like did the wires.”

“What time was this?”

“About three.”

“Can either of you drive, as a matter of interest?” Persy asked.

“Jasper can, but not so well. He was acting crazy. He said we should go to Ocean View and like get some more weed.”

The rest of Ryan’s story corroborated Sean Dollery’s statement. The boys had driven into Ocean View. They’d stopped to speak to a corner dealer who’d called Sean. Sean had hopped into the car and directed him to a house where they scored. Afterwards they had dropped Sean off at the Schneider’s. From there the

two boys had driven to the lighthouse, parked and taken the boardwalk to the rocks near the Kom, where they got stoned and drank the beers. “After that I like wanted to go, cos I knew my dad would freak out, he’s kind of strict. But the car wouldn’t start. I wanted Jasper to go to the bottle store and replace my dad’s beers, otherwise I would get into shit and he said no, so we split up. I walked home.”

“What time was this?”

“About five or six? I told my dad that Jasper had stayed behind at a friend that he’d bumped into in the village. He didn’t come back for ages, so my dad was going to look for him. I had no airtime so I couldn’t phone him and warn him to get back here.

Hey look, I’m really sorry about the car. I didn’t mean to do it and then I was too scared to say anything after the dude was found dead. I thought we’d get into major shit.”

Joel Fortuin was relieved to find out that his boy was not about to be dragged off to Pollsmoor, and backed up what Ryan had said. Colette McKillian had dropped Jasper off around three and the boys had gone off to the beach. Colette had stayed for tea and chatted to the Fortuins for an hour. She now taught music at an exclusive private school, which meant Jasper could attend for free, but she always liked to catch up on gossip about old colleagues at the Logos school. She’d left around five. Ryan had returned home at seven for dinner, saying that Jasper had gone to friends nearby and didn’t know when he’d be back. At about

ten thirty Colette McKillian had phoned the house looking for Jasper, asking why he was not answering his cell phone.

“She got into a terrible state when she found out Jasper was not here. She’d been fine in the afternoon, she chatted with my wife, very calm but she was a different person on the phone – she’s quite an unstable woman, especially about Jasper. By now I knew there had been some fun and games because a six-pack of beer and half a bottle of vodka was missing from my bar fridge.”

Joel had taken a torch and gone looking for Jasper. “I went all over Kommetjie. None of his friends had seen him. In the end I found him passed out on the beach near the Kom. Drunk. *Jiss* man, I was mad as hell at both of them. Then I rang Colette to tell her I’d found him.” Joel laughed. “They had one hell of a *babbelas* the next morning – they slept until the afternoon.”

“Anyone have it in for Sherwood to your knowledge?” Dizu asked.

“There was some trouble at the school, but this was years ago when Andy and Crane and de Groot were on the Board of Trustees. Crane and de Groot wanted to sell off the school’s land to build one of these security villages. They said we could use the profit to build permanent classrooms in place of our wooden huts and prefabs. The land was donated to us so we decided not to sell. Crane and de Groot thought Andy would vote with them, which would have given them the majority. But he voted against them. Crane was mad as a snake I can tell you. He and Andy had a punch up in the school parking lot.” He laughed. “A bit of *skinder* for the parents!”

“Not the only bit of *skinder* apparently,” Persy said. “We heard Gregory Crane got his own back by telling parents at the school that Colette McKillian had accused Sherwood of molesting Jasper.”

Joel looked shocked. “Who told you that?”

“Your son overheard you discussing it with your wife. He passed it on to Jasper.”

Joel put his head in his hands and shook it in disbelief. When he looked up, he was genuinely distressed. “I had no idea. Oh man, that’s terrible. Colette never wanted Jasper to know.”

Dizu speculated as they drove away, “Jasper could have run into Sherwood somewhere on Friday. He had motive and he certainly wanted to get back at him. Colette knew Jasper was missing at the time of the murder, that’s why she gave him an alibi.”

Persy recalled Jasper’s ‘Criminal’ T-shirt. The way he’d slouched into the kitchen and paused at the fridge door, eavesdropping on her conversation with Colette. “I think tomorrow we’ll pay the McKillians an unannounced visit.”

## Thirty-six

Colette opened the piano and started on her scales, warming up for her rehearsal of Schubert's lieder in preparation for her concert the following weekend. But she could not concentrate, could not relax. She went into the bathroom, opened the cabinet and checked how many anti-anxiety pills were left in the box. Had she taken her dose today? She couldn't remember. In any case, they hadn't worked – she was as anxious as ever. She took another one with a gulp of water from the tooth mug.

Jasper was up in the pepper tree in the front of the house listening to music on his iPod. It was his way of escaping from her and getting out of their cramped living space, although he said he liked the view of the mountains. The tree had grown so big it now filled the small garden. Her landlord was always threatening to prune it, worried that sooner or later one of the brittle branches would break off and damage the roof. She always put him off, because Jasper point-blank refused to have it cut back. He'd taken to going up there even more often lately, since he'd found out. Ryan Fortuin and his big mouth. But was he to blame? He was a typical teenager. He would share whatever he knew with his peers, bound as they were to a secret brotherhood that excluded adults. No, it was Ryan's father Joel that she was furious with. You could trust no one to be discreet, it was rumour and innuendo and gossip all the time. Especially in Kommetjie. People had nothing better to do. She was so pleased to be out of there. So glad she had moved to Kenilworth. It was worth the congestion and blandness just to get away from the

insular community, the toxic gossip. So incestuous. Everyone knowing everyone's business.

She called Jasper in for lunch, but he couldn't hear her, his earphones plugged in blocking her out. He'd been quiet, very quiet, since the girl detective had come. Colette went out into the garden just as a train went clacketing by on the railway line. Tiny birds rose screeching from the power lines and whirled up like pieces of ash in the grey sky. She signaled to Jasper to remove the earphones. He reluctantly popped them out of his ears.

"Jasper, come down from there," she said.

"Why?"

"Because its anti-social."

"I'll come down if you tell me what the police wanted."

He'd been on about it ever since Persy Jonas' visit. Colette felt unable to answer. Who knew what they wanted, what they were looking for?

"You lied to that detective." He was staring at her with narrowed eyes, as if he hated her.

"I didn't want them to give them a reason . . ." Her protestation sounded feeble and unconvincing.

"A reason to what?"

He was hunched over in the tree, as if poised to leap onto her at any minute.

"Reason to what?" He was almost spitting at her. "Tell me the truth, mom. And I will tell you the truth. Or don't you want to hear it?"

He looked so big and threatening from this angle, his large shoulders bursting out of his T-shirt.

“I’m only looking out for you, Jasper, that’s all!”

“That’s so lame and you know it. I’m the one who has to look out for you! Because I don’t know what insane thing you’re going to do next!”

That word choked her. *Insane*. His eyes looked slightly glazed over.

“Have you been drinking?”

“What’s that got to do with it, mom? I’m asking you about the police! What did you tell them? Just answer me!”

She couldn’t bear his anger. It made her panic and she couldn’t think straight.

“I told them nothing, Jasper.” She had softened her voice in an effort to placate him. She mustn’t show him that she was afraid of him, of the possible thoughts going through his head.

“Don’t worry darling, please!” She reached up to touch him, to reassure him. “I will take care of everything.”

He shrunk back as if her touch would burn him. “Don’t touch me!” She heard the crack as the branch split from the tree. He didn’t fall far, maybe five foot at the most. But it was the way he did it, the twisted way he fell and then just lay there. She knew with the most dreadful certainty that he would not get up again.

\*

Titus lived in a small house in a forties style Kuils River house in a street inhabited mostly by cops. Solid brick but nothing fancy, a 350 metre squared plot,

a lone pine and some oleanders on the boundary. An attempt had been made to pave the driveway and abandoned. Weeds had grown up between the few bricks laid down, the rest piled near the gate. Typical cop's house, Marge thought, things left half finished, half maintained. Came from always being called out in the middle of things, domestic chores the lowest on the list.

Inside, however, in Letitia's domain, you could eat off the floor, everything spick and span. Budget African themed decor, a big TV, lots of framed quotes from the bible, praying hands and decorative crosses. Letitia was a quiet, unassuming person, but Marge was in no doubt as to her strength of character. You do not stay married to a policeman for twenty-five years unless you have fortitude. Letitia had been a nurse at Groote Schuur, then a sister. Now she had a slightly more comfortable position working as a private paediatric nurse. She was supremely competent, cooking, caring for children and putting in a hard day's work. She represented everything that was right about the world, the real world, the world that Titus put his life on the line to protect.

Their daughters Melinda, seventeen, and Charné, twenty, fussed around Marge, filled up her glass with sparkling wine opened specially for the occasion and heaped her plate with white rolls, fried onions and coleslaw. Titus came in with a full plate of *wors* from the backyard.

"They don't call me the *Boerewors Baron* for nothing," he said. "Even in this wind I cook a fine piece of *wors*." He plopped the plate in the centre of the table. "Right, who's going to say grace?"

After the meal, Letitia and the girls left for church, leaving Marge and Titus alone with the wrestling on TV. “Sorry to gatecrash your family time,” Marge said.

Titus had settled himself on the sofa, looking slightly incongruous among the banks of plump satin pillows. He tore his eyes away from the TV, where a muscle-bound maniac in a zebra skin unitard was aiming well-aimed kicks at his opponent’s head.

“Hey, it’s a relief, man. Women! They never stop talking. I’m away such long hours they gobble me up when I’m around – you know how it is.”

Marge felt a hollowed out feeling in her chest, as if her heart had disappeared for a moment. “It goes by so damn fast,” she said. “Next thing you’re wishing you’d never spent a second away from them.”

“*Ja*, I complain, but they are what get me out of bed every morning.” He sat up little on the sofa. “So now, what’s this about Sherwood and the Clyde Cupido case?”

Marge quickly filled him in on her interview with Raubenheimer. “Sherwood was out on a pass from the Phoenix Centre the day Clyde went missing. Then some ten years or so later, Colette McKillian accuses him of molesting her son, Jasper.”

Titus looked mystified. “Where are you going with this, Marge?”

“You don’t think it’s significant?”

Marge went over the case again in her head. Clyde had been sleeping in the house, his mother was ironing in the kitchen, his older sister was in the garden. No one saw anything. He had simply vanished. Seemingly into thin air.

“The cases are years apart, Marge.”

Marge took a deep breath. “I interviewed Sherwood about Colette McKillian’s accusations.” She was transported back to the dark, hot room at the school. Sherwood’s pale face and gingery hair had stood out in the gloom, while Colette McKillian seemed to recede into the darkness the more Sherwood protested his innocence. “Sherwood was very persuasive. There were some signs that the child had been abused, but I didn’t trust my judgment. I was afraid of repeating the same mistake I made with Theo Kruger.”

“Uncertainty comes with the territory, Marge. We accuse the innocent. We trust the guilty. We are only human. What is important is that we take responsibility for our mistakes and move on.”

Titus leaned forward and patted her arm. “I know how much you want to find out what happened to Clyde Cupido, Marge, believe me. It’s never far from my own thoughts. But there’s not one piece of evidence to link Sherwood to Clyde Cupido’s disappearance. Or to his abusing the McKillian boy.”

Marge knew he was right. But she couldn’t shake the feeling that the cases were connected. But frustratingly, the ‘how’ eluded her. She needed one extra turn of the key to open the lock. “What about Clyde Cupido’s mother? She might remember seeing Sherwood.”

“Beverley Cupido became an alcoholic and disappeared. I don’t think she was a devoted mother to start off with.”

Marge remembered the pungent smell of sweat and alcohol in the low ceilinged room with the photograph of Clyde on the mantelpiece and Beverly Cupido’s disinterest in the small girl plucking at her sleeve.

“Jonas thinks the Sherwood case is pretty straightforward, Marge.”

It could have been read as a rebuke, but his tone was sympathetic.

“Ah yes, Persy Jonas. She’s an interesting girl. What’s her background?”

“Catholic. Good school – Star of the Sea in St. James. First class pass at Police College – highest marks in the detective course. Headstrong, but good work ethic.”

“What about family?”

Titus shrugged. “Don’t know. She’s a private person. Close to her grandfather, who has cancer.”

Marge sighed. “I hate to play the bloody shrink here, but I have to bring this up. I think she’s got post-traumatic stress disorder. She’s very guarded, nervy as a cat. Hyper aware. Not surprising with all she’s been through this last week, but I think it goes deeper.”

Titus rubbed his face wearily. “She’s not the only one, Marge. You could say the same of my whole unit.”

For a brief moment Marge had an insight into Titus’ life. He always put a good face on the burden of his responsibilities without being a happy clappy optimist. His faith had come the hard way, tested by fire and beset by doubts and

fears. It was the reason he was so highly regarded by the detectives in his unit. He walked the talk, as they said.

And he had a point. The entire police force worked under intolerable strain. But it went deeper with Persy, Marge was certain of it. If anyone's judgment was clouded on this investigation it was Persy's. She'd fixated on Sean Dollery and was hostile to any suggestions that Sherwood's death was linked to his private life. It was as if she had a blind spot. Marge knew full well that she was not free of prejudices herself. In fact there was so much psychic and emotional noise between herself and Persy that she wondered if they would ever be able to recognise the truth.

## Thirty-seven

Alphen House College was built next to the biggest prison in Cape Town. One way of ensuring discipline, Dizu quipped. The cluster of buildings made a nod to some sort of Cape vernacular style, but the effect was somewhat marred by being wedged between the prison, a gated golfing estate, the American embassy, a faceless business park and a shopping centre. The same garrison mentality had rubbed off on the school. The students were imprisoned by high walls, electrified fences and booms.

The school itself reeked of privilege and new money, with well-kept sports fields and a tuck-shop that was a franchise of an expensive health food chain. The kids in their khaki chinos and golf shirts had the corporate look of management on a team building exercise.

“It’s like a whites only business park,” Persy observed as they made for the reception. Elaborately draped chintz curtains formed a backdrop to the blonde woman who sat behind a walnut desk facing a computer terminal. She looked like a broker at an exclusive financial institution. Well, that’s what a school like this was, some people would say – an investment in your child’s future. Persy would rather go with Yoliswa Xolele and her garden any day. But then what did she know? She didn’t have kids. The school you chose for your kids was the clearest indication of your real values, she remembered Titus once saying.

The receptionist wore a crisp professional smile. “May I help you?”

“We’re looking for Colette McKillian.”

The blonde's face took on a concerned expression, "I'm afraid she's still at the Constantiaberg Clinic."

Persy must have looked confused.

"Oh, don't you know? I thought that's why you're here. Her son Jasper fell out of a tree over the weekend and broke his back." She looked earnestly concerned. "It's tragic. It seems he may be paralysed. It's a real loss to the water polo team just before the Bishops game as well. Coach is devastated."

The call came in from Phumeza as they left the reception area. "You'd better get back to the station right away – Sean Dollery's been sprung."

Persy felt as if someone had knocked all the wind out of her. "What the hell happened?"

"Chester got bashed on the head from behind when he took Dollery's food. Titus is the *moer* in. He's demanding a full investigation."

"Who was on duty?" Persy asked.

"Mhlabeni. He said he never saw a thing."

They went out on patrol to Ocean View looking for Sean, knowing they were wasting their time. Dizu drove, Persy silently fuming next to him. They had arrested Dollery by a fluke. It was unlikely to happen again. They drove to Kommetjie to the Schneider house, but no one was there. Now they were combing the small roads of Kommetjie.

"Mhlabeni's involved. I know it in my bones," said Persy. "He was shitting himself in case Dollery talked."

“We may think it, but we can’t prove it,” Dizu said.

They turned down towards the sea and found themselves in a cul-de-sac that ended at the Kom.

“Well, well. Look who’s doing a spot of poaching this morning,” said Dizu, cutting the ignition.

Persy looked up to see Duncan hauling a large canvas bag out of the bottom of a small motorboat. His long dreads were silhouetted against the sparkling water.

“Hello. Duncan, is it?” Persy said, as they crunched over the shell strewn beach towards him.

Duncan was not pleased to see them. “*Ja* – detectives – what have I done now?”

“Drowning kittens?” Dizu pointed to the telltale heaving in the canvas bag.

“I got a permit.” Duncan protested.

Dizu put out his hand. “Let’s see it then.”

Duncan went through the pantomime of hunting through his pockets while clicking his tongue in annoyance. “I must have left it at home.”

Dizu opened the bag. Grey green feelers and claws scrabbled and clicked from inside the canvas. “Whoa – enough *kreef* here for five quotas, my friend.”

“What have I done to you that you must *mos* now harass me over a few fish?”

Duncan complained.

“Sold drugs to underage boys for starters.” Dizu closed the bag on the crayfish.

“I don’t sell. I share da holy herb. It’s my religion.”

“Sean Dollery around?” Persy asked.

Duncan shook his head. “Won’t come near me. Too *poep* scared.” He cackled, showing brown teeth. “I nearly killed him once.” He flexed a stringy arm at Persy. She recognised some faded prison tattoos. “I had not found Jah at that time.”

“What was the barney about then?” Persy asked

“About Andy, actually. Andy Sherwood. Those people at the school, those *fat cats*. Asha de Groot,” Duncan rubbed the tips of his fingers together to demonstrate the plentitude of notes that Asha had at his disposal, “Gregory Crane – lawyers – you know you can’t trust *them*. Anyway, they wanted to build on the school’s land, but Andy stopped them. The land is for all of us, my sister. Only Jah can like own the land. Andy wouldn’t do it. So they got Dollery onto it.”

“What does that mean?” Duncan’s eyes were bloodshot, but he seemed relatively lucid. He hawked and spat into the grass. “How did the school burn down? That’s the question. Andy got the community to build it again, so Crane pressed on him. Pressed heavily on Andy – a bad story about child abuse. Andy had to leave the school. And now they’ve killed him.” Duncan shook his head. “It’s sad. Andy was a righteous man. A real righteous man.”

Persy could not make out if there was a grain of truth in what Duncan was saying and was fast losing patience with his ramblings. “Why didn’t you tell me that you knew the boys in the car with Dollery?”

Duncan looked cagy. “I don’t know them.”

“They said they bought *dagga* from you on the beach on Friday afternoon,” Dizu chipped in.

“The white boy’s a suspect,” added Persy. “He was missing when Andy was murdered on Friday night.”

Duncan gaped at her in mock astonishment. Then he laughed and shook his head, “My sistah – that boy could not have killed a cockroach. He passed out right here on Friday night.” He pointed at the nearby ablution block. “Half a bottle of vodka and some very strong ganja in him. I sat on the beach and played guitar, kept an eye on him. When the schoolteacher come I duck before he see me.”

Persy and Dizu stared at him. “You were with him all the time?” Dizu asked.

Duncan looked affronted. “I wouldn’t leave a *laaitie* alone on the beach like that. Someone could have murdered him.”

He put out a grimy paw for his bag. “Now can I have my *kreef* back, please? A man must live and what comes from the sea Jah says is free.”

\*

Jasper lay immobile in the hospital bed, his body bolted into a cast including his neck and head. Only his eyes moved, watching them. Colette slumped exhaustedly at his bedside, her face a small wedge of white enclosed in a dark shawl. Like a widow mourning her dead. “We would like a word with Jasper, Mrs. McKillian,” Persy said. “You may be present if you wish.”

Jasper managed to get the words out through a dry mouth. “Go, ma. Please.”

She put up no protest. When she went it was as if a shadow had left the room. Persy took her place at Jasper’s bedside while Dizu stood at the door.

The boy looked much younger with his hair smoothed off his face and his lip ring removed. There was no sign that he had even begun shaving yet.

Immobilised, his physical presence was diminished. He's only a child, Persy thought. "I'm sorry that we have to speak to you now, but it's very important."

"That's ok," he whispered.

"Ryan told us about what you did on Friday night."

Jasper licked his lips. The skin was cracked and dry.

"Did you see Sean Dollery again after you and Ryan parted at the lighthouse car park?"

"No. I didn't see anyone. I went to the beach." He spoke with a rasp while taking shallow breaths, in too much pain to breathe deeply. "I thought I would try and check out the comet. I had Ryan's dad's vodka, about half a bottle, and some weed left over. I just wanted to blot everything out, y'know."

"So you were not with your mother?"

"Why? Did she say I was? Don't listen to my mom. She gets some pretty weird ideas when she's sick." He was getting agitated. Persy helped him sip water through a straw. The effort exhausted him and suddenly his face crumpled. "She thinks I killed Andy." Tears slipped from the outside of his eyes and ran down his cheeks, wetting the pillow.

"What's even worse is that I thought she'd done it. How crazy is that?" He began weeping, his whole chest heaving. Persy reached over and wiped his cheeks, reflecting that Jasper's short life was already a litany of bad luck. Sometimes her job could make her feel like a monster.

“My mom’s a brilliant pianist, you know,” he whispered. “She’s going to be famous one day – when she gets better.”

Outside the ward, Colette sat hunched over on a vinyl chair, nursing a polystyrene cup of coffee. Persy took a seat next to her. Dizu kept his distance, out of earshot.

“Why did you tell me Jasper was with you on Friday night?”

Colette was ashen under the hospital neons. She kept turning the cup between her hands. Her fingernails were dirty and bitten to the quick.

“I will tell you anything you want to know. All I want is for my son to walk again. That’s all I want.”

“Do you think Jasper’s a suspect? Is that why you lied?”

Colette looked terrified. “No! Why would I think that?”

“Because you found out he knew about the accusations against Sherwood. And because he was missing at the time Sherwood was killed.”

Colette was trembling. “It – was the shock of Andy’s death. I got confused, that’s all.”

“Jasper is not a suspect, ma’am. He was passed out on the beach at the time of the murder. We have a witness who was with him.”

Colette stared at Persy. Then she covered her face. “Thank God,” she whispered. “Thank God.”

Outside the hospital Dizu shook his head in disbelief. “They each suspected the other and tried to cover for each other.”

“Sometimes the hardest thing is to tell the truth to the people you love.”

Persy’s voice was strained. For a brief moment Dizu wondered if she was talking about the McKillians.

University of Cape Town

## Thirty-eight

Bongo, mercifully oblivious to the human dramas of life and death, hobbled along on the sand, his tail wagging weakly, pausing occasionally to gingerly sniff the air. It was the first time Marge had been to Long Beach since she'd found Sherwood's body over a week ago. Being on the beach brought the past week rushing back, and all the painful histories associated with it: Colette's allegations against Sherwood, Clyde Cupido's disappearance, Theo Kruger's death. A week that had churned up false accusations, aroused suspicions and revisited bad decisions. The police were nowhere nearer finding the killer and the prime suspect had escaped custody.

Long Beach was never the same from one day to the next. Every morning and evening it was a completely different landscape. This afternoon the tide was far out, revealing miles of beach awash with stranded kelp. There was no trace of the tidal pools that had entrapped Sherwood's body. Instead, the rocks were marooned in a desert of white sand. How long before this pristine stretch was blighted with the same ugly sprawl as Hout Bay? Marge looked up at Chapman's Peak and the familiar tall palms of Bellevue standing out above the bush, a disquieting reminder of Crane's planned development.

A young surfer was out past the breakwater, practicing his moves in the late light, his body in the wetsuit as sleek and shiny as a seal as he twisted against the waves, at one with the shimmering, roiling ever-moving water. It could have been Will just a couple of years ago.

The beach was dotted with dog walkers and at a distance some horse riders enjoyed the last light. A couple of dogs frolicked in the salty lagoon thrown up by the earlier high tide, wet and shaking themselves, ears folded back with pleasure. Bongo looked on wistfully as one of the dog owners lobbed a stick into the lagoon, sending a Jack Russell terrier racing after it, scattering silver drops of water.

A tanned young woman in a bikini top jogged past, towel around her waist, wet hair slicked back. A boy of nine or ten, brown skinned with sun-streaked hair, trotted beside her and chatted away in a high-pitched voice. She and Will had been the same once, had the same easy camaraderie, the unspoken easy love flowing between them like light or oxygen. Behind the woman and boy a familiar figure came into focus. Frizzy halo of gingerish hair, a long paisley-patterned skirt, stringy arms sticking out of a tank top. Renuncia Campher. She recognized Marge and waved her arms like a windmill, heading for her. "Hellooo Marge!" she trilled.

"Where have you been?" Marge said more sharply than she'd intended. Renuncia's watery eyes widened in apprehension.

"You needn't look terrified. It's only about NAG matters," Marge explained.

"Oh!" Renuncia looked guilty. "I've been away. Well, actually I checked into Phoenix. Trying to get my imbibing under control," she admitted sheepishly.

Marge immediately regretted her accusatory tone. No wonder the poor woman looked even more frazzled than usual. "Sorry, I had no idea."

“Is it urgent?” Renuncia rubbed the tops of her thin, freckled arms as if she were cold.

Marge fished for the paperwork in her carry-all. “I wanted you to sign this.” She found the petition crumpled amid fags, keys, Tex bar wrappers and various pairs of glasses. “It’s an objection to Gregory Crane’s proposal to build a housing estate at Bellevue.”

“Oh!” Renuncia flushed. “It would be hypocritical of me to sign this, Marge. I’m the agent on that sale.”

Marge should not have been surprised; that was Renuncia for you. A well-meaning airhead who couldn’t recognise a conflict of interest and saw no contradiction in being a gatekeeper for the environment as well as a facilitator for greedy developers. She was so disingenuous it was hard to get angry with her.

“I feel so bad about Ivor Reitz,” she said. “Oh my word, he really wanted Bellevue for his mountain conservation project. The whole lease complication was working in his favour until Andy up and died.” She covered her mouth “God, that sounds awful!”

Marge was baffled. “What lease complication?”

“You don’t perhaps have a spare fag do you? Sorry to do this, but I’m hanging for a smoke.” Marge took out her pack. Renuncia’s trembling hand as she lit her cigarette was a giveaway. Marge wondered how long she was going to remain sober.

“Remember Eva Szabo? Who owns Bellevue?”

Marge vaguely recollected a rather eccentric old bat with a strange accent.  
“Hungarian. Mad as a March hare. Big pill popper.”

“That’s the one.”

“How did you get involved in all this?”

“The kaolin mine on the mountain had eroded the land above Bellevue and Eva fretted about mudslides in the winter rains.” Renuncia puffed away nervously. “So I oversaw a landfill for her. That’s how I ended up as her agent. I’ve looked after that property for the last twenty years now.”

“And where do Ivor and Crane come in?”

“When Eva asked me to sell Bellevue I went straight to Ivor because he’s coveted that land ever since I can remember. Always going on about rehabilitating that part of the mountain. He put in a reasonable offer, which Eva was considering. Everything was going tickety boo until Gregory Crane got wind of the sale. He came with an amazing offer via Asha de Groot. Of course Eva went for it. Ivor Reitz was terribly upset, but he couldn’t match the money.”

“Crane was boasting about the development at the meeting last week,” Marge said. “It must have been a blow for Ivor to lose the sale.”

“But wait, that’s only half the story.” Marge was slightly annoyed to see Renuncia help herself to another cigarette – Marge jealously hoarded her ten-a-day ration.

“Out of the blue Andy drops the bombshell that he has this damn lease and he’s moving into Bellevue. Turns out that he and Eva Szabo liked to hit the pots together at one time.” Renuncia gave a rueful smile. “Drinking buddies. I know

all about it, believe me.” She shivered. “Anyway, they got pissed one night and Eva gave Andy this ridiculous ten-year lease on Bellevue for virtually no rent. Naturally Andy had no intention of moving in, he was just humouring the poor old dear.”

“But surely a lease like that can’t be binding!”

“Oh yes, it is. Rental laws protect the tenant in this country. You can’t sell the property either, unless the tenant gives up the lease. Eva was furious, but Andy wouldn’t budge. Said they would have to wait ten years for the lease to expire. Crane hit the roof. He said Andy had a history of being obstructionist and was doing it for revenge. I got the feeling they had some old feud on the go. Ivor Reitz was thrilled of course. He thought Crane would withdraw his offer and then Eva would sell it to him. He wasn’t worried about the lease. He was quite happy for Andy to live there, not that Andy wanted to live there at all. He just wanted to mess up Crane’s plans. Then Crane got de Groot to make Andy a ludicrously large offer to buy him out of the lease.”

“Did he take it?”

“He said he’d think about it. I think he enjoyed dangling Crane on a string. Next thing I heard Andy was dead. Dreadful, isn’t it?”

## Thirty-nine

Sean Dollery waited for Mhlabeni at a small clearing off the back road that ran through the wetlands at the back of Masiphumelele. He was being eaten alive by *mozzies*; he hated being anywhere near the location. Everything was okay in this area until the blacks had moved in, especially the foreigners. Some of them were even making inroads into his business. Drugs. Guns.

Fuck Mhlabeni, late as usual. Sean had only agreed to meet him because he owed the man for springing him from Fish Hoek's holding cells. Not because Mhlabeni gave a fuck about him, the bastard didn't want the goose that laid the golden egg out of action, that's all. When their arrangement had been mutually beneficial it had been fine, but lately Sean was feeling more and more like Mhlabeni's bitch, getting jerked around like a puppet on a string. Thing was, he couldn't stand being locked up, couldn't bear it. His father had locked him in the outhouse, sometimes for days, and left him to sweat, waiting for his thrashing. The waiting was worse than the actual beating. Once he'd overheard his father talking with the men in the yard, talking about Clyde Cupido's disappearance. His father said Clyde had been taken away by men who did things to him. Sean could not imagine what these things were but they had sounded shameful and terrifying. In his worst nightmares Clyde was taken out of a hole in the black earth and hurt in a way Sean could only imagine, but that filled him with despair. Eavesdropping on that conversation was the defining moment of his life. Right there and then he swore that he would move with force in the world, dispensing fear, so as never to

feel afraid again. But the different images of Clyde that ran into each other could never be erased. They had left him with a horror of small spaces, of suffocation in the dark, of being buried and no one knowing where.

Locked up in the holding cell at the cop shop, the old memories and terrors had come back full force of being suffocated, confined, buried alive. Mhlabeni had smelt the stink of fear on Sean. Knew he could not risk leaving him there, that Sean would tell Persy and Dizu Calata anything to get out.

He heard the police van coming slowly down the track and pull up off the road. His senses were on alert; an animal of the streets is primed to notice the smallest change in his environment, no matter how small. The lights dimmed and he heard the sound of the door opening. He could tell by the heavy tread of the boots and the cheery whistle that Mhlabeni had come for a return on his favour, and Sean knew exactly what it was.

\*

Persy made herself a small *braai*, enjoying the heavy full moon that hung low in the sky, silvering the caravan park so that it looked almost festive. She felt at home here after a couple of nights. Enjoying the privacy, not having to watch out for anyone else. Just Gaia the cat, who'd made herself scarce. Marge had called earlier with some story about Sherwood having a ten-year lease on Bellevue, and urging her to speak to Gregory Crane. It sounded far-fetched. Persy rang Crane's home and cell number but only got an answering machine, a recording of his drawling fruity tones, with a tinkling and fluting New Age musical accompaniment. What a *poephoh!* She would follow it up in the morning. For the

moment she was off-duty. Mhlabeni had a search party out looking for Dollery. She was not holding her breath.

She tried to do some paperwork in the caravan, but it was hot and stuffy. She needed an early night. The moon was up, so she left the sliding window slightly open with a safety latch on and the blind up so she could see it from the bed. She took two sleeping pills, hoping for total oblivion, or at least a mercifully dream free sleep and fell asleep almost immediately, still fully dressed, with the moonlight on her face.

Something woke her, a sudden weight on her legs – Gaia, the cat!

She could have sworn she'd locked her out. The animal leapt soundlessly onto the floor and went over to the window expectantly. Persy checked the fluorescent numbers on her watch. Eleven. She'd been asleep for less than an hour. Despite the sleeping pills, she was hyper-alert. It was the absence of sound that bothered her. Then she heard it – a light scratching. Not the cat – Gaia was poised for flight, her eyes shining in the dark. The scratching came again. From the window. Someone had forced the catch and was sliding it open, slowly. Through the Venetian blinds she could just make out his profile.

Sean Dollery.

Persy reached for her weapon at the same time as something bright flew through the air, briefly illuminating the inside of the caravan. The burning ball hit the floor with a flash and burst into flame. A choking smell filled the air.

Petrol.

Flames licked along the trail of spilt liquid, shooting rapidly along the built-in plywood finishes: the caravan was a perfect incinerator. She rushed to the door, but it was barricaded from outside. Both windows were ablaze, the terrylene curtains crumpling in a crackle of melting plastic. Gaia darted under the bed with a protesting screech. The cat flap! Persy dropped under the bed and felt the welcome draught of cool air. Gaia vanished through a small open trapdoor in the floor scarcely big enough for a small child to fit through.

The air was being sucked out of Persy's lungs by the fire. The smell of burning hair filled her nostrils; her dreads and eyebrows and lashes were being singed by the heat. There was no time for calculations. She crawled under the bed and forced her head through the narrow opening, gasping as the cool air hit her burning lungs. She took off her glasses and threw them out first, then forced a shoulder and arm through the gap. For the first time in her life she was grateful for her tiny frame. But she was not small enough. Her other arm could hardly fit through, and the pressure on her chest was unbearable. Every rib was being forced into her diaphragm – there was no space to breathe, or cry out for help, and she thought, *I'm going to burn alive!* Gaia's frantic miaows came from somewhere below her and she wanted to say, *Shut up, it's no use, I'm going to die*, when suddenly strong hands gripped her forearms and pulled. She almost passed out from the agony of feeling her whole body torn in two and she thought *It's Sean trying to kill me*. Then with a pop she slithered through the hatch, her hips gave a last protesting shriek and she shot out of the cat flap like a baby from a birth

canal, dropping on damp ground, still clutching the gun in one blistered hand. The strong arms hoisted her up. “You okay, lady?” The man held out her glasses.

Persy put them on, the world swum into focus. She recognized the concerned beaten down face of the white man she’d seen earlier on the caravan steps. “*Ja* – thank you... thank you.” She gasped, bending double to force air into her lungs.

“They’ve called the fire brigade,” he said, but she was already moving away from him towards the park entrance, breaking into a run as her lungs cleared, clenching her teeth at the pain in her hand. The boom at the gate was locked down and padlocked.

He hadn’t got in that way.

Looking back at the caravan she saw the spreading blaze, licking and crackling at Hamish’s homemade pergola. People were racing from all directions, shouting, most of them in nightclothes, carrying buckets and other containers of water. The park manager emerged from the office lugging a fire extinguisher. It was too late – with a whooshing sound the sky lit up, gilding the shocked faces of the watchers with a fiery glow, and the whole caravan burst into flames.

Persy skirted the inferno and the shocked onlookers and slipped into the laundry room. She grabbed one of her T-shirts from the dryer, soaked it in cold water in one of the concrete tubs and wrapped it around her burnt hand, now throbbing intolerably. She slipped on her damp trainers, grateful for the Velcro straps instead of laces, jammed her pistol into her waistband and ran out to the perimeter wall bordering Masiphumelele. If he’d come in anywhere, it would be here.

She moved her attention to the perimeter wall, bent over, moving slowly, looking for the breach, holding her wrapped hand up in the cool air.

There it was.

A man-sized hole dug at the shallowest point of the wall's foundations. So much for electric fences. She scrambled through and found herself at the back end of the wetlands, not far from Philip Makana's shack. She could see the silhouettes of the shanties through a small copse of trees and hear the distant sound of radios and television sets.

She picked her way through the squelching mud, sweating in her light tracksuit pants and T-shirt. Trees and bushes stood out starkly in the silvery light of the moon. The night was alive with the din of frogs and crickets and the whine of mosquitoes.

Fortunately her night vision was good and she soon spotted the narrow path. Snapped twigs and crushed grass showed that he'd got into the park here, and left the same way. If she followed the path, she should be on his trail. There was nowhere else to go, except into the water. She swatted her arm, already itchy and swollen. She was being eaten alive by bugs. She would have to move with care. The wetlands were also full of snakes, and treacherous marshy areas.

She heard him before she saw him, heard the rustle of leaves and the creak of leather. He stepped out and she heard the soft pop of the bullet, felt the shell skitter near her shoe. He had a silencer. A weapon of assassination. She dropped and rolled, scrambling for the cover of nearby bushes, keeping low so she would not be silhouetted by the moonlit sky.

“Police!” she shouted. “Drop your weapon!”

She heard the second pop, then another. Three bullets. She was like target practice. She crawled towards a fallen tree only to find herself knee deep in water. She moved for better cover, but was suddenly up to her thighs. A splash – he had also hit the water. He was close, so close she could almost smell him. Her every sense was alert. One thing she knew, she was faster. She hoisted herself onto the tree trunk, feeling the scrape of bark and broken branches, and swung her legs back onto dry land, then scrambled to her feet and ran ducking and weaving along the path, getting a good start on him. Her heart was pounding, her breath ragged. Adrenaline pumped through her body, giving her speed and focus and dulling the pain in her hand. Somewhere behind her she heard his grunting as he lifted himself onto the log. She turned to look. The tree was sinking under his weight. At that moment he was clearly visible. She raised her weapon, aimed and fired, feeling the recoil from hand to shoulder. She heard him hit the water, then sounds of his scrambling, and thrashing.

Then, silence. Had he dropped his gun in the water? She moved tentatively towards the trunk, her weapon ready, every sense alert for sound or movement. She strained to hear above the chattering night insects and grunting frogs, overlaid by the rustling reeds.

Far away a bird screeched and took off from the silvery water. She edged her way around the fallen tree. There was no sign of him. Back on the path she saw the trail of silvery wet drops, like mercury in the moonlight. Blood. She’d got him, that’s for sure. He had to be somewhere in the marshes.

She followed the trail along the path, only for it to end abruptly at the water's edge. Somehow, he had vanished into the wetlands.

Like an animal going to die, on his own.

Dizu only got the message at after midnight when his cell went off with a call from the station. He left immediately, not waiting to get the full report, cursing the duty officer for not calling him earlier.

*Persy attacked with a petrol bomb.*

He saw the smoke from the road, and pulled into the caravan park to find it filled with fire service vehicles. They'd been too late to save Hamish's caravan. A blackened, smoking pile of debris, hanging from a twisted metal frame, was all that was left of it. Persy in a muddy, sooty t-shirt and jeans looked shaken, but okay. Her hand was wrapped in a cloth of some kind.

She went over the events of the night quickly and surprisingly coherently.

Dizu could not hide his alarm. "Jesus Persy, why did you go after Dollery on your own? He could have killed you!"

She shrugged. "There was no time to think about it. I knew I would lose him otherwise."

Dizu stared at her small face, smudged with dirt and smoke. Her dreads were singed and her glasses askew. Her sheer guts and determination amazed him. He fought an impulse to put his arms around her and rather allowed his fear for her safety and anger at Dollery to overwhelm him.

"That bastard –."

“I’m okay. Really. Mhlabeni was here when I got back. He went straight out with a search party.

“Mhlabeni! For all we know he sprung Dollery in the first place!”

She shrugged. “I know.”

“What was in the caravan?”

“Some toiletries – and my wallet. My clothes were in the laundry room, and my ID and stuff is in the safe at the station. Cell phone’s a goner. But I’ve got my weapon, at least.”

Dizu thought of the Logos fire, a stone’s throw from here. Both fires had been on the outskirts of Masiphumelele. Both intended for specific targets. Was Dollery the common thread, the fire starter? Dizu looked around at the shocked, smoke-blackened faces of the caravan park residents, children in pajamas, women with hair in curlers. Thank God there had been no wind or the fire would have spread quickly. These temporary structures, gimcrack and flammable, were especially vulnerable. He felt a dull pressing anger and a compulsion to go hunt for Dollery. His phone rang.

“How is she?”

“She has a burnt hand, but she’s okay.” He passed it on to Persy. “It’s for you.”

“Dizu told me what happened.” Persy recognised the voice of Marge Labuschagne. “I’ve called to let you know that I’ve made up a bed for you.”

It was the last thing Persy expected. “I can sleep at the station.”

“Nonsense. I’m always on the lookout for orphans. It’s called the empty nest syndrome.”

Persy heard something in Marge’s voice. Felt a spark of recognition.

Loneliness.

“And I have the remains of a very good lasagna in the oven.”

Persy could not remember the last time she’d eaten a homemade meal. “Well, ok then. Thank you,” she said awkwardly. She rang off feeling strangely close to tears for the first time that night.

\*

Crane had enjoyed his evening. He’d done three hours of very fast Ashtanga yoga and rewarded himself with a blue fin tuna and Asian vegetable salad for supper. He was finishing off with some Tranquility tea while staring out at the moon rising over the sea from the open glass sliding doors. Earlier he’d seen dive-bombing seagulls and dolphins porpoising. Must have been a bait ball out there. He relished the last mouthful of tea, filled with a sense of satisfaction. This was the life. He deserved it. All of it.

He went to the big roll-top desk and took out the plans and surveying maps, and spread them out on the long beech wood table that was the same colour as the sand that fringed the ocean. He examined the mock-up illustrations of “Bellevue Exclusive Luxury Security Village” with satisfaction. The development was high end: slate, glass and wood, some fynbos landscaping as a sop to environmental concerns, and, of course, the essential element needed for maximum returns: security, security, security. Palisades, electric fences, twenty-four hour security

guards, state of the art surveillance cameras and monitors, sensors, the whole bang shoot. Fear was a great economic driver – frightened people would pay anything to feel safe. They craved investments and personal security. They also sought assistance from the gods, and looked to someone who could soothe them and reassure them of spiritual protection. His guidance in such cases was invaluable. Someone had once referred to Crane as a witch doctor and warned him that not all supernatural entities have mankind's best interests at heart. He thought that quite a laugh, really. If he was a witchdoctor, then he was a very sophisticated one, with a very exclusive clientele.

He turned his attention back to the mock-ups. Bellevue was merely the first building block in the far grander vision of Noordhoek acquiring the same status as Camp's Bay: complete with cafés, shops and expensive hotels, maybe even a golf course sweeping down to the beach. No more of those little nasty bungalows shrouded in milkwoods, or rundown old holiday houses like Marge Labuschagne's. The tree huggers could scream and shout all they wanted, progress and development were inevitable, and big profits were there for the picking. The thought of Marge Labuschagne brought a pain to his temples. He should take some meds before the cluster headache set in, with accompanying voices that drove him to bed in a dark room for days. He felt the familiar tension in his neck and with it the compulsion to distract himself.

He was being drawn back to his favourite and most secret pastime. He removed the laptop from the safe. It had been the first thing he'd done when he moved in here – put in the safe. It would not do for anyone else to have access to

his computer. He booted it up. There was a secret 'portfolio' he'd been relishing for weeks. A live feed of a seduction, a grooming, of a delicious innocent known only as 'Raphael'. An angel indeed.

As he booted up he had an odd moment of disquiet about the site, a sense that his transgressions were being observed. Oh, not from 'Shamil' or the other so-called 'guides' that he conjured up for clients. No, these were the real ones, the disembodied voices who had first come to him at the Home after Lance had 'chosen' him. At first they only came when he was in extremis but now they were increasingly present, as much as he tried to push them away. Trouble was they had minds of their own. They came at random times, increasingly so. It was not like you could coerce or reason with them. They were the price he paid for having access to other worlds, for being more conscious than the average Joe shmo, who just went through life completely oblivious of the fact that you could mould your life by controlling and shaping spiritual impulses through the strengthened will. Was his life not testament to that fact? Not long ago he had been renting a backroom hovel in Sun Valley and driving an 80s Corolla rusted through the boot and windscreen.

While the laptop was downloading he got up and went over to the window and admired the Mercedes parked in the steep gravel driveway. Out of nowhere, a presence came to him. They arrived like this, seemingly out of thin air, sometimes plaintive, sometimes unbearably garrulous, a ringing cacophony in his head. But this time it was different. A miasma of dread moved over him, choking him and chilling him to the bone. The fear came from an acknowledgement, long denied,

that he would have to pay the price for his transgressions. The voices were soft but soon they would be louder, until they were roaring fit to make his head burst; they were coming for him and there was nothing he could do. He covered his ears, but he could still hear them. They would never let him be, the headaches would never go away. In fact they were getting worse. His biggest fear was insanity. Ending up like Colette McKillian had, in a clinic, trussed up like a chicken and force-fed drugs.

From the corner of his eye he saw a shadow slip in from the passage. He froze. Someone was in the room with him.

“Who are you?” He heard the terror in his own voice.

The figure lurched toward him like a marionette, jerky and stinking of something foul.

“How did you get in?”

“I can get in anywhere. You should know that.”

Relief swept over him, but it was short-lived. As Sean Dollery came closer, Crane saw the blood-soaked rag around his shoulder, and his thousand yard stare. It was not a good situation.

“What happened to you?”

“That bitch Jonas shot me. I came up through the back of Ocean View over the mountain – but they got the dogs out on me. I need a car. And money.”

Crane could not suppress a shudder of distaste at the sight and smell of him, wet and swampy like a wild animal. How dare he intrude like this, bringing his

grimy ghetto problems into this sacred personal space! “I told you never to come here.”

Sean moved forward, threateningly. “Fuck you Crane. I’ve done you enough favours when it suits you. Give me your car keys.”

Crane’s normal reaction would have been to brazen it out, but it was as if something had sucked all the will from him. Sean was clearly agitated, asking him for something, but the other voices were a cacophony, gibbering and swearing, drowning him out. Cluster headaches, the neurologist called them, but Crane knew better. He knew all the hounds of hell were after him, entreating him to join them. Sean was getting more impatient, pushing him, propelling him backwards towards the open window. He could hear the plaintive voices screaming out to Sean, egging him on. Sean was demanding keys. Crane pulled them from his pocket and tossed them at him, but still they kept coming, gibbering and screaming from the other side. He felt the cold air at his back from the open windows behind him and heard Sean’s warning shout. But it was too late. With a cry he felt himself falling, and as he did, he prayed in terror that he would be like ash blown away by the wind, rather than find the voices waiting for him on the other side.

## Forty

It was after midnight by the time Persy was dropped off at Marge Labuschagne's house. She had momentary misgivings at the sight of the inviting lights shining out from between the half-hidden milkwood, an oasis of normality. What if the invitation to stay had been no more than a polite knee-jerk reaction? What if she was greeted with dismay, or incomprehension? Then where would she go? She was too drained by the day's events to look for a place to sleep. She was trembling with hunger and exhaustion after the adrenaline rush. She opened the gate and Bongo nearly stopped her heart as he limped towards her, tail wagging tentatively. My nerves are shot, she thought as she hunched down to pat him.

Marge opened the door before she could knock, and relieved her of the laundry bag filled with her scrunched up clothes and damp trainers.

They went straight to the bathroom, where Marge got out her first aid kit and gave Persy some strong painkillers. Then she dressed the blisters on her hand. Miraculously, they were the only serious burns.

"I've never known anyone to have so many narrow escapes in one week." Marge's voice was gruff but her touch was careful.

Persy again saw the flash of the petrol bomb, smelled the burning plastic and singed hair. "Singed my dreads," Persy said, feeling her hair ruefully.

"If that's the worst of it you can count yourself very lucky," Marge said.

They went into a big open plan kitchen, a haphazard clutter of kitchenware, old recipe books and pots and pans. Marge opened the dryer and loaded Persy's wet laundry. Then she poured them both generous glasses of wine.

"Uh, no thanks," said Persy. "Some water's fine." Booze would send her right over the edge now. She dare not flip into one of her states.

"All the more for me, then." Marge began dishing out the remains of a lasagna and salad. "I hope you're not a vegetarian or anything foolish like that." She took a large gulp of her wine. Persy tried to eat but only succeeded in moving the food around on her plate. Marge pretended not to notice. "Any idea where Dollery could be?"

"No. He could be anywhere." Persy thought that if he managed to get to Ocean View he would head for the mountains. He knew those mountains like the back of his hand. But where would he go from there?

"How's the rest of the investigation going?" Marge asked.

Persy filled her in on Ryan Fortuin and Jasper McKillian's joyride on the night of Sherwood's murder. Marge looked dismayed at the news of Jasper's accident. "Poor kid, how dreadful. I feel sorry for his poor mother. She's been through the mill."

Later Marge took Persy upstairs. "I kept the door closed to keep the cats out."

Persy was surprised that Marge had remembered her allergy. "I'm revising my opinion of cats, actually," she said, considering that she probably owed her life to Gaia.

Marge opened a door off the landing. “The bathroom’s over there. Will is around, but he sleeps over the other side. You’ll be private here.”

The warm glow from a bedside reading lamp bathed the single bed, the duvet drawn back, a clean towel folded at its foot. Fresh flowers were arranged on the chest of drawers. It had been Persy’s childhood fantasy to have a room like this, but she’d thought they only existed on TV or in magazines. Marge opened the curtains. “You’ve got a view of the mountain from here.” Persy glimpsed the moon above the mass of Chapman’s Peak. Higher than when she’d been in the wetlands earlier. Was Sean still out there?

“Seen the McNaught comet yet?” Marge’s voice broke into her thoughts.

“No.” Persy gave a weak smile. She wanted to say, thank you for this, for everything, but she found herself unable to speak. By the time the words had come, Marge was gone, leaving Persy’s laundry, dry and neatly folded, on the bed.

Marge was locking up the house for the night when she remembered that she hadn’t mentioned Sherwood’s stay at the Phoenix Centre and the suspected link to the Clyde Cupido case. Titus had put a damper on some of her wilder speculations, but there was still the mystery of Sherwood’s lease. Ivor would be able to fill them in. She would take Percy to meet him tomorrow. She drew her curtains. Far off, over the valley, airplane lights twinkled on and off in the sky. She imagined the passengers, lulled by the engine’s roar, sleeping under the dimmed lights of the plane’s cabin, unaware of the comet’s trajectory and the tail

of vaporising ice burning up a million miles long through the galaxy. She got into bed and switched off the light. For some reason Persy's tentative smile came back to her. It was the first time she'd seen her smile. She was so serious about everything. It had made her look shockingly young, and surprisingly feminine. She's just a child, thought Marge. But a child in need of more than a square meal. A child in need of emotional succour. She thought of the daughter she'd never got to know but who was always present like a shadowy half glimpsed spectre between Matthew and Will. A daughter who would have been twenty-five now. Same age as Persy. Would she have been anything like the young detective? Brave, self-sufficient, vulnerable. Marge felt the tears come – for the daughter she would never have and the sons who'd grown away from her, for Louis, now estranged, and the family they had once been. The rest of the night she hovered between waking and dreaming, seeing comets streaking through the sky and the lighthouse at Kommetjie sweeping its soft beam over the ocean. The last image she saw as she finally sunk into sleep was a comforting one: Bongo looking up at her, his head cocked to one side, his big ears pricked.

## Forty-one

The birds, the dying light, or is it dawn? Sean can't tell now, but can feel the heat seep out of him, the water, the very elements, into the earth. He had finally got here, but it had cost him. That fucking bitch had shot him right through the shoulder, shattered bone and nerve. He could move his arm, but every jolt to his shoulder was agony. He'd been forced to cut across the wetlands through the mud and the murky water, keeping clear of Ocean View and Masiphumelele, where roadblocks had been set up. He'd found himself outside the exclusive gated estate built on the wetlands adjoining the old Imhoff Farm. He skulked in the dark like a cowering dog, listening to the electric fence whine and click like a demented insect while he waited for Pietchie.

Pietchie was pissing in his pants about all the roadblocks and refused to go further than the Misty Cliff's turnoff. From there Sean was forced to go on foot to Crane's house. That freaky house. Full of spooks and fuck knew what else.

He felt a burning nausea every time he remembered that shrieking cry as Crane plunged from the window, as if the devil himself was after him. Sean had taken the Merc and got out of there as fast as he could. He'd come here, to the only place he'd ever felt something close to peace, before everything went wrong. A place where he could hide from his father. The secret world with the cool trees. Here, in the attic room with its smell of damp wood, where Persy's face had shone among shimmering dust motes, her eyebrows like moth wings against her brown skin. How old were they then? Six, seven? *Laaities*.

The birds were getting louder as the room lightened. Persy knew the names of all the birds. From Poppa. She had pointed out sunbirds feeding on the protea bushes that day, when they took the path out of the milkwoods. Something of his present weakness was a painful reminder of his childhood. "A weakling," his father had called him. He had been sickly, had always struggled to keep up with Persy, his laboured asthmatic breath shameful and noisy. Her thin brown legs flashing in and out of sight, always just ahead of him, always just out of reach. He was older and bigger than her, but she was faster, at everything. Quick to learn things at school, things he knew he would never learn, no matter how many times she explained it in her impatient voice.

He used to be so shit scared up here on the mountain, of the snakes and the baboons and the mountain's echo, but he would never tell her that because she would have laughed, her dark eyes with their naked, open look challenging him. She would use her sharp little elbows on him, and say, "*But why? Why?*"

Her mocking voice suggesting there was some light, some possibility in his life, if he could only work it out. Life out of the ghetto, away from the violence and the poverty and the dirt. All things seemed to fade away until only the sound of her voice was left, "*Why? Why?*", blending with the sounds of the waking birds, but still he did not sleep, only waited, knowing that eventually she had to come.

## Forty-two

Persy woke to an empty house. In the kitchen she found a note from Marge saying that she'd gone to the post office and Persy was to help herself to breakfast. It had a P.S. – *We are having lunch with Ivor Reitz*. Persy had been lulled by Marge's warmth and sympathy of the night before. The note was an unpleasant reminder of the woman's infuriating habit of meddling in the investigation.

Alone in the house Persy felt like an interloper in the white middle-class world, with its space and air of innate privilege. It was a world she had never experienced, and she was both envious of it and intimidated by it. She called in to the station. The search party had found no sign of Dollery. The dog unit had gone out again at dawn but had lost the scent in the wetlands. She made instant coffee, then wandered into the living room. Although Marge was absent, her presence was everywhere, in the many photographs of herself and her family: the ever genial Will, a surly older boy who must be his brother and, lurking in the background, or slightly apart, an untidy bespectacled man around Marge's age, with an intense stare. The ex-husband, probably.

The cats dozed in the armchairs. Bowls of fynbos were drying up and shedding onto dusty surfaces. The room had a comfortable, cosy air, if you ignored the mess. No one would accuse Marge Labuschagne of being houseproud. Books and magazines spilled off the coffee table, a couple of used teacups and a pot stood on a tray, toast crumbs and smeared butter on a plate. Several CDs had been left out of their cases. Persy flipped through them. Classical stuff, foreign

men in tuxedos and bowties. And re-releases from the 80's by the look of them: Blondie, Devo, The Clash. A book lay open face down on the table. *Trauma and Memory*. A black and white illustration on the cover of a young girl hunched in a corner with bars of light falling over her. Like prison bars. Persy turned it over. The words jumped out at her: *The Characteristics of Denial, Compulsive Obsessive Behaviour, Nightmares, Flashbacks of Recovered Memory, Hyper-awareness*. She snapped the book shut. Psycho bullshit. Her hand was throbbing, and she kept seeing flashes of Sean's profile at the window of the caravan, feeling the heat of the fire, hearing the bird's cries in the wetlands. The disordered room, which had not bothered her earlier, now filled her with anxiety. She felt a strong urge to clean up; how could anyone live like this? It was chaos! She began stacking books into neat piles, moved on to packing the CDs back in their boxes and filing them alongside the others on the shelves, all the time castigating herself for taking up Marge's offer to stay. She had been vulnerable after the fire, and had let down her guard. What if the psychologist's hospitality of the night before disguised a darker, more sinister purpose?

Marge drove Persy down to the Reitz house in the late afternoon, a horrible noise coming out of the exhaust, though God knows where she would get the money to fix it, or buy a new car. When she had phoned Ivor earlier about Sherwood's lease on Bellevue, he'd sounded surprised that she should think the information relevant. Ivor was never the most forthcoming of men, but lately he had been more opaque and inaccessible than ever. Marge had had to exert some

pressure to get him to agree to meet with Persy. Then, as if compensating for his tardiness, he invited them for lunch.

Annoyingly, the way Persy was carrying on in the car it looked as if she shared his view that they were wasting their time. “We have our suspect, we just have to rearrest him.”

“What do you really have on Dollery?” Marge argued. “He’s explained away his fingerprints in Sherwood’s car. That leaves you with Schneider’s gardener who saw him drive past Masiphumelele on Friday night. To get a burger. That hardly sounds like evidence.”

“We have a bigger picture of Dollery than you do,” Persy said. “We’ve been tracking him for a long time.” Their old prickliness and rivalry resurfacing, as if the detente of the evening before had been no more than a brief cessation of hostilities.

“Nevertheless, I think you should keep an open mind until you have all the facts,” Marge retorted. Persy retreated into a sullen silence while Marge put on some music on the car stereo to lighten things up a little. Talking Heads, *My Life in the Bush of Ghosts*. An old favourite – those were the days. She could not relate to that electronic racket that came out of Will’s room.

The Reitz property was off Chapman’s Peak Road and spanned several hectares stretching back through the dense fynbos into the shadow of the mountain.

They approached through a pair of ornate wrought iron gates that opened onto an oak-lined gravel drive, along which several paddocks were neatly demarcated.

Horses gently cropped the grass, coats gleaming and rippling as they moved in and out of the dappled shade of the trees. Marge turned down the music. “Ivor restored this whole estate to pristine montane fynbos. Spectacular, isn’t it?” God, now she was sounding as proprietary as a groupie. *Get over it, woman*, she thought.

The house was an original 18<sup>th</sup> century Cape Dutch manor house with thick whitewashed walls, surmounted by *holbol* gables and single-shuttered casement windows. Persy stared intently at it and then promptly averted her eyes as if the sight offended her. What an odd little creature she was! The night before she’d been like a tired child, now she was sunk in a broody adolescent silence. Marge parked next to Ivor’s four-by-four Range Rover hitched to a horse trailer. Beside it was Morgana’s two-seater sports car.

The Reitz's housekeeper appeared on the *stoep* at the top of the curving steps, dressed in the uniform of the domestic: overalls, apron and *doek*. She ushered them into the cool high-ceilinged reception room. The flagstone floor gleamed in the late afternoon sun, as did the heavy Jacobean mahogany table on which rested a shining brass container filled with an ostentatious display of hydrangeas. Morgana descended the stairs to meet them, dressed in jodhpurs, boots and a crisp white shirt. Her eyes swept over Marge and zeroed in on Persy. “You must be Detective Jonas.” She flashed what she probably imagined to be an irresistible smile. “I’m Morgana Reitz. Come through, Ivor’s in the living room.”

They followed her lagging, provocative walk into a living room tastefully furnished with traditional Cape Dutch furniture. A severe style softened by the

pale sofas and patterned rugs. An adagio for strings provided a bland musical backdrop. Marge thought it looked as contrived as a movie set, with Morgana as the leading lady, no doubt.

“Darling, the police are here,” Morgana announced and then, as an apparent afterthought, “and Marge.”

Ivor sat on the sofa with a laptop open on the coffee table. He got up. “Ah yes. Hello, Marge.” He extended a hand to Persy. “Ivor Reitz.”

Persy hesitated before awkwardly shaking his hand. “Detective Persy Jonas.”

His eyes flickered over her bandaged hand. “What happened to your hand?”

“Minor accident.”

“Better watch that.”

Marge forgot how charmingly attentive Ivor could be when he put his mind to it.

“I thought we should eat outside? Take advantage of a wind free afternoon,” he suggested.

“Good idea,” Marge said enthusiastically. She was dying for a cigarette.

The terrace was shaded by a pergola weighed down by heavy purple bougainvillea. On the table was an ice bucket with wine. There were baskets of breads and platters of olives, cheese and salads. The centerpiece was a large bowl of glistening black grapes. Marge lit up, ignoring Morgana’s disapproving frown.

“Something to drink? Marge? Detective?” Ivor asked.

“I’ll try some of that Chardonnay.”

“A glass of water,” Persy said.

Marge thought that Persy had been ill at ease from the moment they'd arrived, but then the Reitz's house was pretty overwhelming by anyone's standards. The housekeeper delivered a tray with a pitcher of iced water with lemons and mint for Persy, while Morgana passed around big bowls of nuts and olives which she conspicuously avoided eating. In the bright daylight the Botox showed up as lumps under her skin. Marge took a large handful of cashews and crunched loudly. Ivor opened the bottle of wine with one deft movement. "Terrible thing this Sherwood business." He poured a generous glass for Marge. "How can I help?"

"I believe Mr. Sherwood was your tenant," Persy said.

Marge frowned at the girl's frosty tone. She took a big slurp of her wine.

"Yes," Ivor sat back relaxedly with his glass. "He rented one of my older cottages in Kommetjie. For seven or eight years now."

"We don't have much background on him. Did he give you references?"

Ivor laughed condescendingly. "I don't have the time to concern myself with details like those, I'm afraid. I leave those to my letting agent, Renuncia Campher."

Persy's lips tightened. Funny, Marge hadn't noticed Ivor's patronising manner before.

"He had a regular salary from the Logos school. I've heard he had drug problems at one time, poor devil. He was very reliable with the rent for a while, then he had a romantic disappointment and next thing he was out of work. He

started drinking heavily, I believe. He also reneged on his rent a couple of times – but I am always loath to evict people.”

Ivor could afford to be magnanimous. Lack of money was never a concern, although Marge had heard that the economic downturn had decimated his capital. But then what did she know? She’d never had an investment in her life.

“I believe Sherwood had a ten year lease on a property you were hoping to buy,” Persy said.

“Yes, I told Sherwood that I was happy for him to stay on at Bellevue if I became the new owner. I’m sure Marge has told you that I’m a conservation fanatic.” Ivor warmed to his theme. “The mountainside above Bellevue was degraded by kaolin mining on this side. Most of the open mine was filled in about twenty years ago. I want to rehabilitate original montane fynbos on the site. Unfortunately, Gregory Crane came in with a higher offer.”

“But didn’t Sherwood’s lease block that sale?”

“Well, yes.”

“But only if he lived on the property?”

“I believe that’s the case, yes.”

“Is this relevant?” Morgana looked pointedly at her watch.

Persy blinked slowly behind her glasses.

“It would have been in your interest to have Sherwood move into Bellevue.”

“I’m not sure what you’re getting at....”

“Sherwood was packing to move out of your house in Kommetjie.”

“Was he? I had no idea.”

“You know that Crane offered Sherwood money to give up the lease?”

Ivor looked uncomfortable. “It wouldn’t surprise me.”

Persy looked around at the tranquil garden. “Did you make Sherwood a counter-offer? Maybe pay him to move into Bellevue, to block Crane’s scheme?”

“Now hang on!” Morgana interjected.

Marge was taken aback and embarrassed. She was treating Ivor like a suspect. This was meant to be a conversation over lunch, not an interrogation!

“If you’re suggesting I had a motive, I take exception to that.” Ivor’s polite mask was slipping. “Sherwood detested Crane for personal reasons. No money on earth would have induced him to give up the lease.”

“He could have been playing you and Crane off against each other, which would have started a bidding war you couldn’t win. Maybe when you saw your dream of owning the whole mountain disappearing, you decided to kill him.”

Ivor laughed incredulously. “That’s ridiculous!”

“Ivor had nothing to do with it!” Morgana protested, somewhat halfheartedly, it seemed to Marge.

But Persy wasn’t letting up. “Where were you both on Friday night?”

Ivor was battling to stay cordial in the face of Persy’s hostile attack. Marge didn’t know whether to be impressed or appalled. One thing she knew, Persy would never cease to surprise her. “I was at home. I had planned to go and look at the comet with Marge, but I was sidetracked by work. I worked downstairs until about twelve, then I went to bed.”

“I’m not the bird spotting, star-gazer type myself.” Morgana couldn’t disguise the sarcasm. Was it aimed at Marge? Surely not. The goddess Morgana thinking Marge was a rival? That would be a laugh.

“I actually had a bad cold, so I went to bed early.” She jumped up in a swirl of perfumed hair. “And now, if you’ll excuse me, I have a riding lesson.”

Morgana swept out. Persy got up as well. “We must be going, too.” She looked pointedly at Marge, who pretended not to notice. Damned if she was going to let a good glass of Chardonnay go to waste, especially as things were just starting to get interesting. But Ivor and Persy were moving inside and towards the front door. She joined them on the stoep under the gable and, although she had never seen this view of the Reitz estate before, was unexpectedly assailed by a sudden and powerful sense of déjà vu brought on by the vista of paddocks and stables and the open bush. Why did she feel she’d been here before?

As if reading her thoughts Persy asked, “How long have you had this land?” Her voice was neutral now.

“I inherited the house, but I bought the rest of the land twenty years ago.” Ivor had resumed his cordial tone, trying to restore the earlier conviviality.

“There used to be cottages over there,” Persy said.

“That’s right. We demolished them to build the stables. Do you know this area?”

“My grandfather lived here. On a smallholding.”

“Really? Who was that?”

“People called him Poppa.” Her voice was strained.

“Poppa Cupido? I remember him well! A real old school gentleman. Then you must be . . . ?

“Persephone. Cupido. Jonas was my mother’s name.”

Ivor was looking distinctly uncomfortable. Marge was confused. What were they talking about?

“Persephone. Of course! How could I have forgotten? Well I last saw you a very long time ago. You would have been . . . how old?”

“Seven. And Clyde was five.”

Marge literally felt the hair in her neck rise.

“Your brother, of course. That – that was a terrible tragedy . . .” Ivor tailed off, at a loss.

Marge felt the ground shift beneath her – suddenly nothing was as she’d imagined. . . Clyde Cupido, Persy’s brother? That small girl plucking at Beverley Cupido’s sleeve, the grandfather leading her away. *That* had been Persy. Everything Marge thought she knew about Persy, about Clyde Cupido and Theo Kruger, all her assumptions, had suddenly to be recalibrated in the light of these revelations.

She hardly registered the goodbyes and their return to the car. She started the ignition and they slowly drove away.

Persy sat like a statue in the passenger seat with her hands tightly clenched. After a while Marge had to say something. “I had no idea that Clyde Cupido was your brother.”

Persy looked away and stared out of the side window.

“Did you know that I worked your brother’s case?” Marge asked. “With Titus?”

She heard Persy’s sharp intake of breath and then the girl shook her head, but no words were forthcoming.

They drove on in silence. Marge felt a pressure to defuse the terrible tension. “I apologise for taking you there – I had no idea. It must have been such a shock. Particularly after the week you’ve had.”

Persy stared straight ahead.

“I think Ivor was as shocked as you were.”

Instantly she realized her mistake. Persy turned on her.

“Do you think I care about Ivor Reitz? He built stables for his fancy horses on my grandfather’s land!” The girl’s voice was tight with fury. “Poppa grew flowers and vegetables there, and his father before him. Reitz got his land for a pittance. It broke Poppa; he was such a proud man. He had to fix nets and do odd jobs to make ends meet, while that fucker drives a Range Rover and drinks wine on his stoep!”

“I’m sorry,” Marge protested feebly, “I honestly don’t know what to say.”

How could she explain how tainted she now felt because of her association with Ivor Reitz. How responsible. The fact was that a dreadful injustice had been done to Persy and her family by a man Marge admired and was attracted to.

Apartheid was always a fingernail scratching away at the skin. Old histories overlapping and resonating, preparing to detonate in the present.

“Drop me off at the police station please.”

A pregnant silence, heavy with unspoken words, filled the space between them. Marge gripped the wheel while questions bounced around in her head. Suspicions that had begun at the Reitz house, slowly at first, at the periphery of her thoughts, were now crowding in, making it difficult to focus on anything else. Persy had never told Titus that Clyde Cupido was her brother. Could she have found out that Sherwood was on a day pass from the Phoenix Centre the same day her brother disappeared? It would have been easy to find that out. Easy to cover up Sherwood's death and pin the crime on someone like Sean Dollery.

Marge dropped Persy off outside Fish Hoek Police Station. She watched her small figure hurry towards the entrance, shoulders hunched, head down, with an unshakeable feeling of disquiet.

The girl was hiding something. It was obvious from her impulsive behaviour, her fear of disorder, her defensive personality. Marge knew full well the signs of guilt and shame. Persy was punishing herself for some real or imagined transgression.

What if it was murder?

## Forty-three

“He must have wandered off and bled to death in the wetlands somewhere. His body will turn up.” Dizu was speculating aloud as to the fate of Sean Dollery over his third cup of Chai tea – a spicy concoction that had caused much guffawing among the other detectives at the station.

“Terrible way to die. Alone. In the dark.” Persy was hunched over a pile of dockets, shoulders tense.

Dizu carried on unsympathetically. “I’m not shedding any tears. He was a thug who made a living robbing people and selling *tik* to school kids.”

“He had a mother who loved him. And he was a father to a young child. Are you going to tell those women that he was just a thug and a gangster?”

Dizu thought her newfound censoriousness ridiculous. He couldn’t resist riling her. “Sometimes I think you’d be better off in one of the caring professions.”

“Community policing, big boy – ever heard of it?” The jest was undermined by the edge in her voice.

“What’s got into you? I thought you detested Dollery.”

“He didn’t get a lot of chances in life. His father used to beat the shit out of him...”

Dizu was taken aback to see tears in her eyes.

“You okay?”

“Why shouldn’t I be?” she snapped, and dipped her head back to the paperwork, face hidden.

“Did something happen with Reitz?”

She looked up, her face blank. “No. Just filled us in on the lease and shit.”

She gave him a summary of her afternoon at the Reitz interview, keeping the report-back short and sharp and to the point. He could tell there was more to it but the wall was up. He’d wait, ask her again when she was in a better mood.

“Sherwood’s fun and games with that ten year lease was an obstacle to Crane’s development deal, and we know Dollery did dirty work for Crane. Maybe Crane got Dollery onto Sherwood?”

Persy lifted her bandaged hand tiredly. “We have no evidence of conspiracy, but sure, go and interview Crane. See what you can dig up.”

Persy seemed to have lost all interest in the case, but there was no way they could close it even if Dollery was dead. There were too many unanswered questions.

“I’ve been trying to get Crane. I’ve called, left messages. No luck. I have an address, though. I’ll drive round there tomorrow.” Persy was staring into space, seemed to have hardly heard him. “Hey, you okay Persephone?”

“Uh, just tired.”

What a thoughtless insensitive bastard I’m being, Dizu thought. Persy’d had a hell of a week. No wonder she was frazzled.

“How’re things going with Marge Labuschagne?” he asked.

“It’s not working out.”

“I thought the ice had thawed.”

“She’s always sticking her nose in.” A warning to him as well. *Keep out.*

“You don’t have to stay with her. I mean, you’re welcome to stay with me.

It’s basic, but ...”

An awkward silence filled the room, the hum of the computers and the whirr of the electric fan suddenly very loud.

“Dizu listen, I’m not up for anything –”

His hand tightened on his desk, “Jesus – ”

“ – there’s no room for that stuff in my life.”

There was a long, strained silence. Dizu felt as if someone had punched him in the gut. When he spoke again his voice was tight with embarrassment. “You misunderstand me. I’m not coming on to you, Persephone.”

But he knew that if he was honest with himself, it was not strictly true.

## Forty-four

*With a grinding of metal and gears, the machine came for her. There was no escape. A relentless malevolence drove it forward. This time for her. There was no outrunning her fate: retribution was inevitable. Easier to turn and face it and welcome the sleep that would come beneath the cold black earth rather than fight, choking for sunlight and air.*

Persy woke gasping in terror, terror of Donny, of the terrible grinding roar of the double cam, terror of the bull-bars of the twin cab smashing into her, the exploding fireball in the tin box of a caravan, but worse than that was the darker deeper horror of the day before at Ivor Reitz's house, rising up like black water, seeping up from the depths from where it had long waited. By chasing down Sherwood's killer, she felt as if she were chasing down some lost part of herself, going deeper into darkness. From her first sight of the house's gables, flashes and fragments of memories had been coming back to her. Of Ivor Reitz himself she had no memory, but she'd heard Poppa talk of *Kleinbaas* Ivor, the master's son from the big house, who wanted to own the whole mountainside. Who'd pressed Poppa for title deeds to his smallholding and when Poppa could not produce them, had offered him a pittance for the land. Poppa knowing it was a damn sight more than he would get anywhere else, because coloureds were not meant to be living in this area anyway. It had been zoned for whites long ago.

The Dollerys, on the neighbouring plot, had been the first to go. Persy had watched Sean leave, sitting with the furniture on the back of his father's broken

down truck. The thought of Sean's father brought back another memory, of Sean lifting his shirt so that she could run her fingers over his thin boy's back, criss-crossed with scars, a legacy of his father's beatings. A memory buried until now.

As for Marge and Titus, she had no recollection of them coming to the smallholding. But then everything about that day and what followed was a blank, a vast black space into which Clyde had fallen. One night he was asleep beside her, his gentle breathing and the hooting owl the only sounds in the room. The next day he was gone, leaving her with no recall of his face or voice. Nothing, just the photograph Poppa kept hidden away in a drawer, a photograph that had once stood on the mantelpiece at home. A photograph with the face of a stranger. Long periods went by when she thought she'd imagined Clyde, that she'd never had a brother. But the nightmares always returned, leaking from a distant past. Some small thing, a smell, a sound, and a flash of memory would dart in at the edge of her consciousness, then anxiety would drive it back. What she remembered was the aftermath: her bereft mother staggering and slurring and sleeping for hours, even in the daytime; she'd eventually left for Jo'burg, never to return. Only Poppa remained. Poppa, who hid his grief and was always there to comfort her, a rock to cling to through the dark months after they moved to Ocean View, where they'd painfully reconstructed their lives. Just the two of them.

Half awake, chilled by drying sweat, she was disoriented by the strange bed, the unfamiliar room lit from a dim light left on in the hall. She scabbled around for her glasses and put them on. The room came into focus. The half open curtains of the window framed a black mass of mountain that was waiting to crush and

bury her. Fragments of memory returned. She was in Marge Labuschagne's house, in the belly of the beast. Marge with her prying, her seeking out of clues, of looking for hidden motives. How could she ever have imagined this place as a sanctuary, or that Marge Labuschagne could offer her some form of refuge? Tomorrow, she had to leave. Pack up and get as far away as possible.

She had an overpowering compulsion to wash; she felt sweaty, filthy, defiled by the nightmare. She slipped from the bed and stumbled out of the room onto a landing. She was sure there had been a bathroom upstairs, but all the doors in the passage seemed to have multiplied, each one looking identical to the last. She feared blundering into a maze of rooms, waking up the sleepers, exposing herself in this state. She remembered the bathroom on the ground floor and carefully felt her way down stairs that seemed dangerously steep in the dark.

She found herself in the kitchen with the dimmers turned down, the low light lending an air of menace to the shiny, overlarge pots hanging above the stove. Knives glistened on their magnetic strip, sharp as scalpels. She stumbled over to the stainless steel sink, which was not very clean, filled as it was with the remains of the meal eaten earlier. She shuddered at the sight of the dregs, found the dishwashing liquid and turned on the tap, waiting for the water to become scaldingly hot before pouring the soap into her cupped palms and scrubbing them all over with a small dishwashing brush. She scrubbed and scrubbed, feeling the relief wash over her and the terror swirl down the plughole with the hot soapy suds.

Then it came to Persy in a flash. Where Sean was.

The *only* place he could be.

Marge saw Persy pass in the hall, noticed the pistol jammed into the back of her waistband, and then heard the front door softly click shut. It had come as a shock to see Persy armed. Made her seem harder, even dangerous. Earlier she had stood in the kitchen, her small face all closed up, eyes wary behind the glasses and told Marge she was leaving.

“Where will you go?” Marge asked.

The girl shrugged. “Somewhere, but I can’t stay here.”

Marge stared at her closed up face, trying to reconcile her with the small girl they had questioned in the Cupido house hiding behind her grandfather’s legs, staring at Marge with her strange dark eyes. At the time she’d wondered if there was something wrong with the child, if she was autistic, or mute. She refused to speak, except through the grandfather. She had seemed so tiny for seven. “She was playing in the garden all afternoon,” the grandfather said about Persy, “she saw nothing.” Clyde had vanished from his room where he was having his afternoon nap. For the first time it occurred to Marge that they had not looked closely at the family members in the Cupido case, which showed how inexperienced she and Titus had been. In nine out of ten murders a family member was responsible. They didn’t suspect Beverley Cupido because she was so devastated and already showed signs of being an alcoholic. Then there was the grandfather, Poppa. He couldn’t have been more than fifty at the time. She

recalled an emotionally controlled, dignified man. A wiry farm labourer, strong as an ox. Where had he been when Clyde went missing?

University of Cape Town

## Forty-five

The mountain drive from Kommetjie to Misty Cliffs was almost narcotically beautiful. Today, however, the overcast sky covered the landscape with an ominous, brooding pall. The air had thickened and the sea was a gelid mass, barely undulating; it added to the anxiety Dizu was feeling about Persy. He wondered why she'd over-reacted that way. Sure, he was attracted to her, but he would never abuse their partnership. He was hurt and angry, but also concerned, his gut telling him there was more to it, that Persy was in a bad way. She was as fragile as fine glass, as if she would shatter from a loud noise. He sensed that it went deeper than the tribulations of the last week. Marge Labuschagne's advice would be helpful, but Persy would view any discussion between them as a complete betrayal.

He almost missed the house, it was so well hidden off the road. There was no sign of a car. He parked the Nissan and climbed out into the humidity, his shirt stuck to his back. He looked up at the house. *Very laanie*. The guy had serious bucks by the look of things. A full-length plate glass window had been slid open to the sea. The view must be something. So Crane must be in, just not bothering to answer his phone.

Dizu climbed the stone steps to the impressive door carved with African designs and rang the intercom. No answer. He gave a few short urgent punches to the buttons. He pushed lightly on the door. To his surprise it swung open under

his hand. He called out, “Mr. Crane. It’s Detective Calata from the South African Police Services!” Silence. Chimes tinkled somewhere inside the house.

“I’m coming in!” he called, advancing down the passage, one hand on his weapon. A spicy, cloying perfume scented the air. Slatted lozenges of light shone from a series of skylights covered by the reed ceiling. Quite a place. The passage opened into a large room that ended at the open floor-to-ceiling window he’d noticed from the carpark. The room was empty of furniture apart from some expensive looking cushions and mats on the immaculate wooden floor. He liked the African vibe, could imagine living here, staring out to sea while Lira or Femi Kuti played some mellow sounds in the background. On a low table against the wall stood an open laptop. A screen saver swept slowly over its screen. Asteroids moving through space. Dizu hit the mouse and a webpage opened. At first he thought he was looking at photographs of Crane and his son. A cute kid around eight. They were moody, high contrast pictures and it took Dizu a while to take in what they were doing. His first instinct was to close the laptop, to erase the images from his mind, but he knew he had to keep it open or they would never track the source of the material. He knew there were people who got off on kids, but he’d never seen it himself. And wished he never had. Now the images were imbedded in his head and, with them, some part of himself defiled. He took out his phone, making for the open window to get some air. His heart was beating hard and he felt unsettled. The room had a different quality to it now – menace seemed to thicken the air and a palpable and unsettling sense of fear filled him.

It was then that he saw what looked like bloodstains splattered across the pale rug and onto the dark wooden floor. He followed them to the window. The view was almost unreal, the house seemingly suspended between ocean and the sky. He felt vertigo assail him and, afraid of falling, he looked down, trying to anchor himself to the solid floor. That's when he saw the spread-eagled shape on the rocky mountainside, the limbs splayed awkwardly like a broken doll.

University of Cape Town

## Forty-six

Persy was on the path that led to the Reitz's stables Where Poppa's house once stood. It was surprisingly easy to find the back road from there. Overgrown, but as familiar as if she'd used it yesterday. Weeds pushed through the cracked tarmac bleached grey by the sun. A mountain road once used by the kaolin mine company, long disused. She followed the road until it became dirt and continued its steep trajectory up the mountainside. Overcast with a lowering cloud, the mountain looming oppressively close. She was soon breathless from the exertion of climbing. Humidity and heat had thickened the air to a warm soupiness, making breathing difficult and slowing her down.

Up ahead was the tunnel of milkwoods. She entered and the familiar black canopy enclosed her. Her footsteps made no sound on the soft, damp earth. The deep boom of the ocean was muted. Occasionally light filtered through the leaves from a jigsaw-shaped piece of sky.

*Up here, on the mountain, no one could see her, or Sean. They could disappear and no one would know. They came up here whenever they could, to get away from adult eyes. Today they'd been warned to stay away from the area because of the machines, and they would be in big trouble if anyone saw them . . .*

She had a sudden memory of Clyde. His voice cut through into the present, a piercing bird's cry, high and clear and getting closer, "Wait for me!"

*He'd been sleeping when they snuck out. He must have heard them leave and followed. He followed Persy everywhere, never leaving her alone.*

*“Go home,” she says, “you can’t come with us!”*

*He’s only five, but he stands his ground with exasperating stubbornness. His eyes are huge in his small face. Accusing. “Voetsek - go!” Persy shouts and raises her arm threateningly, as if to strike. “I’m warning you,” she puts on her most menacing face. “Go home!” But he keeps coming, short legs pumping, lower lip trembling. At that moment she hates him. For taking all their mother’s attention, for his stupid baby ways, for never leaving her alone for a moment. When he’s an arms length from her, she shoves. Hard. He loses his balance and topples over, upended like a beetle on its back, shocked into silence.*

*She takes off after Sean, passing him on the path, “Come, quick!” she shouts and the two of them are running away from him, and the black leaves are blocking out the sky. The wailing cry follows them through the trees. “Persy! Wait for me! I want to come too!”*

As suddenly as the memory had come, it was gone. The cry of abandonment, still echoing, blended with the cry of a passing gull. Persy carried on, walking rapidly, trying to control a rising panic, searching for the end of the dark tunnel of trees. Filtered light began to break through the leaves. She emerged suddenly into a dazzle of light. She had entered a massive circular depression, as if a large lake had become silted and grown over with weeds. Ivor Reitz’s words came back –  
*“Part of the open mine was filled in about twenty years ago.”*

The area had become a dumping ground: broken wood, old beams, a rusted mattress spring, used paint tins and lengths of tangled cable. Old car seats were upended in the bush. Foam rubber burst from their torn vinyl upholstery like pond

scum. She navigated the thick bush to avoid a sharp metal girder blocking the road. From there on the track became rutted and overgrown, petering out into a thicket of lantana and khakibos. She pushed through and emerged scratched and covered in black jacks at the top of a series of terraces. Straight ahead of her, stretching into the sky, were the eleven palm trees.

*They had stood here, in this same place, their eyes level with the tops of the palm trees.* In the twenty years that had passed, the palms had grown taller than all the other trees. Through the overgrown loquats, cypresses and eucalyptus that choked the descending terraces, she could see the rusted corrugated iron roof of the house below, ferns growing between the masonry and the guttering. A sight suddenly so familiar she wondered how she had managed to completely erase it from her memory.

Slowly she began the descent to Bellevue.

\*

Mhlabeni and Chester April arrived at Crane's house with a team and set to work dusting for prints. Dizu rang Marge's home, looking for Persy.

"We parted acrimoniously this morning," Marge reported. "If I hear from her, I'll ask her to phone you." So first Persy had turned on him, then on Marge. *You can run, but you can't hide, Persephone*, he thought, worry settling like a mantle on his shoulders.

Dizu told Marge he was at Crane's house, and explained what had happened.

Marge sounded surprised. "Do you think he jumped?"

“No sign of suicide. No note. We’ll have to wait for the autopsy. There were a lot of bloodstains in the house – but judging by his injuries, they weren’t his.”

Dizu thought about the openly displayed child pornography site, the missing car and keys. The thought of Dollery crossed his mind, but how would he have got here? Especially if Persy was right in thinking she’d wounded him.

Marge sounded shocked about the child pornography. “Colette McKillian was right then – Jasper *was* molested. But she accused Sherwood when it was Crane.”

“Bloody pervert.” Dizu was surprised by his feelings of fury and disgust. “And now he’s escaped justice. Good thing I didn’t get here first or I might have pushed him myself.”

He went down to the driveway to his car; it was too weird in the house. Mhlabeni’s car was parked next to the Nissan, with its trunk popped open. He glanced in as he passed. There among the usual crime scene paraphernalia, he spotted the can of petrol, bundles of rags – and matches. A fire-starter’s kit. As he’d suspected: Mhlabeni was up to his neck in this shit and working against them all the time. The Logos school fire, Dollery’s escape, the petrol bomb meant for Persy. Not that he could prove any of it, of course. And they were all so damn blatant about their relationships: Dollery the muscle, Mhlabeni the bent cop, Crane the moneyman. And child molester. He felt as if he was choking with fury. His feeling of impotence was overwhelming. What was the use of fighting corruption, anyhow? It was a tidal wave of filth washing over the whole country. He looked up just as Mhlabeni reached him.

“What is this?” he asked.

Mhlabeni's eyes went from the trunk of his car to Dizu's face, knowing what he'd seen but ignoring it, cool as a cucumber. "Child Protection Unit are on their way," he said, slamming the trunk shut.

The memory of the blackened caravan, of Persy's burnt hand and her eyes magnified by shock behind her glasses came back to Dizu, adding to his pounding rage.

As Mhlabeni turned, Dizu hit him. He felt the satisfying sensation of bone giving way beneath his fist. Whatever the outcome of the disciplinary hearing, it was worth it.

\*

The kitchen door was set next to a peach tree that clung to the crumbling stone wall of the terrace, its overlaid branches tumbling nearly to the ground. Bees buzzed furiously and the smell of rotten peaches hung in the air. Persy pushed the door open into the hot, dank room. It had once been a kitchen, but the windows were boarded over, the sink was ripped from the walls and the linoleum on the floor had perished into jagged holes. The smell of dust, damp wood and sea sparked jolts of memory like electrical charges in her head.

*"Persy, I want to come too!" His voice shrill with terror.* A little boy abandoned in the woods, like something out of a fairytale. A wave of nausea swept over her, turning her icy cold and leaving a slick layer of sweat in its wake. Her gun dug into her back, the metal hard and hot against her spine.

She went through the interleading room and out onto the long *stoep* at the front of the house. The view was breathtaking. The whole of Noordhoek stretched

below, rooftops half hidden in the milkwoods, the white strip of Long Beach and the shining wetlands, and finally Kommetjie and the tall spike of the lighthouse at Slangkop.

There was evidence of human habitation – empty beer cans and a three-quarter empty bottle of brandy, a sun bleached plastic ball. A vinyl-covered car seat, the same as the one she had seen on the dump, slumped lopsidedly against the wall. An open newspaper was strewn across it. She picked it up. Last week, Friday. The day of Sherwood's murder. Someone had recently sat down in this chair, had a few drinks and read the newspaper, while enjoying the view.

She turned back the way she'd come, noticing that a window had been ripped out, leaving some bricks from the crumbling masonry on the floor. One brick lay slightly apart, and was a darker colour. Another eye, less trained, would not have given it a second glance, but Persy crouched down to have a closer look. Blood and matted hair. It had been a weapon.

A floorboard creaked above her head.

Someone was upstairs.

She drew her weapon, heart banging painfully against her ribs, and carefully picked her way to the bottom of the staircase.

Silence.

She slowly ascended the stairs, knowing already what she would find. An attic room with small steel framed dormer windows set in the eaves. She hesitated on the threshold. The inner structure was timber and ceiling board, most of which which had been smashed almost systematically. Every window was broken. The

remains of old underfelt from a carpet covered part of the floor. Persy entered, tentatively testing the wood underfoot. A palpable tension, like a high-strung electrical hum, seemed to fill up the room, and with it the memories rushed back.

*They skirt the open mine past the resting machine, silent as a huge dead insect with its metal claw, and slip unseen past the driver eating his lunch under the trees. They have reached the terraces. They see the palm trees and the corrugated iron roof of the house and pause a minute, catching their breath. Then they run down the terrace steps two at a time, down to the back of the house. Sean lifts up the window for her and crawls in after her. They go through the kitchen and up the stairs to their special place. Here, in the top room of the house.*

She was drawn inexorably to the far window from where she would have a view of the lower path. As she moved towards it, she sensed movement from behind the door, but it was too late. An arm was around her neck, forcing her head back in a chokehold. Her stomach flipped at the smell of sweat and blood.

“I knew you’d come,” Sean’s voice rasped in her ear. He wrenched her arm backwards and upwards. The pain was agonising. She lost her grip on the gun. Next thing the cold barrel was jammed into her throat. She was half choking but it was pointless to struggle. As children she had outrun him, but now he was much stronger. He forced her towards the window, she resisting, so that they shuffled in a strange crab-like dance. He was pressed tight up against her, his body heat burning into her back, buttocks, thighs. They were at the window now.

“What can you see?” Sean’s rasp cut into the memory.

She could hardly get the croak out, “Nothing.”

“Fucking liar, Persephone – I know you remember.” He forced her head back around with the barrel of the gun. She struggled, twisting her head desperately to avoid the view, but only succeeded in tightening the chokehold he had on her and bringing the memories rushing back.

*They run to the window, giggling, breathless, to see if Clyde has followed them. They look down and there he is. Lit up by the sun like a camera flash he straddles the path below, a tearstained red-faced little demon, looking up at the house, searching for them. The workmen’s voices carry up to the window as they pack away their lunch and prepare to go back to work.*

She forced herself to focus on the shards of glass from the half broken pane, the spider’s web in the corner of the frame, anything to keep her eyes from being drawn to the road below, but the cracked and distorted lens of the glass could not stop the memory, or the view from this same window twenty years ago, from surging back.

*Clyde sees her and his mouth opens in a big O, preparing to yell his fear and outrage, but his cry is drowned out by the terrible roar as the machine shudders into life. Its giant claw rears up with its burden of black earth. Clyde turns to look, so small, smaller than a doll, his legs like sticks ending in the bright green sandals. The driver is too high up in the cab to see him. Persy tries to call out, but there is no sound in her throat. She can only watch as the great unthinking, unseeing monster bears down on the small figure and tips out its contents. One moment Clyde is there, and then he’s gone.*

Persy's knees buckled and gave way and she sagged heavily against Sean. His grip on her weakened. In that critical split second she forced his gun hand down on the jagged glass in the window. He cried out in pain and dropped the gun. She broke free, dodging the bloody hand as it shot out to grab her back. Sean lost his balance and fell heavily against the wall. Persy grabbed her weapon and trained it on him. He seemed to crumple in on himself and slid slowly to the floor, leaving streaks of blood on the wall. She got her first good look at him since she'd interrogated him at the station. He was bare-chested in an open leather jacket, one arm hanging loose. A torn up T-shirt formed a bloody tourniquet around his right shoulder. Blood was dripping rapidly from his hand onto the floor.

"Get up!" she croaked through her burning throat. Sean hauled himself to his feet, never taking his eyes off her, eyes so dark they sucked in the light.

"Turn around."

He turned around so that his back was to her, leaning against the window for support, edging his legs apart. Keeping him covered, she started to search him: her hands moving up his thighs, patting the pockets of his jeans and jacket, around his buttocks and up under his jacket, feeling the criss-cross ridges of the childhood scars on his bare skin. Beneath her hands she felt his ribs heaving, the wrenching sobs coming without a sound.

## Forty-seven

Later Dizu would not remember how he got to Bellevue, he drove so fast.

Forensics swarmed all over the place. Titus came to meet him. “She’s okay. She’s at Marge Labuschagne’s house.”

“And Dollery?”

“They took him to Victoria Hospital. Shoulder wound and a bad cut on his hand. He’s barely conscious, lost a lot of blood. Crane’s Mercedes was parked under some trees. There’s what looks like his blood on the seat. Dollery probably killed Crane and stole the car to come here. We also found a bag in the house containing Sherwood’s ID and driving license and some of his clothing. We’ll have to get forensics onto it, but I think he was killed here. Persy found blood and hair on a brick. It could have been used as the murder weapon.

“Looks like Dollery was responsible for both?”

“Looks that way, but we have to see test results.”

“How did Sherwood’s body end up on the beach, if he was killed here?” Dizu asked.

“We found blood in an old funicular, rusting in the undergrowth.”

“What’s that?”

“It’s a small cable railway built on the mountain slope. Like old-fashioned elevators that run up the mountain on rails. They used them to transport stuff down the mountain to the beach in the old days. It’s rusted up but still working. It

docks near Chapman's Peak Drive. From there you could easily tip a body over the edge into the sea."

Dizu stared up at the house, the tall palms bending in the wind against the darkening sky. "So Persy was right. It was Dollery all along," he said.

The house was dark, a wind coming up and banging the shutters, rain on its way. Persy sat in Marge's study wrapped in a blanket, curled up like a child. Her back was to the window, her face an unreadable blur in the darkness. The wind tossed the milkwoods in the window behind her, the low-lying branches creaking against each other and rustling the leathery black leaves.

"I want you to listen to me. That's what you do, isn't it?" Persy's soft voice was barely audible against the rising wind.

"Yes. If you want me to." Marge went to turn on the lamp.

"Please don't," Persy said. "It's easier in the dark."

What seemed like Marge's invasive scrutiny, so painful before, Persy could now see as a professional but compassionate concern. Marge would bear witness to her story without judgment or comment. Persy began slowly, haltingly, to speak, not sure if what she said made sense, or where the words were coming from, only knowing that she had to let them out before she shattered into a million pieces.

The fine rain had soaked Marge's jacket by the time she got back to Bellevue, having left Persy heavily sedated and sleeping. The sky had darkened so much

that it was almost impossible to see in the undergrowth. The police had set up klieg lights run from a generator, so the crime scene had an unreal movie set quality.

Coombes arrived with his team and went meticulously through the whole area, carefully clearing the brush around the top part of the funicular. Marge felt an overriding sense of tiredness. She was also worried about Persy. The girl would sleep for hours, and Will was at the house with her, but there was no way of knowing what her mental state would be when she woke up.

The skies opened and the rain fell. Marge took shelter with Titus in his car. He listened as Marge told him what Persy had said.

His face wavered in the watery light from the kliegs reflected in the rain pouring down the windscreen.

“I had no idea Persy was Clyde Cupido’s sister,” Titus said.

“No one did,” said Marge. “I only found out yesterday when we went to Ivor Reitz’s house. Her family owned part of what is now his land. Returning there must have brought it all back.”

“Why did Persy not tell anyone?”

“They must have been too traumatised. It seems neither she nor Dollery spoke of it, not even to each other. They may even have believed it hadn’t really happened, and that Clyde would come back. Young children that age can’t grasp the concept of death. Persy, who was younger, completely buried the memory. Not that it was ever really gone ... this case forced the memories to resurface.”

“Will she be okay?”

“With cases of repressed memory the patient has to internalise the trauma and then form it into some kind of narrative in order to consciously make sense of it. It’s a slow, painful process.”

Marge again saw the small girl slip her hand into her mother’s, and suffer the rough rejection. Persy had carried her terrible secret, hidden for two decades, even from herself. A secret that had resulted in Theo Kruger’s suicide, in Beverley Cupido deserting her child, maybe even Sherwood’s death.

“She will heal if she can forgive herself,” Marge said.

“She’s not the only one,” Titus said looking at her. “You must also put Theo Kruger behind you.”

“Persy was a child. She wasn’t responsible for what happened. I *knew* what I was doing.”

“You had two young boys, Marge. Kruger was a suspected paedophile. We were a young and inexperienced investigative team. Kruger was psychologically fragile. It was a fateful mix, but we can’t change what happened. Ask for forgiveness. Redemption is always a possibility, even for the worst of us. You worked on the Truth Commission, you should know that.”

Marge wished she could believe in Titus’ all-forgiving God. But she couldn’t. If anything, the Truth Commission had shown her the limitations of forgiveness. Some things could not, and should not, be forgiven.

Just then Chester April tapped on the window.

Titus rolled it open. For a moment Marge thought Chester was weeping, but his face was only wet from the rain. “We’ve found something,” he said.

## Forty-eight

The bones were pitifully small.

“It's a child. Between four and five, I'd guess. Male.” Coombes looked unusually somber in a dark checked shirt and rainproof jacket.

“Clyde Cupido. Five year old boy. He went missing from this area twenty years ago.” Titus' strained voice betrayed his feelings. It's not only me who has been haunted by this case, Marge thought.

“Until I have DNA samples I can only speculate, but from what I can see here, the time frame and the size of the skeleton, it's quite possible.”

The SOC team had fallen silent, going about their task with grim expressions. Everyone hated finding a child. Marge shivered, seeing Theo Kruger's face. “*Yes I love children. Since when is that a crime?*” It hit her forcibly, as if for the first time, that Theo Kruger had been innocent. The wind blew grit against their skins. The black South Easter was gaining force, bringing wind and rain. They would have to move fast to secure the scene before the rain washed the evidence away. Next to the covered body a few pitiful artifacts were laid on a plastic evidence sheet. Some clothes, muddy and disintegrating.

“That's what made us dig. It was half protruding on one of the upper terraces.” Coombes pointed out a single small green plastic sandal.

Marge recognised it instantly. “It was Clyde Cupido's,” she said. “He was wearing them the day he went missing. I had a photograph of him wearing them. It was in my file.”

“Can’t tell how he died,” said Coombes. “There’s no sign of trauma to the bones.”

“He was buried alive,” said Marge. “When they filled in the mine.”

A dull rumble of thunder rolled up from the beach, and a flash lit up the sea. The raindrops were heavier, plopping on the ground, shining like beads for a moment before sinking into the dry soil. Titus took a torch and walked back with Persy through the overhanging milkwoods. It was cool but oppressive, muting the boom of the sea.

“I’d better let Persy know,” Titus said heavily. His head had sunk into his shoulders like an old man’s.

“Let me do it,” said Marge.

He stopped. “Thank you,” he said. Then he covered his eyes with his hands for a few moments. They walked back in silence to the car.

## Forty-nine

St Norbert's Priory stood at the top of Rubbi Road, the last road before ascending Slangkop. Cypresses framed an otherworldly view of the village, the expanse of sea, with Chapman's Peak and the Sentinel of Hout Bay breaking the horizon.

The chapel was filled for the funeral Mass. Persy sat in the front pew. Marge right behind, a solid presence. Poppa was beside her, as still as a stone. How much had he taken in? Persy couldn't tell. He knew only that Clyde's body had been found. One day she would tell him the whole story. It would have to be soon, she knew that.

Most of the station was there – Titus, Connie April, Phumeza. And Dizu, of course, standing respectfully at the back; there was no seating left in the pews.

The men, unused to church, looked uneasy and coughed occasionally or hunched forward uncomfortably. In front of the altar stood the coffin, a small wooden pine box, with a spray of St. Joseph's lilies on top. Clyde, autopsy over, his small bones made ready for burial. Again. At least now they knew where he was. They had not managed to trace Beverley Cupido. The trail had gone cold in Johannesburg, at the last address Poppa had for her. She didn't know her son had been found. Maybe she was past caring or perhaps she herself was no longer alive.

Persy had taken mass in St Norbert's many times, often with Sean alongside her. Many Sundays she had examined the statues of Mary and Joseph set in their small blue niches flanking the altar, and the always-burning red light above the

baptism font. The bas-relief plaques of the twelve Stations of the Cross and their journey of suffering and pain were as familiar to her as a storybook. As a child, this tale of suffering that had been endured for the washing away of her sins had been a great comfort to her, but since late adolescence the dolorous atmosphere of the chapel had repelled her, and she had not been back until now.

It seemed so much smaller. The marble Christ who triumphantly bestrode the world with the cross and the banner no longer convinced her that righteousness would triumph. There was no one in charge to put right the evils of the world, no great reckoning to come in which all the evildoers would go down, no retribution for the bad nor salvation for the good.

The only justice was that imperfectly meted out by man, a hit-and-miss affair at best. She would leave Titus to the comforts of his evangelical breed of Christian faith, his conviction that his was the good fight. Hers was a grim mission. Only man could really extract his imperfect retribution. But it was better than no retribution at all.

After the burial, and everyone's departure, Persy lingered in the meditation garden next to the new grave. The cypresses were dense black pencils against the cerulean sky. One day Clyde would have a neat gravestone, with a small red geranium blooming in a pot, well tended by the brothers. The inscription would read: *Here lies Clyde Benjamin Cupido. Dearly loved son of Beverley Cupido, grandson of Poppa Jonas, and beloved brother to Persephone.*

Before long she would bury Poppa alongside him. A family mausoleum to be lashed by the winds and rain of the storms that rounded this headland, or baked dry and cracked by the unforgiving sun. She heard dogs barking in the distance and the cars leaving along Kommetjie on the way home from the funeral. The sounds were muffled by the dense, warm air filled with the herby scent of pelargonium and buchu. She took a seat on a small stone bench dedicated to the man who had brought the marble from Italy to build this church at the tip of Africa.

She heard footsteps on the stone steps descending the terrace to meet her. "Thought you might be here." It was Dizu. He must have stayed after the other's left.

"Yeah, well. A good Catholic girl." She'd been nervous about seeing him again, but now that he was here, it was fine.

He looked out at the Sentinel. "Quite a view."

"Yeah. We were confirmed here. Sean Dollery and me. He looked like an angel in those days."

Dizu sat down next to her. "How're you doing?"

"A day at a time," she said, hating the wobble in her voice. "Marge Labuschagne put me onto someone, a psychotherapist. So I landed up with a shrink after all, what do you think of that?" Trying to sound tough, but feeling so raw, like she had no skin, anger or tears always close to the surface these days. "He tells me it's a slow process. I'm supposed to extend my leave, but I want to get back to work. Take my mind off things. What's happening at the station?"

“Mhlabeni dropped the assault charge against me. I think he knows better than to open that can of worms. He’s been transferred. To Delft, to become someone else’s problem. Talk about sweeping shit under the carpet.”

“And Dollery?”

“He’s been charged for Crane’s murder. Third degree. We’ve also got him for the robbery at the video store and the attack on you at the caravan park. He’s going to sit.”

“But no forensics match to Sherwood?”

“Nope. We have his DNA on the brick that was the murder weapon, but we don’t have a match on the prints. At this rate I guess we’ll never find out who killed Sherwood.” He extended a half drunk can of Coke.

“Sorry. Got nothing else to offer.”

She sipped it. Flat and warm.

She handed it back. “That’s not true, by the way.”

“What?”

“That you have nothing to offer.”

He met her eyes, but said nothing. They sat quietly together, looking out at the ocean, surrounded by aromatic flowers and herbs, while bees buzzed lazily in the heat.

Dizu’s cell phone rang. He listened, then clicked it off.

He looked at Persy. “That was Titus. Sean Dollery wants to make a confession.”

## Fifty

Colette was reading Murakami to Jasper. His latest favourite author. While she read, he gazed out at the pepper tree in the front garden as if he wished he could get back up there, somehow reverse time. The days passed slowly, and she tried not to think about anything too much. Sometimes she found herself doing something and wondering how she'd got there.

She'd heard about Gregory Crane's death and wondered what had happened. It was hard to feel much after Jasper's accident. She had shut down something in her head and couldn't get it back.

Jasper had dozed off. Good. He needed to get his strength up for the operation. A specialist orthopedic surgeon was optimistic about his chances.

She went through to the kitchen to prepare his lunch – a nutritious lentil soup with Turkish bread, and a tomato and basil salad. Ryan Fortuin was coming; she had better put out a bowl for him. Ryan was Jasper's first visitor at home since the accident. Colette had not seen Ryan since the night Andy died, when she'd dropped Jasper off at the Fortuin's house. That had been such a lovely afternoon. It seemed so long ago now. The boys had gone off to the beach while she'd chatted with Yasmin and Joel Fortuin and had a cold drink with them on their patio. They were nice people, especially Joel.

She'd been driving back along the Kommetjie Road when she'd seen the hitchhiker. She thought to herself, "*How strange - I haven't seen a white man hitchhiking for years.*" She slowed down to get a better look and saw that it was

Andy. She was going to drive past, but he'd recognized her and waved her down. On impulse, she still couldn't say why, she stopped further along the road, and watched him run up in her side mirror. He said, "Hi, Colette. Can you give me a lift to Noordhoek? My car's been stolen." As if nothing had ever happened between them, as if they were friends who had seen each other last week, when in truth she had not set eyes on him for seven years or more. And then, just like that, he was in her car. Looking tired, hair thinner, but the same old Andy. A soft-voiced, gentle man. Someone you would instinctively trust.

A child would instinctively trust.

It was then that it occurred to her that their meeting like this was fated. It was an opportunity. To put her demons to rest. To get to the truth. They chatted on the way to Noordhoek. She could tell he'd been drinking, but he was not *pissed*. She told him about her job at Alphen House, how she was learning to play the Winterreise, how much she loved Schubert. He in turn talked non-stop about the comet. "I have the most stupendous view of the McNaught comet. No exaggeration! Seriously. There's only two places in the world where you can see it this far south. Somewhere in New Zealand, and then here in Cape Town. And no one wants to go to fucking *New Zealand*, right?"

Colette laughed and shook her head.

"Right. The best place to see it is right here. Chapman's Peak, Noordhoek. Where I, Andy Sherwood, now live. With the most awesome view in the world."

"You've moved from Kommetjie?"

He put his fingers over his lips, “Ssshhh – secret – no one knows about it yet.”

He invited her to come have a drink with him and see for herself and she agreed. In retrospect it made no sense, but at the time it seemed to. But that’s fate for you. “Karma,” Gregory Crane called it. You met someone and had a bond with them and then you kept repeating the same mistakes until one of you was dead.

Bellevue was completely rundown. It should have been condemned. Bits of masonry had collapsed and bricks lay around everywhere. Andy was sleeping on an old car seat. He said his stuff was packed and he was waiting to get a removals company to move it for him.

He took her to the side of the house to show her the funicular. It looked like a much smaller old-fashioned version of the Table Mountain cable car. He went into a lot of detail about what it was and how it worked. He’d always been fascinated by mechanical things. He explained how, long ago, they’d used it to transport things down the mountain from the house. It was rusty but he demonstrated how it still worked.

Back at the house they drank quite a bit, which Colette was expressly not meant to do on her medication, but she was enjoying the spaced out feeling. Andy was drunk, very drunk, and then, suddenly, so was she. It was still okay then, them getting along, laughing. She’d forgotten how *funny* Andy could be.

Later they watched the comet come up in the sky. It was pretty difficult to see, because her eyesight was blurred from mixing the meds and the drinks. She

hadn't noticed that it had gotten dark, or noticed that Andy's mood had changed. He was slurring, boasting about how he could soon be a rich man if he played his cards right. He said his landlord and Gregory Crane were fighting to give him money. He was getting back at Crane, he said, for all the shit he had caused, all the lies he'd spread. He stared at her and said, "*the lies you spread.*"

She licked her lips, which had become very dry. She felt dizzy and light-headed and wished she had never come. Everything had become mixed up and confusing. But there was a beat, like a muscle pulsing in her head, not leaving her alone. She knew she shouldn't ask him outright but she couldn't stop herself. "Did you molest Jasper?"

Andy's face changed. It was a mask. Unreadable and expressionless. His eyes were black slits. He began talking in a low, angry voice, but soon he was raging, reeling around the room, arms flailing and spittle coming from his mouth. He shouted and spat and swore that she had ruined his life, lost him his job, made people hate him. Her neck became rigid and she couldn't breathe properly. She felt numbed by all the hate coming from him. His words were burning knives, stabbing her. "*You're mad! As crazy as a coot! They should never have let you out of that loony bin!*"

He got up off the car seat and swayed to his feet, beer bottle in hand. It was like the old days, the same mocking voice making her doubt every thought she'd ever had. He loomed over her like a giant from the bedtime stories she'd once read to Jasper. She was more terrified than she'd been in her life. He was going to kill her, she was sure. She warned him not to come nearer but her voice seemed to

come from far away. She was looking down at herself, had floated right out of her body. She watched herself pick up the loose brick from the ground. When he saw it in her hand he said *“You crazy bitch! Someone should take that boy away from you before you also ruin his life!”* She hit him then. The brick seemed to glance ineffectually off his temple, but then she saw blood trickling down his face. He staggered backwards slightly, but quickly came at her again, so she hit him again. And then again, and this time he fell down. It was terrible! Hideous! He kept trying to grab her legs, shouting, *“You’re insane! Completely insane! They should have locked you up in that loony bin and thrown away the key!”*

She had to shut him up, to stop his hateful voice! She hit him and hit him, again and again. The blood was awful, everywhere, all over her clothes.

Eventually he lay still. She stood holding the brick for what seemed like a very long time, listening to the boom of the ocean fill the room from the broken windows, the sound building to an unbearable pressure in her head. She had lost the ability to think. Thoughts and images churned around in her head, the flotsam of madness. She paced the room, muttering to herself, avoiding Andy’s inert body. She had to do something but she couldn’t think what. There was only one person she knew to phone, one person who would manage this situation. She punched in Gregory Crane’s number. She thought he would be angry but he was very calm. He asked her lots of questions. Had anyone seen her with Andy? He told her to stay where she was, he was sending someone called Sean to clean up the mess.

She waited on the steps below the house. A half moon hung above Chapman's Peak. Andy was right, it was a beautiful view. If only she could stop shaking. The comet had disappeared but had left an after image that kept popping into her head: the pinpoint of bright light, the pale sweep of the tail behind it. She kept repeating *this is one of the few places in the world where you can see it*.

Half an hour later a white twin cab bakkie without lights came creeping along the road below and pulled in quietly under the trees. Sean, a young coloured man, took over. He went to look at Andy and came back saying that they had to dump the body, but they must be careful not to be seen from the road. That's when she'd shown him the funicular and explained how it worked. He was very professional, putting on gloves, moving quickly. In contrast, she seemed to have slowed down, her every movement like moving in mud. On Chapman's Peak Drive she kept a lookout while Sean dragged the body to the edge of the road and pushed it over. Then she followed him back to the house through the thick bush and drove home.

At home she stripped off her blood soaked clothes, put them in the machine, and stood under a hot shower. Then she'd phoned Joel Fortuin and asked to say goodnight to Jasper. When he'd told her that Jasper was missing, she had panicked and shouted at him. She was convinced that something terrible had happened to Jasper. Andy might have found him and was directing all that hatred at *him!* Then she remembered that Andy would not hurt anyone again.

In her darkest moments she wondered if Jasper was now paying the price for what she'd done, at other times she thought they were happier and closer than they'd ever been. Whenever uncomfortable memories and feelings threatened to

break out from behind the thick fog of medication, she would console herself by thinking how she'd saved some other mother, some other child from becoming the victims of Andy Sherwood.

University of Cape Town

## Fifty-one

There were already a few people on Chapman's Peak Drive when Marge arrived. Some families had brought wine and picnic baskets. One or two of them had binoculars through which they occasionally scanned the sky. A sort of camaraderie had set in, everyone talking about the McNaught comet, no one really knowing that much. There was lots of speculation and urban myth, an occasional know-it-all dispensing wisdom. She greeted those she knew, determined these days to shake off her usual dyspeptic attitude towards her neighbours.

Some of whom had moved on. The de Groots had returned to England, indefinitely. She'd resumed a wary cordiality with the Tinklers. After all, what was to be gained by adopting a morally superior position? Better to muck in with everyone else, take some comfort from the general muddle and drift of life. They'd all had their fair share of wounds and disappointments. With that thought came the image of Persy's small serious face, eyes blinking behind her glasses, the fierce set to her chin. A long painful process was ahead of the girl as she began to assimilate and then shape the trauma of Clyde's death into some sort of narrative. It would be a perilous undertaking. But if anyone could do it, Persy could.

And Marge would be there to help her.

A small wind gusted up. The children complained of the new chill in the air. Marge hadn't brought a sweater or jacket, but this was to be the last sighting of

the comet before it disappeared for ten thousand years, so she wasn't going to let a bit of cold deter her. On the beach below riders were highlighted on the silver sand, the sea behind them, a darker moving mass. The sight brought Ivor Reitz to mind. He'd dropped by a couple of weeks ago wanting a glass of wine and a chat. Marge brushed him off politely with the excuse of a prior engagement, which he pretended to believe. When he left, she didn't watch him walk back through the dark, but closed the front door decidedly, like closing a book after a final, disappointing chapter.

She sensed someone coming up behind her, and then a jacket still warm with body heat dropped onto her shoulders.

"So where's this famous comet?"

She swung around to see Will. He looked very tall, his eyes as bright as stars. He's a man, she realised. It was time to let him go.

They stood in silence for some time, gazing up at the darkening sky. At first the comet was a barely discernible smudge of light, almost an optical illusion. If they focused on it, it seemed to disappear, but if they shifted their eyes slightly, it popped back into view. A twinkle at its head, the misty streak curving behind it. Will caught his breath. "Oh wow," he said softly, "that's awesome!"

The wind died to a faint rustling of the bushes, the stars popped out and the fynbos released its fragrance in the dusk. Below them the sea became a vast shifting patina of mercury. Horses and riders slowly moved off the beach, threading their way through the dunes. The comet-watchers began dispersing.

"Shall we go?" Will asked. "I'm starving."

Marge pulled his jacket tighter around her shoulders and they followed the others, now packing up and loading their kids and picnics into their cars.

“Where are you off to tonight?” she asked.

“Nowhere. Thought I’d stay home and chill. If you’re not busy.”

She kept her voice casual, but her heart was light. “No. I’m not busy.”

A flock of seagulls swooped overhead and dispersed with ever-fainter cries.

Will offered her his arm and together they walked back to the car.

\*

Persy sat on the scratched and defaced wooden seat, taking a break from the proceedings inside 14B at the Wynberg courts. She recognized some of her colleagues passing in the corridors. Looking resigned, knowing some of their hard work would not stick. A magistrate paid off or intimidated, or just bone-idle. Some were doing a thorough job against all odds, doggedly pursuing a conviction.

Dollery’s sentence would be handed down after recess. He had some serious charges – armed robbery, attempted murder, arson. His confession to accessory to Sherwood’s death was mitigating, but he was in for a long haul.

Colette McKillian had been admitted to Valkenberg, the state psychiatric hospital, where she was undergoing an assessment to see if she was fit to be tried for the murder of Andrew Sherwood. Persy thought she’d probably never stand trial. There were extenuating circumstances. Her mental health for one.

Jasper, up on his feet and walking again, had moved in with Joel and Yasmin Fortuin.

No one at the station knew how Clyde had died, apart from Titus and Dizu. And Marge knew, of course. The court had been closed for that part of the proceedings, at Marge's instigation. She requested that the public be excluded, because the case had involved minors at the time and could compromise Persy's present profession, as well as have a deleterious effect on the family. She cited Poppa's age and illness, and Persy's mother's unknown whereabouts. Persy was grateful for that. She would hate to have seen the story all over the papers, hate for Poppa to see it. She had told him. Finally. It had been the hardest thing she'd ever done. He'd seemed okay at the time, and she wondered if he'd fully understood. Sister Clare said, "Old age, like childhood, provides its own protection." But since then he'd gone down very fast, seemed hardly to be present any more.

Sean Dollery got fifteen years. He'd do ten or less for good behaviour. Persy stood in the sun on the courthouse steps watching the vans arriving, disgorging their prisoners, and leaving with new ones. The never-ending stream of the unrehabilitated and the lost.

It seemed to Persy that some part of herself had pursued the Sherwood case so that she would remember what she had tried so hard to forget. Chasing darkness into light. Layers of the past beneath which were submerged the pain of her childhood: the loss of Clyde, of her mother, of Poppa's land. She and Sean, the dispossessed. She had got away, he hadn't. But then she'd had Poppa. Sean had never had that one person to stand up for the better part of him. She thought

of the girl who'd answered the door at 20 Carnation Street, Sean's house in Ocean View. Persy could so easily have been that girl, with Sean's baby at her breast.

She had to pick up the pieces now. She was a mental case herself, never mind Colette. But with time and the talking cure she would become less fearful, less paranoid. She would sleep better, and be able to get closer to people. That is, if Marge Labuschagne's assurances were to be believed. She'd told Persy that the way the human mind protected its sanity by lying to itself, or forgetting, was a kind of miracle. Not that she would ever be able to block out what happened to Clyde. She knew that better than anyone.

A van turned out of the yard on its way to Pollsmoor. Cop car in front and behind. Maximum-security prisoners. Through the thick mesh she caught a glimpse of Sean's face. In that moment she could still see the boy in the man.

When he came out, whatever was left of that boy would be gone. She would visit him. She at least owed him that. She lifted her hand in greeting, then dropped it as the van turned into the traffic and disappeared.

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