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# Yellow Cake

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Date: 8 February 2008

## Abstract

In 1981 Sizwe Magona a 17-year old South African goes into exile in Europe. He is assigned to work with Graves Kumalo, prominent member of the ANC and responsible for investigating the apartheid government's nuclear weapons' programme. At that time, Kumalo meets Slimkop de Vriess, nuclear scientist in charge of South Africa's (secret) uranium enrichment plant.

This provides the back story for *Yellow Cake*, a political eco-thriller set in contemporary South Africa. Written in a terse lean style with interrupted plot lines and multiple points of view, it uses the genre to explore complex relationships and themes of a country in transition. Global and local power dynamics play out in the choices that the characters make.

Julia Ratford, climate change researcher, meets Sizwe, now an energy activist on a study tour in Denmark. Their attraction for each other is complicated by intimidation, fear and mistrust. And then Sizwe is murdered. Julia's pursuit of the truth uncovers the murky links between politics, business, service delivery, arms trade and international climate change negotiations.

The theme of political-meets-personal is characteristic of crime fiction, and thrillers in particular. Eliot Pattison examines Chinese occupation of Tibet and its violence with 'thought control' in his *The Skull Mantra* series; John Le Carré investigates what loyalty means during the Cold War through his character *Smiley*; and what values drive Big Pharma operating in Africa in *The Constant Gardener*. *Yellow Cake* explores this international tradition.

But ultimately *Yellow Cake* is a South African novel. It explores very particular power dynamics, made so by a complex history of oppression, opportunism and transformation.

# **yellow cake**

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*"Yellowcake" is another name for uranium oxide, named for its colour and texture. Typically yellowcakes are obtained through the milling and chemical processing of uranium ore forming a coarse powder which is insoluble in water and contains about 80% uranium oxide, and which melts at approximately 2878°C.*

*Wikipedia, the free encyclopaedia*

*It is incumbent upon the nations of the world in the interests of their own security to examine closely the development of the armaments industry in South Africa, and in particular the implications of the establishment of a uranium enrichment plant which will produce uncontrolled concentrated fission material for nuclear weapons.*

*ANC Information Department,  
Lusaka, September 1975*

*They said: Do this, do that, don't look left or right, don't read the text. Don't look at the whole machine. You are responsible for just this one bolt. Concentrate on this one rubber-stamp. Don't concern yourself with things beyond your grasp. We will do the thinking..."*

*Mordechai Vanunu, I am your spy  
(technician sentenced to 18 years for  
exposing Israel's secret nuclear  
weapons programme)*

part one

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It was one of those summer days where you could feel the coming storm. The air was thick with moisture; the ground thirsty for rain. Yet for miles and miles the vast sky was clear. By mid afternoon clouds formed. Slowly at first, large white puffs of cotton wool against the infinite blue. Then faster and faster they gathered, cutting out the bright sunlight with their ever darkening shapes. By five – when Julia Ratford stepped out of the changing room – thunder rumbled in the distance.

The pool reflected the sky, dark and choppy as swimmers cut their way swiftly through the water. Up and down. Back and forth. Movement in the dying light.

Julia made her way to the far lane. Dressed in a black Speedo and green bathing cap, with a towel wrapped around her neat waist, she looked every inch the professional. But she had never made it as a swimmer. Never been quite strong enough, her shoulders slightly too narrow. And besides, other things had been more important. Now she swam for pleasure. And to release tension.

Looking up, she estimated twenty minutes before the storm broke. Perhaps half an hour. She tossed her towel onto the flagstones and began to warm up. Arms and shoulders first. Forward and backward circles. Then her calves. Her slim body was toned and perfectly proportioned. Shaking each foot, she stepped up to the edge, dipped her goggles in the water and secured them over her head. Small waves lapped the tiles as her neighbour did a tumble turn. Julia remembered with irritation that she'd left a file at the office. She'd pick it up after the swim.

For a moment suspended above the pool she was completely aware of her body. Absolutely still. Not a muscle moved. Her toes pointed. Her arms outstretched. Then she hit the water. Without thinking her right arm came up and forward. Her feet kicked rapidly below the surface. She pushed hard to the end of the lane.

The second length was more measured. Julia brought her attention directly to her body. Focussed on her hand as it broke the surface, moved through the air and back into the water. Every fourth stroke she expelled the stale breath slowly through her mouth. It rose in bubbles. She turned her head to the right. The in-breath was quick. Her full lungs added buoyancy. Propelled her a little faster. No thought in her head. The brewing storm had ceased to exist. Her work thankfully forgotten.

A metre short of the wall she tucked her chin to her chest. Her body followed the movement into a somersault. She pushed off from the smooth tiles with a twist. The water parted easily with the movement.

After ten lengths another swimmer joined Julia's lane. It was a busy time of day, despite the weather. Joburgers left their air-conditioned offices, got into their SUVs and exercised before going home to their spouse and kids. Although Zoo Lake was a public pool. For a mere three Rand you could swim as much as you liked. The elite tended to stick to the expensive gyms. Julia moved against the rope without breaking her rhythm. The swimmer passed. A choppy wake slowed her momentarily.

Large drops of rain were falling when she finally pulled herself out of the water and grabbed her towel. She sprinted the last few metres as the drops turned to sheets and lightening flashed. She felt good. Her body alive. The week had been tough and the day wasn't over. She needed to work again that night, but she sensed progress. Would have something to show the Department by next Wednesday. Their deadline.

The showers were lukewarm. She washed quickly. Her towel dried hair fell in soft curls to her shoulders. Above the basins were fragments of once large mirrors. She found one big enough to see her face in. The swim had brought colour to her cheeks. A touch of eyeliner, mascara and subtle pink lipstick added definition to her fine features. She stared at her image and smiled. Despite everything, she was enjoying herself.

Wrapping her wet costume in the towel, she headed for the parking lot and drove to the office. The storm raged. Water poured from the sky and amassed in huge rivers that flowed down the sides of the roads. The traffic was thick. She kept a good following distance and made it to the University unscathed. It would take a minute to copy the file onto her memory stick.

The building was deserted when she entered. She ran up the stairs and along the corridor. Fluorescent tubes lit the area emitting a low hum. Her office was behind one of the many wooden doors on the left. A Yale key opened the lock. She left the door ajar.

The room was spacious but dark. A narrow window at the far end looked onto the main street leading into Braamfontein. Because it was two stories up, the panes were seldom cleaned. Months of car fumes and city grime blocked most of the sunlight. Her desk stood in front of the window so that she faced the door when working. Bookshelves full of files lined three of the four walls. In the centre of an open space between the door and desk was a small table with two chairs.

Julia walked rapidly to her computer. Switched on the hard drive and turned to the monitor. Something was on her keyboard. A photo. One of those from an instant snap-and-print camera. She moved it aside to type in her password. Then picked it up. Where had it come from? Her desk was always neat, papers piled or put away when she left for the day.

The picture was of a swimmer poised in mid air above the water. Julia stared at the green bathing cap and black costume. Even before she saw the digital date and time, she knew it had been taken that evening. As she dived into Zoo Lake pool.

The photographer – or perhaps someone else – had drawn a noose around her feet. The rope was attached to a stylised fishing rod. In the top left corner was a black mark that looked like a skull and cross-bones. She turned it over. Nothing. Back again. She stared at the small black image. Three propeller blades. Not a skull. The symbol for nuclear material crossed out by two crudely drawn bones.

## 2

That night Slimkop De Vriess took the Air France flight from Johannesburg to Paris. First class. He liked to stretch his long legs and enjoy the luxuries he could now afford. Some remnant of the poor dominee's child remained with him. Even now. At Charles de Gaulle he shaved, showered and changed into his fawn Armani suit. Adjusted his watch by an hour. A small amount of eau de Cologne completed his image as successful European businessman. He left the building with a small case that contained his laptop, the clothes he'd travelled in and essential toiletries. His wallet, passport and cell phone were in the inside pocket of his jacket. Everything else he needed was in his Paris flat.

The taxi rank was busy. Normally he organised a Chauffeur but today he wanted his destination to remain anonymous. The precaution was probably unnecessary, but then so was the risk. The queue moved quickly and within fifteen minutes he was comfortably seated in the back of a Citroen, chatting amiably to the driver about the weather and the state of French politics.

De Vriess was in a good mood. He was in his favourite city. Even in winter Paris had a certain flair. People took care of their appearances. Wore a dash of colour to offset the grey weather, ensured their hair was perfectly styled. He blamed the English for bringing to South Africa a casual disregard for personal aesthetics. London in winter was grim. A city turned in on itself in a communal depression. Not Paris. Here

pedestrians moved with purpose, confident that their style and looks would be appreciated.

The taxi dropped him on the banks of the Seine some distance from his meeting place. He still had an hour and wanted to walk after the long journey. A flight of steps led him down to the river. It meandered slowly, as it had for centuries, through the vibrant city, creating a sense of continuity and stability. It resonated with his image of himself. A man able to maintain equilibrium no matter the circumstances. It was easy if you never formed attachments to anyone. He walked under the bridges breathing in the smells, dampness from the exposed mud mingled with patisseries and diesel fumes. None of it smelt of his homeland. He was happy to be back in Europe.

The café was easy to find. At the appointed time De Vriess made his way to a corner table where a grey haired man was idly perusing the menu. He was stocky. Where once muscles had made him strong, fat now made him heavy. His eyes sharpened as De Vriess sat down.

“You had a good flight?” The man asked.

“Yes. Excellent. Thank you. I hope you haven’t been waiting long?”

“No, no. Arrived a moment before you did.”

De Vriess knew this was untrue. He’d ordered a coffee across the road twenty minutes earlier and watched the man enter. He was alone. Smith. That’s the name De Vriess knew him by. No first name. De Vriess had seen his file. His name changed regularly. It was unimportant.

A waiter came to take their order. Double espresso for De Vriess; full English breakfast with tea for his companion.

“It’s good of you to come,” De Vriess offered.

“Not at all. I wanted to sort out the details face-to-face.”

Smith’s manner was relaxed but De Vriess could sense his anxiety. He wondered what other business he was involved in, who he was selling the information on to. Or perhaps Smith had just become paranoid. It was common amongst ex-intelligence agents. Either way, it could ruin the operation. De Vriess would need to watch him. Make sure all leaks were plugged.

The men had met twice before, once in London and once in Washington. Both times more than twenty years ago. Smith had provided specialist training. A gift to the Apartheid state, courtesy of the British government. He had been passionately anti-Communist, convinced that if South Africa fell from white control it would fall to the

reds. Perhaps he'd also been prejudiced. Held the feelings of superiority that most Europeans had for most other races; Africa at the bottom of the heap.

Their food arrived. Smith tucked in with undisciplined greed. De Vriess sipped his coffee. The sight of the man eating disturbed him. He'd been a vegetarian since he was ten – not out of any misplaced love for animals, but because eating meat seemed like a contamination. It had also outraged his father and unsettled his mother. It had given him a sense of control. Now, it cost the Brit the deal.

“The schedule's changed. I won't be in a position to provide the material by the end of the year as we discussed.”

Smith's face fell. “What are you talking about? I thought everything was in the bag, that production would begin by June and the first consignment would be ready a few months later?”

“It's not going to happen.”

De Vriess watched him. He was right to cut him out. The man had gambled too deeply. Needed it too much. He saw him grapple with conflicting emotions – anger, fear – but in the end greed won out. Or perhaps desperation. De Vriess heard he'd had a rough time when the Berlin wall came down and Glasnost removed the Communist bogie. Couldn't cope with the change of regime, with people playing games with his values. And the British government had found him and his kin embarrassing. Had released them into early retirement. After a few years growing vegetables in Wales, Smith had revived himself and his contacts. He now sold information to the highest bidder.

“Okay, so this year won't work. When do you expect the first shipment?”

“I don't think you're hearing me. There will be no shipment. No deal.”

“Mr De Vriess are you out of your mind?” I've spent years working on this. You can't pull the deal!”

“I will see that you are compensated.” De Vriess stood up and left the restaurant without looking back.

Julia was incredulous. Pamela Swart her boss sat opposite her. They were in Bamako's, a coffee-shop-come-restaurant favoured by academics and NGO workers who hung around Braamfontein.

"Please Julia. There's no need to raise your voice. I thought an international trip would interest you."

She stretched a perfectly manicured hand to take a menu. Like the rest of her body, her hands were slightly too bony to be elegant, but they were well maintained. Moisturised and painted.

"Do you have a passport?"

"Yes I have a passport." Julia answered mechanically. She needed a moment to think. This couldn't be happening. The presentation was due in less than a week. She'd been sent a warning – at least she assumed that's what the photo was. After months of preparation she at last felt she had something to offer the Department. And now this.

"Good. That's settled then. You can get an emergency visa in twenty-four hours."

In her late forties, Pamela was formidable. Thin, incredibly smart, with a quick temper and impeccable dress sense, she'd been Director of the Climate Change Research Unit at Wits University for ten years. She smiled briefly as a waitress approached.

"Ah excellent. Our coffees are here. You wanted to ask me something Julia?"

The image of her body poised above the water flashed through Julia's mind. She'd thought her boss should know. But things were happening too fast.

"It's nothing."

"Oh please Julia. You insist on meeting me outside the office and now you have nothing to say." Pamela snapped open her phone to read an sms.

"Why do you want me to go to Denmark?" Julia was now composed.

"Because Julia, I am very busy. I don't have time for these kinds of trips any more. But we need to participate. Keep our funders happy."

In her own way, Julia was more than a match for her boss. She sat in silence. Waiting. Eventually Pamela continued.

"Look Julia, I know you were looking forward to presenting to the Department. And I know you think you've got some useful findings. But you can brief me. I was planning to be there anyway."

“I must say Pamela, I’m surprised.” Julia watched a fly settle on the sugar, “you led me to believe my research was critical. That it was needed yesterday.” She looked her boss in the eye, “How come there’s suddenly time for me to spend ten days in Europe?”

“I don’t like that tone Julia. Or what you are implying.” She waved her phone.

“It’s interesting...” Julia continued, “that it’s so hard to get data. Why are the Department and Eskom and the Regulator so reluctant to open their files? What is it they want to hide? It makes me wonder if there is more to this research than you have told me...”

“Julia. Let me make one thing extremely clear.” Pamela put down her phone and held her gaze, “We are *not* conducting an investigation. We are a *research* unit. Our brief is to estimate how expensive nuclear energy is... Yes Julia, *including* the externalities,” she said as Julia opened her mouth, “*And*,” Pamela went on ignoring her colleague, “whether it is a viable alternative to coal. As a response to climate change. *That* is what we are doing. Not sticking our noses into other people’s domains. Not threatening officials with the Access to Information Act. Just doing some good, solid research.”

“To do that I need numbers,” Julia said quietly. “How much it costs to build a power station. How much to dispose of the waste. Where the yellow cake will be sourced. What its price will be. Those kinds of things.”

“And?” Pamela opened her bag and took out her purse.

“And I can’t get them. Those numbers are not available.”

“Nonsense Julia. Those numbers – or their proxies – are readily available. You can find them on the internet for God’s sake. There is absolutely no need for you to be poking around harassing government officials.

“Yes Julia. I know you have been asking questions. Questions that are not entirely related to your research. Getting just a little too interested in those opposing nuclear power. Take my advice Julia. Go to Denmark. Learn about renewables. Find out how serious Europe is about climate change. Are they likely to buy less coal from us – these are the kinds of things that will help your research. Leave the nuclear calculations for now. You can brief me on how far you’ve got and I will see what I can do to fill in the gaps.”

“Are you taking me off the project?”

“Not at all Julia.” Pamela snapped her fingers at a passing waiter. “I’m just wanting more balanced research.”

Pamela paid the bill and left. Julia sat for a while longer thinking through her options. That afternoon, she told Pamela she'd go to Denmark.

"But because it's such short notice, I'll need to take some leave – for personal reasons. I'll come in before I fly to brief you. On Monday."

Pamela reluctantly acquiesced.

Back in her office, Julia sat behind her computer and took a deep breath. She was about to do something no honest researcher ever did. Manipulate her raw data. Once she'd steeled herself, she worked quickly. Set up a hidden directory and transferred all her information. She gave the files innocuous names – hh\_finances, letters\_personal. They shouldn't be visible but the University was always upgrading its computer system and she wasn't confident no one could tap in. They were too precious to delete until she was sure of her backup system. Copies went on to her memory stick with the original names. She scanned the office looking for papers that might provide clues to her work. Most were innocuous. Even the annual reports were unlikely to draw interest. She left them. It would look odd if nothing was in her office. She could explain away the electronic files by saying she was working at home, and was worried about University network's confidentiality. It would only be for a couple of days. Finally she downloaded and filled in the Schengen visa forms, and left them with the office secretary. She'd drop off her passport and two colour photos first thing in the morning. A courier would pick everything up and take it to the embassy in Pretoria.

Julia spent the next days and nights working. She sat at the counter between kitchen and sitting room. Home was a garden cottage in Parktown. No one disturbed her. She kept herself going on Bioplus and coffee. The warning photo meant only one thing to her. Someone suspected what she'd found. No one could possibly know for sure. And she was going to make damned sure their suspicions weren't confirmed. The spreadsheets she gave Pamela would look right but they would have been tweaked just a bit. The anomaly would be hidden.

#### 4

Kastrup airport, Copenhagen wasn't quite what Julia had imagined. For one thing, it was small. And a bit scruffy. She descended the stairs into the arrivals hall yawning. Her body ached. On top of her sleepless week, it had been a nightmare trip. They'd left Joburg late due to the weather. She'd missed her connecting flight. And 'sorry we can't

help you' had been the attitude of the British staff when she'd tried to get on the next one. Now, thirty hours after leaving home, she stood waiting for her suitcase. Her feet were sore, swollen tight inside her brown ankle boots. Her clothes were crumpled, her hair pulled back in a short messy ponytail. A handful of passengers watched luggage enter through a hole in the wall. Except for them, the hall was empty. The conveyer belt made the only sound in the vast room. It whirred and clunked and got louder and louder until Julia thought she would scream. Suddenly she was no longer standing, but on the floor, half sitting, half fallen, her left arm bent awkwardly under her. No one noticed. A man grabbed a large black bag and left. She was alone. Dizzy and disoriented. A solitary suitcase went round and around. It was red and battered. It wasn't hers.

By the time she got through customs control – why are you travelling alone, where are your bags; and filling out numerous forms – small blue case on wheels (borrowed from a friend), checked on in Johannesburg, marked for Copenhagen via London – it was after 11pm. The Institute had assured her it would be easy to catch a train from the airport to a station five minutes walk from the hotel. US dollars could be exchanged or used to buy a ticket. She walked up to the ticket office. The metal grill clanged down. She called through the grill.

“Please can I buy a ticket?” (she'd been told all Danes spoke English)

“Sorry. Closed.”

“Can I get one on the train?”

“You'll pay a fine. Anyway, you can't get through the barrier.”

Julia wondered if they'd throw her in jail if she couldn't pay the fine. It might be a relief. She was sure Danish jails had beds.

“Please? Please could you just issue me one ticket? I only have dollars.” There was faint desperation in her voice. The man ignored it.

“No. I'm closed. You can try the machine over there. It takes Danish crowns.”

He shut the second, solid barrier, cutting all communication between them. Julia went up to the ticket machine. It was impossible to understand. She thought an LCD message was telling her the last train was at 11:36, but couldn't be sure. According to the clock, it was now 11:21. She held off the tears and forced herself to concentrate. Exhaustion caved in on her.

She walked back towards the customs control. All was closed and dark. A shiver ran through her. It was eerie to be alone in a place built for crowds. Julia did not panic easily but in this strange place she felt anything could happen. Since the photo she'd

become more nervous. Someone was watching her. But of course that was in Joburg. This was Copenhagen. She was safe. She leant against a pillar and closed her eyes. Tried to think what to do. It would come to her. If only she could get some sleep...

“Are you fine? Can I help?”

The questioner was tall, German, immaculately dressed. Said he'd been watching her while he drank his coffee, waiting for the last train. She hadn't seen the cafe, which was the other side of her pillar. He bought her a ticket, bringing the machine to life. He held her arm lightly as they walked to the train. His touch was supportive but not intrusive. A handful of people were on the platform – a young couple entwined, their bags by their sides, a businessman on his cell-phone, a woman with sallow skin taking a packet of cigarettes in and out of her pocket below a no-smoking sign. Julia's escort got off the train after a few stops. He left her with a clear mental map of which exit to take and how to find the hotel.

It was snowing lightly as she emerged from the station. She looked up and saw each flake falling slowly through the diffuse street light. It was magical, like some childhood dream she'd never known about. Snow! The surprise and peacefulness of it shifted her mood completely. It lifted her exhaustion and anxiety. Now she was happy to be without a heavy bag. Her step was light as she made her way along the road to the small bed and breakfast. It was housed on the second floor of an old, dark building. She walked up the narrow stairs to find hot tea and pastries waiting for her. The bed was firm with crisp white sheets and a down duvet. She slept peacefully for almost ten hours.

In the morning, she opened the door to find her suitcase outside. She unpacked quickly, showered and dressed. Through her window the world was white and quiet. The smell of coffee drew her down the narrow corridor.

“Miss Julie!” A loud voice boomed as she walked into the breakfast room. “What's up girl?” The mock American accent didn't fool her. The man was South African. Before she could reply a huge man with dark smooth skin and high cheekbones rose from his chair and strode across the room.

## 5

“Sizwe Magona.” He held out his hand. She shook it.

“Julia Ratford. Nice to meet you.”

“Man we were worried about you *sisi*.” He clasped her round the back in a kind of bear hug, “didn’t want to lose my compatriot.”

“Well I’m here,” Julia said disentangling herself, “and I need some coffee.”

“Help yourself to this stuff they call breakfast and come and join us.” He indicated a table where an elegant blonde woman sat with a stocky black man. The man’s entire face was covered by an enormous smile. Even his eyes were laughing. Danish and East African, she guessed. Probably Kenyan.

Julia turned to the food. Varieties of dark bread, cheese, cold meats and green pepper were spread on plates. And coffee. Lots of coffee. It was perfect. Despite Pamela and the photo and the missed presentation and the flight from hell, she was happy to be in Denmark. She’d never been to Europe before. And here she was. Surrounded by people from all over the world, eating food they’d never serve before noon in Johannesburg. She helped herself and went to join Sizwe and his companions.

His name was familiar. By the time she sat down she remembered why. He was a leading activist and frequently in the newspapers. Services For All – or SFA – was his organisation. Coming out of the townships, SFA was a campaign demanding water, electricity and infrastructure. It was fuelled by the frustrations of poor people whose needs had been forgotten. More than forgotten, Julia thought; more accurately ridiculed. The new elite were determined that nothing stand in their way of moral highground and wealth. SFA was a thorn in the side of government.

“Julia, this is Solomon Awori from Kenya,” Sizwe said laying his hand on her arm, “and Ana-Marie dos Santos from Argentina.”

So the blonde woman wasn’t Danish. And she didn’t look happy that Julia had joined them.

“We were just discussing the programme,” Sizwe continued, “and wondering if we could shake it up a bit. Make it more useful to us.”

Solomon caught Julia’s eye and grinned, “apparently your countryman is not that interested in renewables. He wants to challenge north-south power relations. Head on.”

The conversation continued in this vein for some time. Julia listened. Solomon was convinced they could learn something from the Danes. Sizwe that they could not. Ana-Marie tossed in the occasional pragmatic comment with a pout. She was a government bureaucrat. Eventually Julia turned to Sizwe,

“So why did you come? If it’s such a waste of time?”

“Oh Miss Julie!” His mirth was genuine, “being here is not a waste of time. Not at

all! And perhaps Solomon is right. I might even learn something!”

Their Danish host stood up to outline the day’s itinerary. A trip to Nyborg was planned. There they would see an incinerator that converted waste to electricity. They went to collect their coats and bags.

In her room, Julia took a moment to assess her appearance. She sat in front of the mirror and tied her hair into a ponytail. Pulled out a few wisps. Then let it all down again. Tried a clip instead. Eventually she left it loose but put an elastic in her pocket. Touched up her lipstick. She debated using perfume but decided against it. It was too early in the day. But there was no harm in putting it in her bag.

The bus was almost full when she climbed in. Solomon was at the back chatting avidly to an Indian man. The racks were stuffed with anoraks and scarves in luminous shades. Julia removed her jacket and added it to the mass.

Sizwe had kept her a window seat. She squeezed past him and made herself comfortable. The seats had a lever that tilted them back. They were built for tall Danes. The bus meandered slowly through the streets of Copenhagen. Old buildings and narrow streets were interspersed with open stretches of canalised water. The bus picked up speed as they left the City.

“So what’s the story Sizwe? Why are you on a renewable energy study tour if you have no interest in renewables?”

“A direct approach! I like that.” He winked at her. She looked back unblinking.

“Well?”

“Well Miss Julie. I might ask you the same question. What are you doing on a renewable energy study tour when your subject is nuclear energy?”

Her body stiffened. The photo flashed through her mind. She still had no idea where or whom it had come from. Three propeller blades. The cross-bones. She stared out the window. As if to mock her, a giant windmill turned slowly against the horizon. Three propeller blades. She felt Sizwe’s eyes on her. Breathing her in. She stilled his gaze with a look.

“What do you know about my work?”

“Hey Miss Julie,” he laughed lifting his arms in mock surrender, “no need to take offence. I’m just curious. Why did the formidable Dr Swart send you to Denmark?”

Her eyes narrowed, “you know Pamela?”

“Yes. I have had the honour of meeting your Director.” He tightened his lips and clenched his jaw in a manner so similar to Pamela that she burst out laughing.

“That’s better.” He ran his index finger over the back of her hand. “We’re in Denmark. No need to be so serious.”

“But I am interested Sizwe. How did you know I’m working on nuclear energy?”

“Word gets around,” he said, tilting his seat back and closing his eyes.

Julia watched the unfolding countryside. His arm lay heavily between them, both an encroachment and a barrier. The bus trundled on. The landscape didn’t vary. They crossed a long bridge, one of the hundreds connecting the islands and peninsulas that made up Denmark. Julia saw a flock of birds, high in the sky, their bodies dark against the grey. Then, as one, they changed direction and were white. She looked at Sizwe. His face was relaxed; his mouth strong and firm, his breathing even. The edges of his eyes were smooth with no wrinkles. Tightly curled eyelashes provided the only break in texture. He opened one eye slowly and smiled,

“Miss Julie.”

She turned away, blushing. He shifted his seat upright and bent his body towards the window. The bus slowed down and turned into a large compound.

“Sleet,” he announced stepping onto the ground. It was true. The weather had changed. They ran the short distance through ice rain. In the warm hallway they shook off their coats before being herded into a dry room with stark walls. The ubiquitous flasks of hot coffee were spaced evenly on ugly brown tables, the tables arranged in an open rectangle. At the open end was a blackboard.

## 6

Slimkop de Vriess stood in the shadow of the building wearing a black tailored coat. A woollen scarf kept the cold from piercing his neck. With a cell-phone to his ear, he looked like any other businessman in Europe. The bus turned passed him and parked in front of the hotel. He hadn’t waited long. It had been easy to get their programme and participants list. Being Denmark, the scheduled times were accurate. He switched his phone to camera mode. People climbed off the bus clutching jackets and bags. Sizwe, Julia and another African – presumably Solomon Awori – were the last to leave. They were laughing. He zoomed in, clicked the shutter. At the hotel door Sizwe said something. Julia looked momentarily disappointed but soon smiled and kissed him on the cheek. Sizwe waited until they were inside before slipping quietly down a side road. De Vriess watched him go.

He was in Denmark at the urging of Kumalo. It also suited him. If it hadn't, he wouldn't be there. Copenhagen had held appeal since his childhood. This was his first visit. The city lacked the flair of Paris, but it was attractive in other ways. He'd spent a couple of days walking and making use of the free bikes downtown until he knew the streets. He noted which were popular, and which were less used. His memory was phenomenal. Writing and numbers imprinted themselves on his brain. He could read something once and recall it to mind years later. Street names were child's play. He used buses to explore further. By the time he stood outside the hotel he'd seen the Little Mermaid and the Royal Palace; spent half a day in the hippy town of Christiania eating falafels, walked past the closed-for-the-season Tivoli Gardens and indulged his curiosity. Curiosity was the reason he had agreed to Kumalo's request.

He crossed the road and headed towards Nyhavn, choosing a different route to Sizwe. His instinct said his quarry would go to parliament. The meeting that night was on overseas aid. Sizwe would want to explain how the Danes should spend their tax money in South Africa. It would be around service delivery. Kumalo might get excited about this, but he, Slimkop de Vriess was only vaguely concerned. Unless there was civil war, it wouldn't affect his plans. The stones thrown by the disaffected left barely hit a target. They made no impact on the establishment. De Vriess prided himself on knowing more about everything than anyone else. His brain could combine and compute millions of seemingly irrelevant details to derive a likely outcome. Some called it sixth sense. Intuition had nothing to do with it. The actors in this play were predictable. He could write their words and would choreograph the final scene.

It was funny how age had mellowed him. Ten years ago he would never have acted out of idle curiosity. Now he indulged it. Just a bit. Copenhagen had drawn him because of a conversation. As a teenager, his interest had been captured by a German named Werner Heisenberg. This man was a brilliant scientist. A physicist, like him. He had posited the extraordinary Uncertainty Principle. It had intrigued the young De Vriess that so rigorous a science could include something so ambiguous. The uncertainty surrounding the German's life was even more compelling. Heisenberg had collaborated with the Nazi government to develop the atom bomb. Or had he? No one knew for sure. His motivation was unclear. Had his involvement speeded up or slowed down Germany's nuclear research? The answer lay buried in Copenhagen's history. In a conversation. One night the young German had gone to his mentor Niels Bohr with a dilemma. They had talked. What had the revered Danish physicist advised? What had

the young German decided? And so De Vriess had come to Copenhagen, to walk the same streets, to see through time. Back to a moment of indecision. A moment of decision. As a young man, he too had made a decision.

De Vriess emerged on the canal-side road two hundred metres behind Sizwe. There was an ironic resonance that appealed to him. Tracking Sizwe here, seeing who he talked to and visiting those places of history – the laboratories, Bohr’s house, the parks where they might have walked. Curiosity about Sizwe, that was the second reason he had come. He had known about the activist since the early eighties, but had never met him. The lines had been drawn in those days. Slowly over the years, they had merged as like personality sought like and greed overtook ideology, leaving political allegiances unclear. But Sizwe had never crossed the line. Not as far as he knew.

Arrogant. That’s what Kumalo said. An arrogant upstart, meddling in things he knew nothing about, driven by a misguided sense of martyrdom. That wasn’t what De Vriess saw. He saw a confident man with a strong presence and plenty of charm. History and circumstance made Kumalo blind. It wasn’t sensible to misjudge your enemy. De Vriess knew why Kumalo hated Sizwe so much. He thought back to the first time he’d met Kumalo. They’d been in Paris. The young South African exile had walked into his local café, his thickset body bristling like a fighting cock.

“Mr De Vriess?”

De Vriess imagined what Kumalo had seen: a man no more than thirty, with a long narrow face, cropped sandy brown hair and piercing blue eyes. A man who was already successful and powerful.

“Mr Kumalo”, he’d said, getting up, his voice sonorous with a slight Afrikaans accent, “I’ve been looking forward to meeting you.”

Kumalo had shaken his hand and sat down, “I believe you know why I’m here.”

“I believe I do. But why don’t you tell me.” He’d folded his long legs back under the table and looked straight at Kumalo.

“We want information on the Y-Plant. We know it is capable of producing enriched uranium. And we know you are having technical difficulties with it.”

“You seem to know a lot.”

“We want to know how much you are currently producing and of what quality.”

“I see.” De Vriess had picked up his cup, pursed his lips for a final sip and indicated to the waiter. He’d looked back at Kumalo “You want a coffee?” Kumalo nodded. De Vriess remembered the tension, almost smelling Kumalo’s impatience. The waiter

arrived and he'd ordered two coffees before turning back to his visitor. "Supposing your information is correct – which I'm not saying it is – what makes you think I would confirm it and provide you with more?"

Kumalo had leant forward, and spoken softly and clearly, "we are in a position to pay."

That line – that's all it had taken. The words, the assumptions in them – it was enough. De Vriess knew what motivated Kumalo and he would never forget, not while he could still be useful.

Sizwe walked across the square leading to parliament. De Vriess followed at a distance and watched him enter the imposing building. A café was open on the opposite corner. It had wide glass windows and a clear view of the entrance. De Vriess ordered a double espresso, black, no sugar. Caffeine was his one vice. He hardly drank – a top quality single malt being the exception – and he never smoked. The café was not full. He pulled out his newspaper – *le Monde* – and waited. He thought about the girl. Julia Ratford. She'd recently joined the Climate Change Research Unit, some Johannesburg based think-tank. She was quite attractive. It was annoying that she was investigating nuclear energy. In his day, that was left to men, scientists bound by secrecy. They reported directly to the President. Times had changed. It made no sense to reminisce. He'd watched her arrive in Denmark. Exhaustion and stress had immobilised her, leaving her incapable of making a decision; that would be something to remember for later, if necessary.

A woman he recognised crossed the street. She went in the same door Sizwe had. He'd seen her at international meetings. She wasn't a parliamentarian. She was an activist; her mission to stop nuclear power. Perhaps Kumalo had a point. He ordered a second coffee.

## 7

"Do you think we can see that power station they talked about?" Julia asked. She was standing with Sizwe on a beach north of Copenhagen. It was a week since they'd met. The tour was almost over and Julia felt sad. They'd spent most parts of most days together, sometimes with Solomon too. She enjoyed being with Sizwe but doubted the friendship would survive the reality of Johannesburg. They inhabited different worlds. Going home also meant thinking about her work and who it was antagonising. For some

miraculous reason she'd managed to forget about it in Denmark.

Small waves danced in the sea, petering out at the shore where the shallow water had frozen. The beach was covered in patches of snow. It was whiter than the whitest sand. Hardy grasses pushed their way through from the hidden dunes. The sky was clear and blue. It was very beautiful. Julia put her hand to her forehead and peered out across the sea towards Sweden.

"I can't see anything. Is it really so close?"

"So they say. Long ago the whole sea froze and you could walk across. It was important in early battles between Denmark and Sweden. So you see, Miss Julie, the earth has warmed and cooled throughout history. Your climate change is nothing new!"

Julia started to object, but stopped when she saw he was teasing. They walked on.

"Look there." Sizwe put his hand on her arm and pointed. "Can you see those black shapes?" Julia squinted. She could just make out a dark line across the horizon. He continued, "It must have really pissed off these well-planning Danes... declared themselves nuclear-free then their neighbour builds a power plant next to their capital." He bent down to pick up some snow, tossing it from hand to hand, slowly building a ball. "A bit like the liberal-minded Capetonians and Koeberg."

"Sizwe, I wanted to ask you about Koeberg..." she looked at him and he raised his hand, "Hey! What are you doing?!" She leapt away as he lobbed the snowball at her. They chased each other up the beach, tossing snow and eventually collapsed in a laughing heap. He pulled her on top of him,

"What did you want to ask me about?" his lips brushed hers. It felt too intense, too close. She jumped up, completely serious.

"I'm going for a swim."

"Don't be crazy Julia. It's probably about four degrees." He grabbed at her arm, but she evaded him.

"Come on! It'll be great. I'm tired of being in stuffy rooms and I've never swum in the Baltic. Bet you haven't either?"

"Well no, I haven't. Or the Atlantic, or the Indian, or the Pacific. I don't swim. And I'm not mad."

Julia stripped to her underwear, folded her clothes into a neat pile, and ran into the sea. The water cut her like a knife. She couldn't breathe, but she went on, past the frozen water, into the shallow surf. Her body was on fire. She made a shallow dive and stood up. Her body was no longer part of her. She could see it but not feel it. Far away she

could hear someone calling. The sound was familiar but it was slow, heavy.

“Julia... JULIA!!”

She turned around. A man was running towards her, towards where she thought she was.

“Get out! You must get out. You’ll die.”

He looked agitated. She took a step towards him. He reached out to her and wrapped her in a cloth, drawing her into his body. He held her for a long time before picking her up and carrying her to her clothes.

“We need to get you dry and warm. You could have died.”

He dried her gently with the kikoi he’d been using as a scarf, put his beanie on her head and helped peel off her wet underwear before dressing her. It was too difficult to put on her shoes on the beach so he carried her to the edge, to a bench. Feeling started to come back into her body. It began at the centre with pain. The pain spread outward, into her feet, then her toes and was replaced by warmth. Her heart resumed its regular beat, pumping warm blood through her limbs. Sizwe kept his arm around her as they walked to a coffee shop.

“How are you feeling now?” he asked as the waiter put two steaming mugs on the table. She curled her fingers around the hot chocolate and lifted it to her face, breathing in the warm, sweet aroma.

“Sizwe, it was amazing. Exhilarating. I felt... I don’t know... something magical, profound. Like a connection with God or something. That sounds weird.”

“You could have died.”

“Oh come on!” she said provocatively, “didn’t you enjoy playing the hero just a little bit? Saving me from myself and from freezing to death? Sounds very grand!”

“It’s not funny Julia.” His voice was sharp. “I’ve watched people die. It’s not an heroic experience or a laughing matter.”

“I’m sorry.” She felt chastened and concentrated on her drink. It had cooled enough for her to take a sip. The melted chocolate was delicious. They sat for a while in silence; their bodies close but not touching.

“Sizwe, I was sent a threat. I don’t think it was a death threat, but...”

“You *what?*” Sizwe’s entire body became alert. His eyes bored into hers, like an interrogator. “*Here?*” he asked, “here in Denmark?”

“No, no. Sizwe. I’m sorry. Nothing like that. It was in Joburg.”

His body relaxed. His eyes softened but remained focussed. “Tell me about it.”

She told him about going swimming and the storm. About forgetting her spreadsheets at the office. About finding the photo. As she talked two things happened simultaneously. One, enormous relief. She hadn't realised how much she was holding in. After the disastrous meeting with Pamela, there'd been no one to tell. Sizwe felt like the right person. He'd probably had a similar experience. The second thing that happened was fear. Talking about it rekindled the feelings she'd had when she realised what the photo was. Her hand shook as she put her empty mug on the table. Fear of being followed, of an unknown shadow. Of someone or something that could do anything, would stop at nothing. Someone who knew where she swam and where she worked.

Sizwe listened attentively. His seriousness unnerved her. She tried to break it,

"It's probably nothing. Just a prank."

"It's not a prank Julia. That's deliberate intimidation. You need to tell me more about your research."

The café door opened. She looked in the direction of the icy wind.

"Hey Solomon!" she exclaimed as the Kenyan walked in.

"Not interrupting am I?"

"No. Not at all. Sit down." Julia responded.

Sizwe shifted towards her and squeezed her hand gently before turning to Solomon, "Let's order you some coffee."

They stayed chatting until the light faded. The café owner closed the windows and cashed up before asking them to leave. Outside the air was bitterly cold. Julia stuffed her hands into the pockets of her jacket. Gently Sizwe pulled her left one out. He enveloped it, his long fingers curled round hers. The three of them walked on in companionable silence. A train arrived quickly. Soon they were back at their local station. From a nearby café, Slimkop De Vriess watched them walk up the street.

## 8

Julia removed her make-up and splashed water on her face before putting on a deep cleansing mask. Her flight was early the next morning. The treatment would keep her skin moist for the long journey home. She lay naked on her bed, the lights off and thought about Sizwe. Today had been the first time they'd crossed from friendly affection to something more deliberate. She touched her mouth where his lips had

brushed it on the beach. It had been mad to go swimming, but his closeness had unnerved her. She touched her hand to her breast. He had taken off her wet bra to reveal pert nipples. They hardened in memory. She imagined his long fingers gently exploring.

Footsteps in the corridor brought her back to reality and she jumped up shivering. Wrapping a kikoi around her hips and slipping on a sweatshirt she went into the bathroom to remove her mask. The footsteps stopped outside her door and she heard a knock, then her name.

“Julia? Miss Julie? It’s Sizwe. I came to say good-bye...”

“Just coming!” she shouted through the sound of running taps. She looked up into the mirror. Her skin was soft and pale, her hair curling gently where it was damp from washing her face. No time for makeup. He would have to take her as he found her. She opened the door. Sizwe stood still looking at her for a moment before walking in. He sat down on the bed without touching her. She stood in front of him. A slight frown formed between her eyes.

“Sizwe...”

“Come here,” he said pulling her close until she was sitting astride him. He leant forward and kissed her. She responded immediately. He put his hands under her shirt, running them over her body, noting where she was sensitive. He moved his hands onto her thighs, and she stiffened.

“It’s okay.” He said kneading her flesh, nibbling her ear. She was no longer relaxed.

“Sizwe, I...”

He moved his hands and she stepped off him, sitting down on the bed.

“I’m sorry.”

“No. It’s fine. I should be sorry. I thought you...”

“I do! It’s just...” she stood up, “I don’t think... I can’t do this unless... well I don’t know what will happen when we get home, and I...”

“Hey. It’s okay.” His voice was soft. He stood up and held her in a tight embrace, stroking the back of her head and kissing her gently. “It’s okay. Come.” He led her to the bed and they lay down facing each other, talking quietly. After a while Julia moved her foot to caress his. Eventually she fell asleep, her legs entwined with his. Just before midnight he extricated himself. Julia was still sleeping. He leant down and kissed her. The sound of the door closing woke her. She blew a kiss to his departed presence.

The taxi turned into his street and stopped outside his house. Sizwe could see the Southern Cross shining brightly in the pale night sky. It was good to be home. He handed the driver two hundred Rand, requested a receipt and thanked him. A few years ago he would have taken a minibus taxi from the airport to the centre of Joburg. Then a second one. It would have dropped him a kilometre from his house. Then the walk. He lifted his suitcase, grateful to carry it only across the road. He stood a moment after the taxi left, breathing in the warm night air. He recognised the smells of onions cooking and meat browning that wafted out of the houses into the street. He looked across at the place he had lived with his mother, brother and sister-in-law for the past five years. An old green BMW stood in the driveway. His brother was home. The front door opened a fraction and his mother's head peered out,

“Sizwe, is that you? Are you home my boy?”

He crossed the street in big swift strides, up the three concrete steps, put his case down and into his mother's arms. Physically she seemed smaller. She was getting older. But she had not lost her spirit, or the strength of her embrace. He remembered her coming home for weekends when he was a child, pulling him into her arms, then holding him out to look at him, to see how he had grown, how his week at school had been. How proud he had been of his uniform in those first years. He'd polished his shoes, scrubbed the mud stains from his white shirtsleeves, and washed his hands and face so she too would be proud when she saw him. And then, like everything related to school, his uniform had become part of the oppression. Soiling it had been an act of rebellion, an act of defiance. And still his mother stood by him. Now he held her in his outstretched arms and looked at her, the reverse of his childhood ritual.

“Ma, you look tired. You've been working too hard. You need to rest. I've brought you something for your feet.” He put his arm around her shoulder and led her towards the living room.

“Sizwe. It's wonderful to have you home. But I'm fine. Let's eat, we've been waiting for you.”

The wooden dining table was covered with a bright cloth. A crocheted rectangle ran down the middle on which a series of pots stood: chicken stew with potatoes, cabbage, white rice, sweet potatoes, beetroots. Sizwe's sister-in-law served them all, giving Sizwe an extra portion of stew.

“Ah it’s nice to be back,” Sizwe said tucking in, “those Danes don’t know how to cook! Pickled herring and black bread for breakfast lunch and supper... I’ve missed real food.”

His mother smiled at him and patted his arm, contented. The doorbell rang. Sizwe made to get up, but his mother restrained him,

“I’ll go. You’re tired.” She made her way slowly to the front door, calling to ask who was there before opening it. Sizwe could hear muffled voices, but no words. She returned to their meal.

“Who was it Ma?”

“They’ll come back tomorrow.” She resumed her place, picking slowly at her food.

“You’re not eating,” he said looking at her, concerned.

“Yes, yes... I am...”

“She went to the Doctor. Had us all worried.” His sister-in-law intervened.

“What is it Ma? What’s wrong?”

“I’m fine Sizwe. Fine. Not a problem, just getting older. Have some more.” She passed him the sweet potatoes.

Sizwe didn’t press the issue. He would speak to his brother later. The doorbell rang several more times, and each time his mother went to the door, told them to come back later; Sizwe was tired, only just home.

“Whatever it is can wait until tomorrow,” she announced clearing up the meal, “one more day won’t matter. Now go and put your feet up. Relax.”

Sizwe switched on the TV before flopping down on the couch. The late night news was about to come on. In the meantime he had to sit through a barrage of ads. He hit mute and went to turn on the kettle. His mum was still busying herself in the kitchen.

“You want coffee?” She asked.

“No. A treat for you.” He responded taking down the tub they used to transport washing from the bath to the line outside. “Come, I’ll show you.” He filled the tub with boiling water, adding some cold until it was warm but not hot. He extracted lavender salts from his bag and put them in, leading his mother to the couch. He helped her remove her shoes and placed her feet in the water. Like so many women her age, her ankles were swollen from years of domestic work, from standing on her feet all day.

“That feels good. Thank you Sizwe.” She stroked his arm.

He hit the sound on the remote as the news came on. The headline was a corruption scandal in Mpumalanga. A government official had bypassed the tendering process to

give her brother a huge catering contract. Sizwe sighed; such stories saddened him. Next the TV cut to Graves Kumalo, Minister of Energy and Water, outlining a zero-tolerance strategy for people who didn't pay their water and electricity bills or who illegally reconnected households. That was why so many people had come to see him. They wanted to know how to respond. Sizwe turned to his mother,

“You knew about this?” It was more a statement than a question.

“Oh Sizwe, one day won't matter. You can deal with it tomorrow.”

“I shouldn't have left. I shouldn't have gone to Denmark.” He turned the TV volume down but not off. He dropped the remote next to him and continued in a flat tone to his mother, his confessor. “I thought it would help. Really. I raised these issues in the Danish parliament. Told them they shouldn't be supporting a government who cut off peoples' water and electricity.” He started to get up. “I must go.”

“No Sizwe,” his mother pressed his arm, “this is not new. It will not change.” She repeated herself, “one day won't matter. Tomorrow. You can work tomorrow.”

Sizwe sighed, “they'll think I've abandoned them, that I'm too good for them, a *returnee*, enjoying overseas trips, complaining about the unfamiliar food. Getting involved in global issues.” He leant his head back against the couch, his eyes to the ceiling, and exhaled deeply.

“Sizwe, listen to me *mtwan'am*. You can't carry everything. You can't carry everyone. You too need to rest. You give everything. Take one evening, just one evening to sit with your old mother.”

“Oh Ma...”

“Now tell me about your trip. Who did you meet? What did you learn?”

“I met some European activists. But that seems minor now, compared to this campaign of Kumalo's.” They sat in silence for a while.

“And I met a girl,” he hadn't intended to say it. It slipped out, “a South African.”

“Oh Sizwe...!” his mother's face broke into a huge smile. “Tell me about her. Who is she?”

Sizwe thought of Julia's easy presence, her ready smile, the way she could shift from seriousness to playfulness so quickly, her soft brown hair. He thought about their last night in her hotel room.

“You're smiling. That's a good sign!”

She was from a different world. Their worlds could never sit side by side. Not in Johannesburg. The rainbow nation was a myth. Her naïve belief in the goodness of the

world could never survive the harsh reality of his. And yet she'd received a threat. Something about her nuclear research had alarmed someone. She hadn't told him why. Perhaps she didn't know. And perhaps that was best. He answered his mother,

"No. It can't work."

"Sizwe that doesn't sound like you. This girl makes you happy. Accept her."

A new friendship with him would be dangerous for her. It was best not to see each other again. Besides, Kumalo's crackdown campaign was serious. He, Sizwe, had a lot to do. He shook his head.

## 10

Julia gave Sizwe ten days to call her. Then she called him. The photo was propped against her screen. The inked drawings were fading. She'd put it up to remind her why she was phoning. He answered almost immediately. Her breath quickened. He sounded wary. She cut to the point.

"Sizwe. I need to talk to you. About my research. I think I know why I was sent that photo. It's to do with the input costs... in the document I received from the Department one was highly inflated..."

"Julia. You're losing me. Say it slowly."

"Okay. Sorry. To make nuclear fuel you need uranium."

"Yes. Yes. I know that."

"Sizwe. Is this a good time to talk to you? Do you want to call me back later?"

"No it's fine. Carry on."

"Well uranium ore is crushed and converted to yellow cake – a mixture of uranium oxides. Then that's enriched – to increase the ratio of radioactive atoms. Naturally it's about one percent and it needs to go up to four percent."

"I still don't understand the point."

"I'm getting there!" Julia felt frustrated. She'd thought Sizwe would be a sympathetic ear. More than that, she'd hoped he would listen and reassure her. He seemed to know something about nuclear energy. He clearly understood politics and politicians. She picked up the photo. Using her thumbnail she scratched off some of the nuclear symbol. "The point is that the Department has estimated the cost for enriched uranium to be *twice* that of the international market rate."

"You're joking?" Sizwe suddenly sounded serious.

“I’m not joking Sizwe.” She was annoyed and relieved that he was finally listening. “I thought you might know someone who was taking payments...”

“Corruption? Yes, maybe...” He paused. She waited. “But I think it’s something else...”

“I’m going to find out where the numbers come from.” She opened her middle drawer and buried the photo under a couple of papers.

“Julia,” he suddenly shouted, “where are you phoning from?”

“My office. Why?”

“Your *office*? Are you out of your mind?”

“Jesus Sizwe. Don’t scare me. I’m sorry I called. I’m sorry I involved you in this. It was thoughtless. I hope you have a nice life.” She slammed down the phone.

Almost immediately her cell rang. She let it go to voice-mail twice before picking up. His tone had changed completely,

“Miss Julie? I’m sorry I gave you a fright. It’s been a hellish week. This zero-tolerance campaign is really screwing people over.”

Julia waited for him to go on.

“We have a huge public meeting on Saturday. Why don’t you come? We can chat afterwards – about the things you mentioned. I’ll fax you a map.”

Again she said nothing.

“I’m glad you called. It makes me happy to hear your voice. Miss Julie.” His words were a caress. “Saturday?”

## 11

Slimkop de Vriess took a photograph out of his briefcase and propped it against a small wooden sculpture on his chest of drawers. The girl had deep brown eyes and was laughing. She looked incredibly happy. The man she was smiling at was not in the picture. De Vriess had photoshopped him out. Julia Ratford was now smiling at him.

He turned and walked to the cupboard, taking out his Armani suit to hang in the bathroom. Steam from the shower would remove the final travel wrinkles. He selected a cream cashmere shirt, together with ironed white briefs and put them on the bed. He placed his brown loafers side-by-side on the floor. Along with a taste for good coffee, he had adopted the fashion of Europe. He stripped, folding his clothes neatly before putting them in the washing basket. The bathroom was very modern – minimalist and

expensive, almost clinical. It had helped him choose the flat, one of twelve in an exclusive complex. Brand new. The developers had pulled down a decaying mansion and cleverly designed a secure estate using some of the old trees. They'd positioned the flats to receive winter sunlight, stay cool in summer and for maximum privacy. De Vriess had done a brief check on all of his neighbours. None warranted further investigation. He never saw them and they never saw him.

He stepped into the glass-doored shower, pausing to look at his head and torso in the mirror. The hair on his chest was starting to grey but his muscles were still firm and toned, his jaw line sharp. He turned the taps on hard, forcing his body to experience the too-hot water as he scrubbed his skin. Adding a bit of cold, he indulged in the perfect temperature and allowed his body a brief moment of sensuality before turning off the hot altogether. He always did this – summer, winter, Africa, Europe – ending with a freezing cold shower kept him alert. And being alert kept him alive. Staying one step ahead of everyone else had given him power, starting with his father.

He drove swiftly through the streets of Pretoria, stopping only cursorily at red robots. His car was small with excellent acceleration. It gave him great pleasure and satisfaction. He arrived at a property with a high wall and imposing gates. They opened automatically as he reached them. The driveway curved gently round a large neatly mowed lawn on which hadedas were feeding. He parked and made his way up the wide front steps and rang the bell. The entrance hall was huge, modelled on an Italian villa. A butler opened the door and led him into a sitting room. Zuzi Dlamini stood up to greet him. She was a very beautiful woman. Impeccably dressed.

“Welcome Mr De Vriess,” she said. “It’s good to see you again.” Her voice was seductive and the pressure of her hand hinted at intimacy, but her eyes were clear and sharp, offering nothing. “Please, make yourself at home,” she indicated a large armchair. “What can I get you to drink?”

“Lime and soda would be perfect. Thank you.”

“Ah Mr De Vriess... can't I offer you something a bit stronger? A single malt perhaps? I have Glenmorangie – your favourite.”

It was not in fact his favourite, but it would do.

“Thank you. Just a small tot please.”

He sat down and watched as she went to the drinks trolley to pour his whiskey. Her body moved with grace. She was wearing a long narrow skirt and halter top with a very low back. As she bent to pour the whiskey, he could see the curve of her firm breast.

“My husband will be down shortly,” she said turning around.

“I trust you’re both well?” he asked, taking his drink.

“Yes, very well. Thank you.” She sat down. “And here’s Graves...”

The door opened. Graves Kumalo walked in. He had aged since De Vriess had last seen him. His head was still shaved, giving no sign of his greying hair. There were lines on his face and his thick neck seemed to have obtained even more flesh. His eyes were dull. He walked with heavy steps towards De Vriess who put down his whisky and got up slowly to greet him.

“Mr De Vriess. It’s good of you to come.”

“It’s good of you to invite me Minister.”

“You’ve got a drink? Good. Zuzi – my normal please.” He sat down with considerable effort. De Vriess thought that his legs would trouble him a lot less if he lost thirty kilo’s. He wondered what the much younger Zuzi saw in him. Even his power seemed to be fading.

“You’ve come to bring me information on that bloody skelm?”

“I did go to Copenhagen – yes.”

“Well?”

“The Minister probably has more information than me – from local sources.” De Vriess laid the bait and wondered if Kumalo would pick up on it.

“Nonsense,” Kumalo said taking his brandy and coke from Zuzi, “you know those Europeans much better than me. What did he do? Who did he speak to? What kak did he tell them?”

So he wasn’t going to tell him about Jon Roberts. Interesting. Well De Vriess also had things he wouldn’t share.

“Graves,” Zuzi said gently caressing her husband’s head as she sat down, “let’s not talk about Sizwe Magona now. It always makes you so agitated. Why don’t we ask Mr De Vriess about Europe and what’s been happening there. You can talk business after we’ve eaten.” She skilfully steered the conversation onto other topics.

Dinner was served in the dining room at a table laid with polished silver and starched linen. De Vriess was the only guest. The chef had outdone himself to provide modern vegetarian food, African style. Kumalo was discreetly served lamb chops. Zuzi too refrained from meat – the perfect hostess. It was only towards the end of the meal that the conversation shifted to the real reason De Vriess had been invited.

“I see you’ve launched a new campaign Minister.” De Vriess took perverse delight in calling him Minister. It was a private joke. A literal translation of his father’s title, *Dominee*. A title he’d learnt to despise. He was sure Kumalo could not detect the irony.

“Yes, yes. You know we can’t have counter-revolutionaries stirring up unrest. This upcoming Africa Summit is important. Very important.” Kumalo sounded like a politician, even in his own home. “It is critical that we nip these ultra-leftists in the bud – zero tolerance – that’s what we have to exert. We are a country committed to social change, but it cannot happen in a chaotic manner.” He leant towards De Vriess.

“Maintaining a stable market and the right climate for investment is critical.”

“But we want a little more than that out of the Summit, don’t we Minister.” De Vriess said looking at Zuzi and playing the role of advisor perfectly, his tone gentle, but prompting.

“Absolutely. We intend to show case Africa, to demonstrate to the world that Africa is not a continent to be ignored and forgotten. The time of the African renaissance is here!”

“Graves intends to create a proudly African hub,” Zuzi returned De Vriess’s look. “Investors will be encouraged to pledge money towards flagship projects. The Pebble Bed will have a prominent position.”

“Of course!” Kumalo boasted. “The Pebble Bed is a truly African invention. No one else has got it right. But we will. Everyone will want a share in it.”

De Vriess smiled with encouragement.

Kumalo continued, “But Sizwe. Time and again it comes back to bloody Sizwe Magona. I want people to pay for the electricity they use. Who stops them? Sizwe! I want to take Africa to new heights through state of the art technology. Who stops me?” Kumalo’s face was turning red. He was working himself up into a rage.

“Graves please,” Zuzi said gently. “I think you overestimate Sizwe. He is merely someone who hasn’t yet found his place in the new South Africa. He will. Don’t worry about him, my love.” Her voice was soothing. “Why don’t you and Mr De Vriess go and speak business over coffee. I’ll join you in a while.” She ushered them out of the room.

“Minister, we need to talk about the Y-Plant.” De Vriess began. They were back in the lounge and Kumalo was mixing himself yet another brandy and coke. De Vriess didn’t know how he could stand so much sugar. He continued, “Everything is ready from my side. We are just waiting for your go-ahead. And of course the political buy-in.

Everyone is very excited about it.” He sat down, and put his hands together, finger-tip to finger-tip.

“Mr de Vriess, as you know I am working with a timeframe that is hard to rush. Parliament will meet later next month. I foresee no problems.” He sat down heavily, spilling some of his drink onto his suit pants, without noticing. “They will not go against the advice of me, their Minister. And we will get support from the rest of the continent... As South Africa we need to play our cards carefully; we can’t be seen to be running the show. I’m sure you know all of this.”

De Vriess leaned forward, “if I might suggest Minister,” he said as though the idea had just come to him, “a campaign. A media campaign.”

Kumalo finished his drink and took out a handkerchief. He had finally noticed the wet spot on his suit.

“What you need to do,” De Vriess continued, “is get public opinion on your side. Link it to the zero-tolerance campaign. Include as counter-revolutionaries those who oppose technology and innovation. It won’t be hard. Most will be green ideologues – easy to marginalize.”

“But we can’t mention the Y-Plant...”

“No. Not yet. But the ground will be laid for it.”

The Minister was looking tired. De Vriess stood up to take his leave. “One more thing... this girl... Julia Ratford. It might be worth watching her a little more closely.” He laid the bait again.

“I’ve already taken care of it.”

Aha! Jon Roberts. De Vriess smiled to himself. He enjoyed the fast drive through empty streets back to his flat.

## 12

Julia entered Soweto from the Golden Highway. It was a long time since she’d been to a township. Situated south west of the City, Soweto housed the men and women who had built Johannesburg. They’d never been its citizens. Not until 1994. One momentous day in April had changed all that. But it was not obvious. Julia passed a group of kids pushing a wheelbarrow full of empty drums. The eldest one had taken charge and was shouting at the youngsters not to topple her load with their exuberant games. At the end

of the street was a standpipe. Women stood chatting as they waited in turn to fill their buckets.

Sizwe's hand drawn directions were on the seat next to her. She'd tried to compare it to her map-book but failed. The roads had no visible names. After a few false sightings, she turned into an area surrounded by high barbed wire fences. Groups of people were gathered around half a dozen cars, listening to the radio. Julia parked next to a white Polo at the main entrance. A man was sitting in the driver's seat, his head bent over his cell phone. After glancing in the mirror, she picked up her bag and got out of the car. The man in the Polo looked up. His ice-blue eyes watched her through the door. He followed soon after.

The hall was huge with a cement floor. Her vision took a moment to adjust after the bright sunshine. Old plastic chairs formed a square in front of a makeshift stage. Daylight filtered through high up windows where bits of broken glass clung to the sills. The wall held several long fluorescent lights, some fully on, others flickering at half power. The room was hot and stuffy. On the chipboard and beer crate stage were two microphone stands. A tall thin man was standing at one, encouraging people to take seats.

*"Amandla!"*

*"Awethu!"*

*"Phantsi privatisation, phantsi!"*

*"Phantsi!"*

Sizwe stood chatting to a small group of people. She went up to greet him.

"Miss Julie," he embraced her in an enormous hug, "glad you could make it Com!" And then he was gone. It didn't matter. She was in a good mood. They'd chat afterwards. She made her way to a chair a few rows from the front. A woman took the mike and led the crowd in a song:

*My mo-ther was a kitchen girl*

*My faa-ther was a garden boy*

*That's why I'm a socialist*

*I'm a socialisti, I'm a socialisti*

Julia didn't join the singing. An old woman with a walking stick struggled to sit down next to her. Her joints were stiff. Eventually she settled with her bag clasped on her lap. She gave Julia a toothless grin and patted her hand. Julia looked around the packed room. All of these people – young and old, men and women – had come because

government hadn't delivered on its promises. Water and electricity had been given to some, not to all. The man from the Polo lurked in the back corner. She didn't see him.

Sizwe opened the meeting. He spoke in English and isiZulu. Everyone listened closely. Julia couldn't understand all the words but it wasn't hard to follow the argument. His presence and tone said as much as his language. He was a powerful orator. Services for All was a continuation of the struggle against Apartheid he said. It was a class struggle. The zero tolerance campaign was an assault on the working class.

People were invited to give testimonies of their experiences. A mother talked about having her water cut-off. She had to sneak to an outside tap at the school. She needed water to boil for her baby's bottle; both her brother and his child were living with HIV/Aids and needed their bedding washed and changed regularly. There was no water.

Sizwe sat behind the speaker, his attention completely focussed on her. Julia watched him. This was his world; these were his struggles. Her problems must seem trivial to him. She tried to imagine her life without water. Her thoughts immediately went to swimming. Perhaps it was a luxury, but she'd die all the same. No place to open her mind and free her spirit.

She listened as speaker replaced speaker. All shared their personal stories about water and energy – lives of poverty. Some were angry, but most told their harrowing stories without hatred or blame. It was very moving; very sad. She raised her eyes and caught Sizwe looking at her. He smiled. Then stood up.

“Now these are not just issues for Soweto and South Africa. They are also global issues. A result of globalisation. Cut-offs are exactly in line with a cost recovery approach that the World Bank, IMF and World Trade Organisation are imposing on our countries. We need to remember we are part of a larger international struggle against neo-liberalism and exploitation. And it's not just people being exploited. It is also our environment. There is someone here who can tell us a bit about *this* side of the struggle.”

He looked at Julia with a big smile; invited her onto the stage with his eyes. She looked straight back and shook her head. The public meeting was her excuse to see Sizwe. She'd come to discuss nuclear fission, not services. She didn't want to speak. But he held her eyes and kept up the challenge. She stood up. Everyone looked at her.

“Can you hear me from here?” she asked. There was a low murmur from the crowd. Then someone began a song and everyone stood up. They wanted her on stage, talking

from the microphone. She squeezed past the people in her row and made her way to the front. She felt heat moving up her neck and into her face. But the singing calmed her.

“What do you want me to talk about?” she whispered as she took the mike from him. He took it back.

“This is Julia Ratford from Wits University. She will tell us about climate change and government’s plans to promote nuclear energy as a solution.”

Julia looked out across the room. People had sat down again. She started to talk, a little too fast. She explained what climate change was and described the costs and benefits of nuclear energy. She was both nervous and angry. The audience listened with respect, but it seemed without much understanding. She knew she was speaking as an academic. She couldn’t turn her words into sentences that were relevant to this gathering. She ended her short speech by saying that people should engage with what government chooses to invest in. It would have long term implications for energy delivery and a clean, safe environment.

Sizwe took over, “What Julia’s saying is that government is trying to solve this problem of climate change – which was created by the rich countries – by using money that could go towards service delivery to invest in a technology that creates terrible waste. This waste will be toxic for the next hundred thousand years. They will dump it on poor communities that have no way of protecting themselves from it. Phantsi nuclear energy phantsi! Phantsi Kumalo Phantsi! Forward renewable energy for all, forward! Viva Julia Viva!”

The echoing ‘viva’ lacked strength. Julia felt stupid and embarrassed. She left the stage. Then the hall. She was too angry with Sizwe to stay.

The blue-eyed man unfurled himself from the back corner and followed her out. He’d already taken note of her car model and licence plate.

### 13

Like all government departments, the Department of Energy and Water had its headquarters in Pretoria. On Tuesday morning Julia and her boss Pamela parked in the basement and signed into security. Ten minutes later, a woman with blue eye-shadow and hair piled high on her head arrived with an access card to let them through the door. She showed them to the lift and went back to her desk. On the tenth floor they stepped into a corridor lined with closed doors. Pamela read the name plates and gave Julia a

short bio on the person who worked within. She knew everyone. The last door on the left belonged to Mandla Dumisi. He popped his head out as they approached,

“Dr Swart, Ms Ratford, morning. I’ll be with you shortly. We’re meeting in the room at the end.” He pointed to where a tea-trolley was stationed. “Julia, do you mind if I have a quick word?” He drew her into his office. “It’s about those files I gave you.”

Mandla Dumisi was Director of Energy Generation. Julia liked him. He was always courteous and helpful. His appointment had been based on merit not political status. Julia wondered how long he would last.

“Oh Mandla, I’m so sorry. You know Pamela asked me to go to Denmark at the last minute – just a few days before we presented. I really intended to go through them and build them in to the research. I just didn’t have time. I’m really sorry. I’ll look at them immediately.”

“No. Not to worry Julia. I’m sure you’re very busy. You haven’t read them then?”

“Not yet. No. I’ve had a lot to catch up on since I got back. I feel terrible because I know I pressured you into giving them to me at such short notice!”

Mandla smiled, “not at all. We like the public to keep us on our toes! No, the thing is Julia, I really shouldn’t have given those to you at all. They’re internal documents and the Minister himself is a stickler for security.”

“So you don’t think they’ll add to my research findings? You were happy with what Pamela presented?”

“Yes we’re very happy. Everyone’s been singing your praises. But I’d be grateful if you deleted those files.”

She nodded. They left his office and joined Pamela who was chatting to two of Mandla’s colleagues. Julia’s research was critical to the upcoming Africa Summit. As hosts, South Africa needed to take the lead. The next step was a preparatory meeting in Nairobi.

“The thing is,” Mandla said, “while we were originally looking only at South Africa, the Minister is now keen we look at the continent.”

Pamela nodded, “yes I’m sure that’s fine. Obviously we’ll need to increase the budget – there’ll be a fair amount more work to do, but yes. We can do it.”

Julia ignored the leave-this-to-me look from her boss and asked, “sorry Mandla, I just want to be sure I understand. Instead of looking at the feasibility of nuclear energy as an alternative to coal for South Africa, you want us to see if it could work for the whole of Africa?”

“Yes. I realise it’s a big task, but we’re only looking for preliminary figures – ball park estimates. Can Africa’s electrification be supplied by nuclear power. Obviously the Pebble Beds will be an important technology to factor in.”

“That’s two things you’re asking for...” Julia said looking up from her notebook. Pamela interrupted,

“Julia. I’m sure the Director has more important things to do than get into the details. He’s asked us to do a job and we’ve agreed. We will present the Department with a proposed research outline and a budget.”

“I’m sorry,” Julia looked at Mandla. He nodded for her to continue. “There is one other thing...”

“Julia, we’re delighted with the work you’ve done to date. So please, tell me. What is bothering you?”

The files he’d asked her to delete was what really bothered her. Instead she said,

“It’s the waste. I know you’ve asked me to do cost-benefit calculations of energy *production* but I really think we need to look at the costs of disposal if we’re going to compare options.”

“Julia. The Department is looking at that internally. You know that.” Pamela spoke sharply.

“Okay, well then maybe you can give me a ball-park figure of the cost and I can factor it in?” She turned innocently to the DEW staff.

## 14

He let himself into Julia’s office. It wasn’t hard. Wits had no security check point for pedestrians. Anyone could walk onto the campus. The day was quiet and the corridors empty as he entered her building. It was one of the ugliest. He hated Wits University. He hated the liberal institution it had once been. Full of self-righteous pseudo-politicians. And he hated the populist place it had become. Overrun by children of the new elite who weren’t bright enough to get into a University with a semblance of academic standards.

The lock on Julia’s door took him fifteen seconds to open. He closed it quietly behind him. The room was dark. He walked across and opened the narrow blinds. Julia’s office looked onto a small hill. It led over a bridge to the old Central Business District into what used to be downtown Johannesburg. Now most of the CBD buildings

were abandoned. Law firms, mining houses, banks and finally the Johannesburg Stock Exchange had relocated north of the City. Hawkers, informal traders and micro-entrepreneurs had filled their place. It was vibrant. Hot mielies and shoelaces could be bought at every street corner.

De Vriess turned back to the room. Julia was in Pretoria. That would give him some time. He switched on her computer. The start-up tune was louder than he'd anticipated. He stood still and listened. A door slammed at the end of the corridor. Nothing else. He waited a full five minutes before moving. The bookshelves held project files and books. He leafed through some of them looking for hidden pieces of paper. Nothing unusual. Her filing cabinet was full of University regulations and project finances. Again, nothing unexpected. But he found something in her desk. At the back of her middle drawer was a photograph. A swimmer was suspended in mid-air over a pool. Faint markings remained where someone had drawn on top of it. He put the photo in his jacket pocket.

Her computer files were in perfect order. A mere ten emails in the inbox pending action. The rest were assigned to sections with unambiguous labels. He scanned through 'civil society prep', a sub file under 'African Summit'. Nothing interesting. He memorised the correspondents' names. A further twenty minute search revealed nothing. Before switching the machine off he ran a history scan. And there he found her hidden files. Or rather, he saw where they had been. The folders were now empty. He could not retrieve them.

Clearly he needed to up his surveillance.

First he found the network details of her machine and added them to his memory. With a bit of trial and error he'd be able to access her files from any other Wits computer. Next the phone. A small device in the wall connection would record both incoming and outgoing numbers. He would also be able to listen in on all of her conversations. De Vriess did a quick survey of the room to see he'd left nothing behind or out of place. He let himself out and left the building unseen.

A call came through two hours later. He was sitting in his car outside the gym. The cell-phone number ran across his monitor. He picked up the headphones.

"Hello, Julia Ratford speaking." She could have been next to him in the car.

"Julia, it's Jon", an attractive, but slightly high-pitched voice said. He spoke rapidly, "Jon Roberts."

De Vriess had never met him. Or heard him. Of course he had seen his file...

“It’s probably a surprise, I know”, Jon said tumbling over his words, “but I was thinking of you and then I saw you, or rather saw and heard you, at the SFA rally on Saturday – you were awesome – and wondered how you were, but you left before I could speak to you. It was quite hard to track you down. How are you?”

“Hi Jon. I’m fine thank you. How are you?” Julia sounded calm. Cool.

“Oh don’t be like that babe, I haven’t seen you in ages. I’m well but I want to see you. Don’t you want to meet for a drink?”

“Jon, it’s nice to hear from you really, but I don’t think it’s a good idea.”

“Oh come on Jules, it will be great. We can remember old times and chat about what you’re up to now. We’re working on similar things, I’d love to hear what you’re doing, how you are. Please...”

“Jon, honestly, thanks. But I’ve got a lot going on at the moment and I really don’t think it’s a good idea.” De Vriess admired her resolution. At the same time he developed a grudging respect for Jon Roberts.

“Okay. Suit yourself Jules. I just thought it would be nice to catch up. Maybe we’ll run into each other sometime. Cheers for now.”

“Bye Jon.”

De Vriess removed the headphones and tapped his finger tips together. Jon was choosing to go into the open. It made sense. They’d once known each other very well. That was on file. She’d been a school girl when they’d met. De Vriess tried to imagine her at sixteen.

## 15

Julia dumped her bag on the coffee table. Jon’s phone call had unsettled her. She was surprised. It was more than twelve years since she’d seen him. She pictured his gangly body, intense blue eyes and jet-black hair. He’d been very good looking. Perhaps he had thickened out and lost his hair. His voice was identical. When he’d left – it seemed a lifetime ago – she’d missed him terribly. He’d never bothered to communicate.

She opened the cottage windows and breathed in the cool evening air. It was sweet with wisteria blossom. Her bedroom led off the entrance-come-living room. A small corner had been converted to a bathroom with a shower and toilet. She changed out of her work-clothes into a pair of jeans and cotton top. Then she flopped onto her bed. She was exhausted. A swim would make her feel much better...

The sound of the doorbell woke her.

“Hello.” She called into the intercom. It was unusual for someone to drop by on a week evening.

“Miss Julie?”

Sizwe. A warm sensation ran through her body then subsided. How the hell did he know where she lived? She pushed the gate catch open and walked through her front door onto the patio.

“I’m up here,” she called, “follow the paving stones.”

He came bounding up the path, a big bunch of flowers in his hand.

“Ah Miss Julie, don’t be mad at me. I have brought you a peace offering.”

She stood at the top of the path. A mix of emotions swirled inside her, all thoughts of Jon long gone.

“Are these for me? Thank you.”

“Let me put them in water and then let’s go.”

“Go where?”

“You’ll see.”

“No Sizwe. Tell me where. Last time you invited me somewhere you made me give a speech and I didn’t want to.”

“No speeches, no rallies. Come. Put on your shoes. Let’s go.”

They walked into the house. Sizwe found a rinsed out glass jar on the draining rack and filled it with water for the flowers.

“This is nice!” he looked around the room. Two armchairs and a sofa formed a semi-circle in front of a small TV that stood on a cupboard full of books and CD’s. A large Persian carpet lay in the middle under a coffee table. The kitchen was separated by a counter, which Julia used for chopping and writing. It also doubled as a dining table.

“Thanks.” He put the flowers down on the coffee table.

“Anyways it was good for you to talk. You said important things. You were great Com. You must just lose some of those big sounding words!”

Julia made a face at him, but was too happy to scowl. “I didn’t want to speak. I hadn’t prepared anything. It seemed so trivial compared with other people’s issues.”

“It’s all part of the same system. Like I said. You must just listen a bit more and you’ll know what to say. But *come*. We must go now.”

“Okay, okay! I’ll put my shoes on.”

They drove up Northcliff Hill. Sizwe had borrowed his brother's old green BMW. It had a radio with a manual tuner. They managed to find Brenda Fassie between the crackle. The music and the spontaneity of the outing put Julia in a good mood. But she couldn't help asking,

"How did you find my house?"

"Ah come, Miss Julie, don't be so suspicious!"

"Seriously Sizwe, how did you find my house?"

"Well, I looked you up in the phone book..."

"It's not there."

"Then I asked all the people I knew..."

"Seriously."

"Seriously." He switched off the ignition and turned towards her. "Let's look at the sunset. That's why I brought you up here."

He opened his door and went to sit on the bonnet. After a short while she joined him. Other couples were also sitting on their cars across the ridge, some kissing, others chatting. A man was there with two excited children.

"My father once brought me here," Sizwe said, "when I was a small boy. He said everyone should see a good sunset. He left my brothers and sister at home, brought just me." Sizwe spoke out over the hill, "I was so excited. It was rare to have my father all to myself. We came up here, like now, about half an hour before the sun went down. I had never seen anything so beautiful. There were huge clouds in the sky that started changing colour. I was transfixed, to be in such a magical moment with my father. Just the two of us."

He was quiet as they watched the sky turning, their thighs barely touching. Julia could feel the warmth from his body entering hers. Every part of her was on fire, alive. She longed to touch him.

"And then?"

"And then..." he turned to look at her, his leg moving away as he did so. Her body quietened. "My mother was furious. Of course I was too young to understand why. I thought she didn't want me to be with my father, didn't want me to have special times. I was angry with her for weeks." He stared out at the sky that was shifting from orange to purple. "I was a teenager before I realised we shouldn't have been there. We had no permission to enter white areas after dark. My father had risked jail and exile to Venda just to watch a sunset. He had stolen a sunset for me."

Julia shifted closer to him and took his hand, entwining her fingers through his.

“I did want to call you when I got back,” he said. “From Denmark. But I’m worried Miss Julie. That photo you were sent. It doesn’t make sense. I think its probably better for you not to know me.”

“What? You’re going to decide what’s good for me?” She asked in mock alarm.

“No.” He laughed. “I realise that was a bad idea. That’s why I’m here. But I’m still worried.”

“What were you going to tell me – about the inflated costs? By-the-way the man who gave me the data asked me to destroy it. Said it was internal Departmental stuff. Can you believe it? Anyway, you said you didn’t think it was corruption but something else.”

“Ah. Miss Julie, I think you must be right. I can’t imagine even Kumalo having the audacity to do what I thought. He’s too much of a coward. I knew him once. We were in exile together. And if what I suspect is true, it’s better for you not to know.”

They sat in silence for a long time after that. Julia felt enormous peace. It was as though Sizwe’s entire being was opening itself to her through their joined hands. Eventually they separated and he dropped her at home.

## 16

The door to *Imbizo* was open. Sizwe walked into a dimly lit room. The ceiling was low and the air thick with smoke. Six small tables stood close together. People had pulled up chairs and crates around each one. Alcohol was flowing. Sizwe squeezed through the standing customers to the bar. He bought a black label quart and navigated his way to a table at the back.

Seated around were five men. They greeted him warmly. All, except Zenzile. Sizwe worried about the youngster. He was so angry and his anger was indiscriminate. Often it was directed at Sizwe. Sizwe slapped him on the back,

“Zenz! Move up a bit.”

The young man lifted his eyes briefly, “Howzit Com,” then shifted his wiry body to the end of the beer crate. Sizwe perched on the other side.

“So. What’s up?” he asked.

They told him of an area that had had its power cut off. They’d be targeting a specific street that night.

At times Sizwe missed the direct action. He thought fleetingly of his first night out with pickaxe and pliers. It had not been a success. He'd been half way up the pole when he heard the whistle. The climb had been harder than he expected. His bag kept falling round in front of his body, impeding his movement. He'd managed to stop and put the strap over his head, to fix it more securely to his side, but it was still difficult to grip the smooth metal. The watch had already whistled once when he heard it. Headlights caught him almost immediately. He stared, transfixed, before the adrenalin kicked in. He slid down the pole and disappeared into the shadows. He never knew if it was the police, or just an ordinary car.

Then he remembered his first night when it had worked. He'd managed to provide an old woman with electricity. She'd watched him from her door as he smashed the electricity box. He'd adjusted the wires inside. She'd watched with a mixture of disapproval and gratitude. Disapproval that he had to break the box and the law to give her what she'd been promised. Then she'd flicked a switch and light burst out from the front door. It spread down the steps, illuminating her deep smile. *Siyabonga!*" she'd called. Thank you.

Sizwe brought himself back to the present. He no longer did the reconnections. This was their job now.

"You know this zero tolerance campaign is serious hey?" He looked at each of the men in turn. They nodded.

"Kumalo's a shit." One of them stubbed his cigarette out in a beer bottle lid. "Promise people power and then fucking take it away. Who the fuck does he think he is? Being poor is now a fucking crime." He stood up and went to the bar.

Sizwe remembered first meeting Kumalo. It was a long time ago. He'd had almost nothing – an old battered suitcase with two clean shirts, some socks and a pair of woollen trousers. His thin body and summer clothes had been no match for the biting wind, which channelled down the narrow Amsterdam streets. In the pocket of his ill-fitting jacket was a letter of introduction. The letter was from his uncle to Kumalo. He'd had it for some time, in case he had to leave the country quickly. He hadn't said goodbye to his mother. Or to Zuzi. It was a long time before he could safely send a message home. They must have worried.

Sizwe wasn't given to reminiscing. This was the third time this evening a powerful memory had come to him: his father on Northcliff hill; the anxiety and adrenalin of

climbing an electricity pole; and now Amsterdam. It was Julia. Something in her stirred him deeply. He would need to watch it.

In Amsterdam, he'd found the building easily and walked up the five flights of stairs. His hand had shaken with cold as he knocked on the door. The man who bade him enter was sitting behind a desk in a small room with dirty white walls. His large shaved head and thick muscled shoulders gave the impression of a big man, a very physical man. It was not until he stood up that Sizwe realised he was not tall. His face was pockmarked and looked faded from too many Northern Hemisphere winters. He gripped Sizwe's hand, holding it more tightly than was comfortable, for a fraction too long.

Over the months Sizwe had learnt that this was his manner, a hint of physical power to back up what he was saying or doing. In the beginning Sizwe had been unsettled. This man was to be his mentor. He held a senior position with the ANC. He'd studied in Moscow. But in the end Sizwe had learnt to despise the bully Kumalo became whenever he felt threatened. The zero-tolerance campaign was entirely consistent with the man he'd known. He was unable to engage with his own failure. He tried to beat it out of existence. Well Sizwe too could fight.

The Comrade returned with three beers to share, "gotta stay alert for tonight," and lit another cigarette. Zenzile turned to Sizwe and asked,

"So who's the girl?"

"None of your business." Even as he said it, Sizwe knew it was the wrong response.

"Out of order Com." Zenzile's eyes were menacing, "It's is exactly our business who you hang out with. I saw Mr Roberts at the back of the meeting. Was that just a coincidence?"

"Yes. What the fuck was he doing there?" Everyone turned to look at Sizwe. He put his hands up in the air,

"Guys, guys." Then he put his elbows down on the table and lowered his voice. They all had to lean forward to hear him. "Normally Mr Roberts sends his minions to our meetings. We know that. We don't always know who they are, but we know they are there. We've always known this. What we say, who speaks, all of this goes directly back to the city. We can assume that anything from a public meeting is in the public domain. Meaning government knows about it." He looked round. They were nodding. "So why does Mr Roberts come himself?" Sizwe sat back and let the question hang in the air. No one spoke. They were waiting for him to answer his own question. Sizwe

took a sip of beer, then leant forward again. “He’s worried. They know their zero tolerance campaign is unacceptable. They know we will react. But they don’t know how. He’s looking to see who comes to the meetings, to who is making the decisions.” He looked at each of them, “I suggest you are all extremely careful who you talk to in the next while. There is no doubt they will be soliciting informers.”

## 17

Julia turned up the radio. Minister Kumalo was being interviewed. His pompous voice boomed across her living room. She was working from home. It felt safer. She saved her calculations and switched her attention to the Minister. He was talking about the upcoming Summit. And how South Africa was going to save the rest of the continent. Even to her, unschooled in politics, it sounded bogus.

“South Africa has an inherent advantage. We generate more than eighty percent of the electricity in Africa. We must expand our networks so that others in the region can benefit.”

“Minister, some people say you should ensure that everyone in South Africa has electricity before selling to other countries.”

“Yes, well these things are not in contradiction.” The Minister spoke slowly and deliberately. “But people must understand that they must pay. Some think they can steal electricity. They reconnect households. This is a political ploy driven by ultra-leftists. We have zero tolerance for it. *Zero*. Anyone conspiring to rob government will be arrested and charged. The penalties are severe.”

“But Minister...”

“And...” Kumalo was emphatic.

“Minister!”

“Please! Can you allow me to finish? You have invited me here to speak. Let me speak! “

“You were saying...”

“I need to make it clear. We are looking at a number of options. Electricity is needed in the region. We can supply it in many ways. This is entirely in line with our development plans for Africa. We need energy to grow the economies.”

Julia went to switched on the kettle. She was reminded of her economic history class. He sounded very like the European Colonisers. The Minister was clearly irritating the interviewer who tried a different tack,

“Coal is not very popular right now because of climate change. How do you intend to overcome negative perceptions around that?”

“Well of course coal will continue to be used for the foreseeable future – this is entirely consistent with our right to develop. And we are also investigating nuclear power generation.”

“Is this where the new nuclear technology comes in? The so-called Pebble Beds?”

“Yes, absolutely. We have invested in developing the Pebble Bed Modular Reactor. It is an intrinsically safe nuclear process. It will enable us to build small power stations where needed.”

“Tell me Minister, how does this relate to the upcoming Summit?”

Julia’s phone rang. She hit mute on the radio remote, and so didn’t hear Kumalo’s answer.

“Julia. It’s Santie.” Santie was Pamela’s PA. “Listen, Pamela wants you at a meeting this afternoon. Three o’ clock.”

“What’s it about Santie? I’m making some progress on my work here. I don’t want to come in unless it is important.”

“I don’t know Julia. Pamela didn’t say. It’s with a city official – something about the African Summit. Anyway she says you must be there.”

Julia agreed and put down the phone. She was irritated. It was impossible to put in a solid day’s work without being interrupted. Actually she was more than irritated. She was frustrated. Nothing was any clearer. She’d looked again at the files Mandla had asked her to delete. The only copy was now on her laptop at home. The numbers said the same thing. The input cost for enriched uranium was twice the current international market price.

Some analysts were predicting that uranium would get more expensive. This would happen if nukes were seen as a clean alternative to coal in the climate change stakes. The jury was still out. And in fact, Julia realised, the African Summit would probably sway the debate one way or the other. Uranium was a limited resource, so if demand increased the price would rise. But even so, it wouldn’t rise that much that quickly. She tapped her fingers on the desk and debated phoning Mandla. It would be the easiest way to solve the problem. But she couldn’t. He’d know she’d read the forbidden document.

Presumably someone was advising the Minister and providing these figures. But who? Or perhaps it was just an error. Everyone would be glad when she pointed it out. Unlikely, given the anonymous photo. Sizwe knew something he wasn't telling her. She thought about phoning him. But she'd be seeing him later. He'd invited her to his brother's birthday party. She googled his name instead.

There were hundreds of hits. She read a couple. All were about public services. Statements he'd made, interviews he'd given. Nothing about nuclear energy. Reading the words rendered him soulless. The language was dull. The journalists unsympathetic. None captured his vital spirit. She checked out youtube and found a short clip. That was better. She put on her earphones and listened. A warm sensation crept into her stomach as she remembered their evening. He'd dropped her home. She'd wanted him to stay but he wouldn't. He had a meeting. Their farewell had been tender.

Suddenly Julia saw the clock at the edge of her screen. It was 2.15. Pamela would kill her if she was late. She disconnected from the internet and switched off her computer. A change of clothing, a touch of lipstick, and a brush through her hair. She was ready to go. The kitchen counter was in full view of the door as she locked it. Her laptop was on it. She unlocked the door, leaving it ajar, grabbed the computer and stuffed it under her bed. Then locked up again. She stood outside Pamela's door at one minute to three. She used the minute to catch her breath. Then knocked. A tall man wearing smart clothes got up to greet her. He looked somewhat dishevelled.

"Julia, this is Jon Roberts who's in charge of delivering services in Joburg. Jon, this is Julia Ratford, our new researcher."

"Yes, we've met before," Jon said and shook her hand. Julia glowered at him. She was unimpressed.

"Oh good, so you know each other. That'll make things easier. Listen Julia, Jon is busy preparing the City for the African Summit. He wants to showcase different electricity supply options during a panel on climate change. I've said you'd give him your full co-operation."

"I see." She spoke slowly then sat down in one of the pale leather chairs. "Can we talk about this?" Her voice was completely reasonable.

"Of course! That's why I've invited you here." Pamela too took a seat.

Jon walked behind Julia and put his hand on her shoulder. Then gently kneaded it with his thumb. Heat waves went out from his touch. Her skin felt on fire. It was

unbelievable. Twelve years later and her body still responded. He sat down opposite her.

Within an hour, Jon had charmed his way back into Julia's heart. His slightly nervous manner and extreme intelligence reminded her why she had fallen for him. He was quick and witty, with a touch of self-deprecation. And he was familiar. The information he needed for the Summit wasn't onerous. She'd be doing most of it anyway.

He apologised as soon as they left Pamela's office.

"Sorry Jules. For ambushing you like that. I thought you might send me to hell with that look!" He squeezed her elbow. "But I wanted to see you and I couldn't think of any other way. Was it that bad?" he pulled a clown face, "I mean I can see how you'd want to keep a professional image around that woman, but... it's nice to see you. Really. You look... you look gorgeous. Slim. Assured." He stood back gesturing with his hand up and down her height, "professional."

"You too Jon. You look well."

"So let's meet for a drink? Come on... please, please, please, please, please!"

"Okay!" she said, laughing and walked to her office.

Her light heartedness was short lived.

## 18

Julia kept an emergency supply of make-up in her middle drawer, as well as a couple of scarves. It was useful for times like now when she had to go out straight from work. After the meeting with Jon she spent a futile hour searching the internet for costs of nuclear waste disposal. She learnt that not a single nuclear plant in the world had ever been formally closed. Decommissioned was the official term. Not one. No one knew what to do with the contaminated equipment and site. Cost didn't even come in to it. As for the spent fuel, no one boasted about the numbers. She would have to persuade Mandla to give them to her. Or approach Eskom, the company that ran Koeberg.

Frustrated, she switched off her computer and grabbed her make-up bag. The zip was open and things fell out. Her mascara rolled to the back of the drawer. She stretched her hand in and retrieved it. Then felt for the photo. It wasn't there. Her fingers ruffled through bits of paper. Nothing glossy. She pulled the drawer out and turned it upside down her desk. A rubber band was stuck in the gap between the side and base. It broke

when she pulled it out. She threw it in the bin. The drawer was now empty. She put back each item separately. The photo wasn't there.

Her hand shook as she flipped open the lid of her base. She steadied herself on the bathroom basin. Took three deep breaths. When she looked in the mirror, her face was pale but calm. She applied the powder and added some colour to her cheeks. Then did her eyes. Sizwe was the only person who knew about the photo. Sizwe and the watcher. Sizwe would never have taken it. He'd never even been to her office. But why would the photographer remove it? It made no sense. Julia realised she'd go mad if she let her thoughts go round and round. She was seeing Sizwe shortly. She'd ask him. But something nagged at her.

The afternoon storm was just starting when Julia parked her car. Huge drops of rain landed on her as she crossed the street. She'd found Sizwe's house without a wrong turn. The front door was open. A couple on the steps shifted to let her pass. They seemed oblivious to the weather. A woman walked towards her from the end of a corridor. Her hair was speckled with grey on the edges of her face. Julia could see the likeness immediately – her eyes were warm and wary at the same time, with lines embedded from many years of both laughter and tears. She smiled broadly. Her eyes took in Julia. She held out both her hands to clasp Julia's and welcome her. "Sizwe told me he'd met a beautiful *umlungu* who he says is also intelligent. Is this you? You must watch out for my son! I hope he's not drawing you into all his politics."

"Hey ma, leave her!" Sizwe was right behind her. "She draws herself into politics. Technologies you would never believe possible." He gave Julia a huge hug, "I'll be with you in a minute." He touched her forehead with his.

"Sizwe." His mother shook her head. "Come Julia, have some food. You must eat, you are too thin." She led Julia down the corridor into the dining room, "I'm Nolitha."

A huge feast was spread across a large ornate table. Chicken pieces, beef stew, pap, rice, tomato and onion sauce and cabbage were all in steaming pots. At the side, in metal bowls were beetroot and grated carrot salads. The room was full of people drinking, eating and laughing. Nolitha evicted a young man to seat Julia in the most comfortable chair in the room. She tried to object but was hushed. Sizwe's mother left after introducing her to various neighbours and friends. They were polite and friendly, asking her how she was and what she did. Within five minutes more and more isiZulu words slipped in until there was only the occasional English word that Julia could hook

on to. Her knowledge of isiZulu was rudimentary. She listened carefully to see if she could pick up any words. But they were speaking too fast.

After a while, she got up and went to look for Sizwe. He wasn't in the kitchen or on the stoep. Suddenly she felt lonely and walked back past the dining room. Someone had moved into her chair. And, like a wave closing in on itself, had wiped out her small mark on the sand. She didn't fit there. She wandered down the house, looking for a bathroom. There was a closed door on the left. After knocking lightly, she turned the handle and pushed the door inwards. It looked like Sizwe's bedroom. He was sitting on a single bed. Two men sat next to him. Another three had pulled up chairs and were talking animatedly. They looked up as she opened the door and became silent. Sizwe stood up.

"Julia! We're just chatting. How are you Com? I won't be long."

"I was looking for the loo."

"It's down the passage on the right. I'll find you soon." He smiled at her.

The bathroom was small. Everything matched – fluffy purple toilet seat cover, with a mini version covering the toilet paper. The hand towel and soap were also purple. Even the air-freshener, sitting neatly on the toilet was purple. It reminded her of her grandmother's house in Graaff-Reinett. As a child she had always loved the frills and sprays, things that her paternal grandmother had said were 'common'. When she walked out onto the stoep, Sizwe was there, entertaining his cousins. The rain had stopped and the air felt as though it was breathing deeply, a relief from the heat build up of the last few days. She went to stand next to Sizwe and he put his arm around her, drawing her into the conversation. The men who'd been chatting to Sizwe were finishing off plates of food. They looked restless. She recognised a couple from the rally. Eventually one came up to Sizwe, drawing him aside quietly. Julia went to find Nolitha to thank her and say good-bye. Then returned to the stoep.

"Good-bye Sizwe. Thanks."

"Julia! You're leaving." He feigned regret, but sounded relieved.

"Can you give Zenzile and Dan a lift?" He indicated two men who were leaning against a pillar.

The men followed Julia to her car in silence. They both got in the back seat. Zenzile slouched forward pushing his legs into Julia's back. She didn't like to ask him to turn them sideways. The pressure felt deliberate. She pulled out of the parking place, "which way?"

“You can go straight. I’ll say when you need to turn.” They sat in heavy silence for a while. Eventually Zenzile asked:

“So what do you think of Soweto?”

“I like it.”

“Kak.”

Julia let it ride.

“Left. Right. You can drop us there, next to the corner.” They slammed the doors and skulked off. But Zenzile turned back. Came right up to her window. He leered in, his face close to hers.

“What do you want here?” She could smell his stale breath, “with Sizwe?” He dropped his voice to a whisper but the threat was palpable, “You should be careful. White girls don’t always get what they want.” Straightening up he banged his hand on the roof and said loudly, “Thanks for the lift. Com.” He made it sound like a swearword. “You know your way out? Go back the last two turns and you’ll be on a road that takes you straight to the highway. Don’t get lost!” He slapped his friend on the back and they disappeared, laughing.

Julia tried to move forward with her handbrake still on. The car cut out. Her hand shook as she turned the key. It wouldn’t start. She leant back in her chair and breathed deeply. Taking the key out of the ignition, she pressed the immobiliser. All her doors locked. She put the key back in. The car started immediately.

## 19

The place was near the pool where Julia swam. Slimkop De Vriess walked down the paved path. The lawns on either side were green with all the summer rain. The grass had been mowed but not raked. The chopped pieces scattered as he walked, brown and dry from the sun. A scrap of paper stained with tomato sauce and mustard lifted in the breeze and stuck to his shoe. He kicked it off. A small sticky patch remained. It was typical of the new South Africa, a total disregard for cleanliness and order. The country was awash with litter. He went into the toilets next to the boat-house. With water and paper towel he managed to remove the stain from his shoe. Like him, the Frenchman noticed such details.

He’d arranged to meet Yves Corbusier at Zoo Lake. They would rent a boat and be assured of a private conversation. The Frenchman wasn’t yet there. De Vriess paid for

an hour's rental and walked to the water's edge. A duck leapt into the lake quacking loudly. Five ducklings followed. The boats were weathered with paint peeling off the sides but none, as far as he could see, was leaking. He picked the yellow one closest to him and stepped in. The oars fit neatly in the rollicks. He dipped them into the water and sat calculating the changing rate at which they dripped.

Slimkop waved when Corbusier appeared at the top of the hill. He'd known the Frenchman for the past twenty-five years. They'd met in Karlsruhe, both trainees at Germany's Nuclear Research Centre. De Vriess had been the youngest South African ever to go there. It was funny how things had worked out. If he hadn't got that scholarship and proved his brilliance at school... but it wasn't really chance. He didn't fit in a small town with people obsessed by God's wrath; with people who thought science was a direct challenge to the Almighty and the work of the Devil. How he had loved numbers as a child. They had provided a way to escape his petty-minded father and into a world of wonder. His bosses had identified him at school and groomed him. South Africa was going to be a nuclear power and *he* was going to make it happen. Now they were out and others were in. It made no difference.

By the time he went to Karlsruhe, De Vriess already had a PhD and a formidable reputation. He'd used the opportunity to cram in everything he could. The technical advances of nuclear fission, the power dynamics between people – nothing escaped him. He had observed and remembered it all. Corbusier had caught his attention because of his love of food. It seemed a strange reason, but it struck de Vriess forcibly. The man would go out of his way to buy fresh tomatoes, lettuces and olive oil to add to his stodgy German meal. He had even cultivated a small window box with fresh herbs. De Vriess appreciated the attention to detail. So a friendship of sorts had grown. Now they frequented the same café in Paris and enjoyed the same music.

The Frenchman approached smiling. He was a large man with broad lips and a soft fleshy face.

“Ah Mr De Vriess this is wonderful! I so appreciate the unconventional setting. This lake, these ducks, it reminds me of a park near my childhood home. Please, you must let me row.”

“But of course.” De Vriess moved to the back of the boat, “be my guest.”

Corbusier lifted his trousers to allow his hips to bend as he sat down. He placed his feet squarely on the wooden floor. “Wonderful!” he repeated.

De Vriess did not point out the plastic bag that floated past. Corbusier manoeuvred the boat out of the dock and into the middle of the lake. De Vriess stretched back, enjoying the warmth of the sun on his face.

“I believe your meeting with Zuzi Dlamini went well.” He said.

“Oh very well, very well.” Corbusier smiled, “she’s a very beautiful woman. I wonder though...”

“Yes?”

“I think she might suspect our contribution to her start-up financing.”

“Well she’s a smart lady. And a powerful one. Her company is one of the Black Empowerment forerunners.” De Vriess tapped his fingers on the side of the boat, “I wouldn’t be too surprised if she guessed. But she can’t know for sure. And it is not in her interest to make it public.”

“No.” The Frenchman assented. “You really know how to play your hand De Vriess. Although I think you might have made a mistake.”

De Vriess laughed but listened attentively.

“Yes...” Corbusier went on, “someone has been asking questions.”

De Vriess said nothing. He allowed his friend the pleasure of suspense; the brief power of controlling the conversation.

“There is a man. An Englishman. Not a nice one, I don’t think. Overweight. He has been hassling me for information.”

“Thank you Yves. I appreciate your help. Perhaps it is a loose end I need to tie up.”

They drifted towards the reeds. Corbusier rowed them back to the centre. He folded his hands over his round belly.

“Now. You wanted to talk about finances?”

“Yes. Things are moving along nicely. I am hoping the Minister will make the announcement before Nairobi, but we will have to see. Timing is everything.”

“Of course. But I know you De Vriess. You have everything in place for many scenarios. Tell me, when do you need the cash?”

“I think it would be good to have half next week. I’ve opened an account that is untraceable. The number is here. He handed over a piece of paper. The Frenchman put it in his pocket.”

“And the name? In whose name is the account?”

“I will let you know when you are back in Paris and ready to make the transfer.”

Corbusier laughed. "Always a trick! But it's fine. It's a pleasure to do business with you. What a glorious day!" He steered the boat back to shore.

De Vriess made a call on his way home. Two days later a man known as Smith died in a car crash. No one saw it happen. The funeral was small. Her Majesty's Government sent flowers.

## 20

Jon was standing at the bar when she walked in. It was a languid Sunday afternoon. He wore black jeans and a loud floral top. He looked incredibly handsome.

"What can I get you? No, no... let me think... a vodka and orange? Right?" he looked up expectantly.

"I'll have a beer thanks Jon. Windhoek light."

They took a table outside on the wide stoep. It was noisy, full of the pre-dinner drinking crowd. A hedge separated them from the sights and sounds of Joburg streets. They looked at each other and grinned. Julia took in the changes to Jon's face – deeper lines on his brow, a more pronounced jaw. But they were minor. His face was still youthful. It was his eyes that captured time. They looked sadder. He interrupted her thoughts,

"So how are you? What have you been doing with yourself? When did you start drinking beer?"

Julia laughed, "Come on Jon, one question at a time. I wasn't the one who stopped communicating."

"I know. I'm sorry babe. Things got kind of hectic for me. I was trying to juggle work with being in a new city. And then the woman I was seeing fell pregnant."

"You have a *baby*? Jesus Jon. You could have told me."

"No, she miscarried at six months. We'd stopped seeing each other but it was still kind of crazy. She got really freaked out and blamed me. She couldn't stand the sight of me, but couldn't stand me not being there either. But you? Tell me about you."

"I'm fine."

"You're fine, you're fine. Come on babe, what's going on?" He put his hand out and gently stroked the back of hers before picking up his beer. "Do you have a boyfriend? Kids? I presume you don't have kids. What's your job like? Do you still swim so far?"

Julia smiled without meaning to. She remembered when they first met. She had swum the mile across Fish Hoek bay and was waiting at the train station. It was a wonderful feeling, being out in the middle of the sea, looking down through the bottle-green water to the sand, many feet below. The swell had been big that day. She loved swimming as the waves alternately lifted her so she could see across to Hang Klip, and dropped her so she could see nothing but water. She was amazed that so few people had discovered the exhilaration of sea swimming. The bay was relatively empty. Jon had been catching waves on Long Beach and dropped at the station to make his way home on the train. He approached her as though he'd known her for years and was very happy to see her. They gave up waiting for the train and went for a drink instead.

“When did you get back to South Africa Jon?”

“I’ve been back a couple of months...” Julia raised her eyebrows, “Okay, a couple of years. A friend in Pretoria let me know about a job going and encouraged me to apply, so I did. I would have called you, but I wasn’t sure what you were up to and if you’d want to see me.”

“No...”

“Jules, Jules! I’m sorry. Honestly. Can’t we start again? Does your mother still have that weird cat?”

Julia laughed, remembering the first time Jon and her mother had met. Mrs Ratford had not appreciated her school-aged daughter going out with a lefty student from the University of Cape Town. The manicured woman with a trained Siamese cat had equally taken Jon aback.

“My mother has married a pompous Englishman and become even more eccentric. The cat is sadly no longer with us. But we don’t speak much.” Julia shook her head, “How is your family?”

“They’re all fine.” He said shortly. “Let me get you another beer. This time I’ll make it a full-strength one.”

Jon returned with two beers each, “it’s happy hour, what can I say? Drink up.” Julia was already feeling light-headed.

“Morning special! Demonstrator shot dead. Twenty-five injured. Morning Special! Soweto riot. Fourteen arrested. Morning special! Ma’am, ma’am. Please, please, just

one paper. Here, here.” The seller thrust a newspaper onto Julia’s dashboard. Normally she put it straight out again. This morning, although her head was pounding from a hangover, she scrambled for change. Sizwe stared at her from the front page. Next to him was a photo of police laying into a group of demonstrators. Her blood ran cold. The robot changed and, after someone hooted behind her, she edged right into the Jan Smuts traffic. She looked at the photo captions and started to read the story. Luckily the traffic was slow. It was easy to read a paragraph or two at a time.

A Sunday rally led to direct action. People had marched to the house of a local Councillor and demanded better services. The Councillor was returning from church, dressed in an expensive suit. He was driving the latest Mercedes. Black. Surrounded by a chanting crowd, he became nervous. After screaming obscenities at them, he’d called the police. The result was inevitable. It could have been any decade in South Africa’s history. Angry people, frightened targets, and police trained to maim or kill. Julia scanned the story, looking for Sizwe’s name. And there it was. She exhaled deeply and relaxed. She hadn’t realised she’d been holding her breath. Sizwe had been asked to comment. He hadn’t been killed. Or arrested. Then she felt angry. It was cheap journalism to stick his face on the front page, under the headline ‘demonstrator shot dead’. A recognisable face. If he wasn’t dead, it implied he was to blame. The traffic started moving more quickly. Julia reluctantly put down the paper and concentrated on the road. She’d phone Sizwe when she got to the office.

“He’s busy organising bail,” the woman who answered said. “He’s been up most of the night. I’ll give him your message. Maybe he’ll phone later.” Julia doubted he’d hear she’d called. She felt powerless and totally unable to concentrate on her work. She stood up and walked around her office. Through the window she could see the usual hive of activity. She stared for a while as a mielie lady argued with a customer. The hand gestures said everything; she couldn’t hear a word. Her office felt cramped. Files pressed in on her from all the walls. The evening with Jon also replayed in her head. It had been nice to see him, but now she felt unsettled. While she’d been drinking, Sizwe was being shot at. She and Jon had stayed out late. They’d gone for dinner and talked and talked. It was easy, familiar. Such a contrast to the party at Sizwe’s house, a world she would never fit in.

Julia left her office and wandered into the resource room. Two colleagues were sitting around the table, drinking tea and discussing the morning news. Their tone of voice irritated her, even before she heard what they were saying.

“They smashed his windows and called him a killer. It’s typical of township mentality. Bloody lawlessness. He was right to call the police.”

“And were the police right to shoot and beat them up?” Julia asked, angry.

Her colleague continued, “Well they were asking for it. They were acting like hooligans at a soccer match.” He was English and Julia had long suspected him of being voluntarily clueless about what really went on in South Africa.

“They have no water or electricity. It kills people. That’s not exactly the same as watching your team lose.” She glared at him.

“What’s with you? It’s hardly unique. The paper’s full of blood, violence and death. What’s so special about this?”

“Oh god!” she turned to go, “Tell Pamela I’ll be in later. I’m supposed to prepare some stupid presentation for parliament with her.” The she faced him again, “How can you be so bloody insensitive? You work on energy for theoretical future generations but don’t give a shit whether or not anyone can cook food in this generation.” She stormed out. Down to the pool.

“You can’t swim now miss. I’ve just put chlorine in. I couldn’t do it last night because they had a gala, so I had to do it now. I’ll open at noon.”

Julia got in her car. She was shaking. Everything was overwhelming. Her headache, Sizwe, Jon, her stupid ignorant colleagues. She was angry and frightened. Scared for Sizwe and what might happen to him. Terrified of her feelings for him and where they might take her. Instinct made her drive to Northcliff hill. The car park was empty. She got out and sat on her bonnet. The extreme fear and anger subsided. She no longer shook. The city shimmered in the afternoon heat. She imagined she was swimming. Breathe in fast and deep. Then hold. And out slowly. She could almost see the bubbles. Sizwe felt the connection too. She knew that. But he fought it. Julia thought about his work – what drove him, what enabled him to believe so completely in what he did. It would always draw him away. If she got involved with him, she’d have to accept that. His comrades would never embrace her. She could never enter his world fully. Even if they hadn’t threatened her, she knew she would never fit in.

Julia heard a sound. Footsteps on gravel. She looked up. A man was approaching furtively, staring at her. Jesus! She tensed, got off the bonnet and opened the car door. The man rushed at her. She jumped in and fumbled with the key, eventually getting it into the ignition. The man was close. He stared at her wildly and lunged towards the

door. She got her car into reverse and drove off. As soon as she could get her phone from her bag, she dialled Sizwe's number.

## 22

The veins on Kumalo's neck stood out. "Shut up. Do you hear me? Just shut up." He leaned his substantial torso forward; "You think you are so high and mighty with your ideals and your principles. But you need to grow up. Think about your family and what this is doing to them. Why do you think Zuzi didn't want you? Because you're a nothing, a nobody. I don't want to hear from you again. I don't want to see you again. And I certainly don't want to see your name and ridiculous stories in the newspapers. Do I make myself clear?"

"Perfectly clear Minister Kumalo." Sizwe said quietly. They were sitting in a booth at the back of a hotel bar. The hotel was in Midrand. Neutral territory. It was early in the day. Heavy curtains were drawn and the smell of stale smoke oozed from the furniture. The room was empty save them. "I will leave shortly Graves. But before I go there is one thing I would like to mention."

"What! You come here accusing me of violence when it is you, YOU who is to blame. Throwing stones at councillors. You think you are clever. Sizwe Magona. The revolutionary who never grew up."

Sizwe listened to Kumalo raving. It had been pointless to set up the meeting. Yet things couldn't continue. Somehow, some way, they had to start to talk. Sizwe would make overtures to the Department. The Minister was unmoveable. It was time he resigned from public office.

"Graves, the issue I want to discuss has nothing to do with your campaign. Clearly we will make no head way on that. But I did have a question about the Y-plant."

It seemed impossible that Kumalo could look any more enraged, but he did. Sweat appeared all over his pock-marked face. He clenched and raised his right fist.

"You..." the word came out like venom. Spit flew across the table. At that moment Sizwe's phone rang. The sound was loud. He retrieved it from his pocket to switch it to silence. Julia's name flashed on the screen. He hadn't phoned her back since the arrests. She would worry. He shouldn't take the call. He pressed the green icon,

"Julia!"

“Sizwe, it’s Julia. There’s this man and I feel frightened and I…” she sounded hysterical.

“Julia. Listen. Calm down. What’s wrong? Is he there?”

“No. He’s not here, I’m fine, I’m driving, but he came…” her voice caught and Sizwe interrupted again.

“ Julia, I’m so sorry, but I can’t talk now. If you’re okay, then go home – or go to a friend,” he said gently, “and I will phone you soon. I promise.”

He felt Kumalo staring at him. This man who’d stolen his first love.

“So you’ve got yourself a new girlfriend?” Kumalo taunted. Sizwe switched his phone off and put it in his jacket pocket. “Perhaps we do have something to talk about.” Kumalo’s voice was now measured. “If you are hanging out with that meddling girl.”

Sizwe hid his surprise. Kumalo knew about Julia. He also knew that she knew Sizwe. The stakes were higher than he’d thought. What Julia had found was not incidental and it was not a mistake.

“I think I will get some coffee.” Kumalo banged on the table and a fresh-looking barman appeared. Sizwe held his tongue. He would learn more and antagonise the Minister less if he kept quiet. “Julia Ratford,” Kumalo mused, “researcher at CCRU. Assignment: climate change mitigation. Specifics: nuclear energy cost-benefit analysis. Quite the model researcher I’m told. Yes Sizwe, I’m keeping tabs on your girlfriend. So perhaps, as you said, we do have something to talk about?”

Sizwe thought quickly. He’d watched Kumalo do deals; knew how he thought. If he’d dropped his anger, he believed he held the high cards. Sizwe thought about the photo threat Julia had received. Could Kumalo have sent it?

“Yes Sizwe,” Kumalo repeated, “I think perhaps we can talk. This girl. She means something to you.” The Minister sat back in the velvet red seat and smiled. In that instant Sizwe knew that Kumalo’s pursuit of Zuzi had not been circumstantial. It had been to hurt Sizwe. He’d had no idea the man hated him that much. Or that he was so capable of long-term revenge. Sizwe hoped for Zuzi’s sake that love had been a factor at some point. Sizwe remembered telling him about her. It had been a rare moment of intimacy between the two men. Kumalo had invited him round to his Amsterdam flat for supper. This in itself was an unusual event. They’d drunk beers and talked about things unrelated to their work and the struggle – how they missed the landscape, the smell of rain on the earth, women, love. Sizwe had confessed his love of Zuzi; a woman of serene beauty and sharp mind. He’d taken out a photo of her laughing carelessly.

And now the Minister was implying that Julia was the pawn.

“You see Sizwe, many things went down in those days. It is not something anyone wants to reopen. It will not be wise for you and Ms Ratford to talk about those things. Believe me, I will know if you do. And if you do... well, let me just say that a researcher’s life is not that important. There are plenty of people to replace her.”

The waiter arrived with the coffee. Sizwe stood up and walked away. Kumalo stirred five spoons of sugar into his coffee and drank it, spilling some into the saucer as he did so.

## 23

Julia sat at her desk without doing anything. Her computer was on. The draft presentation to parliament was open. Her small window was shut and the curtains drawn. She was oblivious to the heat and stale air. Her phone rang. She ignored it. When it had stopped ringing, she picked it up and dialled the office secretary. Said she was busy, asked her to take messages. The hands moved slowly on her watch. It was still seventeen minutes to twelve. Seventeen minutes until she could use the pool.

Someone knocked on her door, then turned the handle. The door didn’t move. Julia had locked it. She waited for footsteps to recede down the corridor. Instead the pounding got louder, and someone shouted her name, “Julia!” Slowly Julia pushed back her chair and stood up. She walked to the door and turned the catch. Then moved back. The door opened with force. It was Pamela.

“Good God Julia. What are you doing locking your door when you are inside?” Without waiting for an answer she continued. “I was walking past and wanted to tell you that the presentation to parliament’s been cancelled.”

“Okay.” Julia said in a monotone.

“What *is* wrong with you?” Pamela focussed her attention on her colleague, “you look half dead.”

“Sorry. I’ve had a rough morning.”

“Oh yes?”

“It’s nothing. When did parliament cancel? Have they set a new date?”

“No, of course not. But I’m sure they’ll let us know when or if a new slot becomes available. Listen Julia, you really don’t look well. Perhaps you’ve been working too

hard? I know I've asked a lot of you, and I appreciate all you've put in. Why don't you take a bit of time off?"

"Thanks Pamela, but I'm fine. I'm meeting with Jon Roberts over lunch. We need to finalise our support to them for the Summit."

Julia grabbed her costume as soon as Pamela left and headed for the pool. It was odd that parliament had cancelled. It also felt the last straw. Parliament was in Cape Town and she'd planned to spend the weekend there. A swim in the sea would relax her, help her to see things in perspective. Joburg would be far away. She entered the pool gate. The attendant was at the shallow end. She flashed him her staff card.

"You've chosen a good time to come, Miss. I've just opened again. How many lengths will you do today?"

She smiled at him and shrugged her shoulders. She didn't know. Why had parliament cancelled when the research was urgent? The Department kept emphasising it needed to get through the political structures. Parliament made the decisions.

Julia changed, put her clothes in a locker, stood on the pool edge, stretched up, bent forward and dived in. The water was a wonderful relief from the thirty-degree day. Cool, soft, buoyant. She stretched out and started to swim. With long, slow strokes, she reacquainted her body with the water and movement. After a couple of lengths she quickened, putting power into each stroke. Quite soon her pulse rate was right up, her breathing much deeper. She did ten rapid lengths of crawl. Then changed to breaststroke, smooth and slow. Swimming fast, her mind was clear except for the sensation of her body moving through the water. As she slowed down, thoughts entered, one by one. She could almost see them. These times were the best for sorting out what was in her head.

Various images of Sizwe floated in. She tried to push them out. He hadn't been there when she needed him. His work would always come first. But his laughter persisted. She switched strokes again. Butterfly was wonderful for concentrating her mind. Thoughts had no place as she moved her body through the dolphin-like movements.

Jon was sitting at Bamako's when she arrived. In some ways he was not unlike Sizwe. He was also driven, also had a passion for right and wrong. And they both had a partly cynical take on the world, as though they would never quite trust it.

“Sorry Jon,” she said kissing him on the cheek, “Thought I’d fit in a quick swim and it turned into a long swim.” Water dripped from her wet hair onto her neck. It made her look less neat than usual.

“That’s okay. I’ve ordered because I’ve only got half an hour. Now I wanted to talk about the upcoming Summit.” Jon’s jacket was on the back of his chair. He wore a pale blue shirt. You could see the top button undone behind his loose tie.

“Absolutely. The Summit.”

“What?”

“Nothing.”

“Come on Jules, what is it? Isn’t that why we’re meeting? Is there something else?”

“No. Nothing. The Summit,” she repeated, grinning.

“You’re teasing me. What’s so funny?”

“Nothing Jon. Honestly. I’d forgotten how you could get so serious about something so quickly. It made me smile, that’s all.”

“You’re in a good mood.”

“Actually I’m not. Or I wasn’t. I’ve had a hellish morning.” She shivered as she remembered the wild man on Northcliff hill. It felt like a life-time ago. She didn’t want to tell Jon about it. “I’ve been working on a presentation for Friday that was cancelled. It was in Cape Town so I was hoping for a weekend swimming in the sea.”

“Shame. Well maybe you’ll take Friday off and spend the weekend with me?” He put out his hand to touch hers. “I’ll take you out to the Magaliesberg. Bet you’ve never been into the kloofs there. Or maybe we can go mountain biking.”

She withdrew her hand. “No Jon. This is supposed to be a work lunch. Let’s talk about the Summit.”

“Okay,” he cleared his throat. “As the City we’re keen to show how we’ve improved electricity delivery to the townships. We also thought we’d have a section on climate change where we display our mitigation options. Funders will be there. It might be a chance to get some additional international finance. I’m not sure what info you have, but maybe you could help us work on that part of our display.” Julia looked distracted. Jon continued, “or not...”

“No, it’s not that. I’m sure we could help you. But you mentioned funders, and something’s been bothering me... Jon, can I ask you a question?”

“Of course. Fire away.” He leaned towards her with exaggerated concentration.

“The presentation I was supposed to give was to parliament. Do you think they cancelled because there are funders in town? Today’s paper said that a French investment group was in South Africa. They’re looking at nuclear energy, in particular the Pebble Beds. So do you think they cancelled the presentation because I was going to question whether the technology is financially viable?”

“Definitely not.” Jon rubbed his hands across his face and sat back.

“Definitely not?”

“Definitely not.” He repeated firmly.

“How can you be so sure?” Julia had not given her idea much credence until Jon denied it so absolutely. Now it seemed entirely plausible. “It wasn’t just us presenting, it was going to be an open session. Lots of people in Cape Town are unhappy with the idea of another nuclear reactor near them. The session was planned months ago – at the beginning of the year when they set their timetable.”

“Parliamentary hearings are cancelled all the time Jules. I can’t remember the number of times I was booked to go and didn’t. Things come up. Urgent issues. I wouldn’t think about it.”

“But don’t you think the timing’s a bit too convenient? Of course they don’t want anyone criticising the Pebble Beds if funders are in town.”

“Drop it Jules. Really. There’s nothing in it.” A waitress arrived with their food.

“But...”

“Seriously Jules.” He looked at her, his eyes hard. “What do you think of your sandwich? I wasn’t sure if you were still vegetarian so I ordered mushroom and spinach. I hope that’s okay. But you’re welcome to share my chicken tikka if you want.”

“It’s fine. Let’s talk about the Summit.” She picked at her sandwich.

“Well what we want are cost estimates for putting solar water heaters on new RDP houses – say a pilot of 50, followed by a roll-out, and possibly retro-fitting all City owned buildings with energy saving devices. Can you do this for us?”

“Probably.”

“Come on Jules, don’t be grouchy. I really think you are exaggerating about parliament. I’m sorry you aren’t going to Cape Town but I don’t think it’s a conspiracy.” They sat in silence for a while, eating their sandwiches. “Talking of conspiracies, how are your friends in the SFA? I guess there’ll be a court-case against them.”

“What friends? Oh, right. You were at that rally.”

“So is Sizwe Magona your friend?”

“I know him. Why?”

“I just think he’s bad news, that’s why. I saw how he forced you to speak when you didn’t want to – he uses people. I’d like to see him running the City and see if he can do any better. He has no real interest in getting services to people, only to further his personal agenda. He just wants to bad-mouth the ANC because he failed as a politician.”

“Oh come on Jon, whatever you think of Sizwe, you can’t say he isn’t principled and committed.” Julia sprang to his defence although the barb about her rally speech cut.

“I can see he is a friend of yours. Maybe even your boyfriend. Is he your boyfriend?”

Julia put down her sandwich. “Jon. I don’t want to talk about this.”

“Oh come on babe. I’m just teasing you.” He leant across and pushed a strand of hair behind her ear.

“Jon, I’m serious. If we’re going to work together, it has to be as professionals.”

“Ok.” He grinned broadly. And called for the bill.

## 24

Julia hit “play” on her answering machine as she flopped onto the couch, TV remote in hand. She was irritable and angry. A storm had broken just as she’d reached her front door. She was tempted to go outside and shout in it. But there was lightening too and her mood wasn’t yet suicidal. The first message on her machine was blank. Someone had hung up. The second message was an electronic voice – an SMS to her landline.

“You Have A Message From Number Withheld,” said the false American accent. “We Are Watching Julia.” Then a pause. “Bad Things Happen to Meddling People”. The message was repeated before ending with a date and time. It had been sent earlier that afternoon.

Julia replaced the receiver and poured herself a drink. She didn’t bother switching on the TV. Rain pounded on her roof. It was enough of a distraction. She chose a genuine whiskey glass. Ice was in the freezer. She ran it under the tap and loosened three cubes. Then refilled the tray. The bottle of Jamesons was almost full. She poured a healthy tot and added no water: for now, the stronger the better. She changed out of her

work clothes and flopped back on the couch. She was exhausted but the deadness of her pre-swim mood was gone. Exercise, lunch with Jon, the phone message. All made her feel more alert. And on edge. The sms seemed as unlikely as the man at her car. As random. Who had sent it? What were they warning her about? It was the same as the photo. Intimidating, but unspecific. Personal. It felt very personal. She sipped her whiskey. The alcohol spread to her nerve ends. It felt good. The phone rang. It seemed very loud.

“Hello?” There was silence on the other end. Then heavy breathing. “Oh for god’s sake,” she said into the receiver loudly before slamming down the phone. It rang again immediately. She let it ring and left to get a pizza and watch a movie. Comfort food. Comfort entertainment.

A car was in her driveway when Julia turned back in. The taillights were on and someone was sitting inside. She reversed straight out. Who the hell would be in her driveway at 11pm on a weeknight? Certainly not someone to visit her landlords. The movie had been a romantic comedy and cheered her up. A post-movie whiskey wiped out the last vestiges of paranoia, but she sobered instantly to find a strange car at her house. She backed into the road, unsure where to go when her phone rang. It was Sizwe.

“Hey Miss Julie, what you doing leaving your house. I’ve been waiting an hour for you. Thought I’d fall asleep before you got home.”

“It’s *you*.” She said her heart still racing. “How can you just park in my driveway? Why didn’t you phone me?”

“Sorry man. Thought you knew my car. I’ll pull out and you can drive in ahead of me.”

As Sizwe got out of his car, stretching, Julia turned to him, “How did you know where I lived?”

“I’ve been here before. Remember.” Sizwe said, attempting to embrace her. She pulled away and looked at him seriously.

“But the first time. How did you find me the first time?”

“Oh Miss Julie.” He put his hands on her shoulders and looked into her eyes. “Your address was on the participants list from Denmark. You have mine as well.”

“Sorry,” she looked at him and smiled wryly, “I’ll have that hug now.”

He embraced her, keeping his arm around her as they walked up the path to her cottage, “why so paranoid Miss Julie?”

“It’s nothing. Do you want some coffee?”

“In a minute. Come and sit here with me.” She nestled next to him on the couch. “What have you been doing with yourself?” He stroked her hair soothingly. “Sorry I couldn’t talk earlier.”

“That’s okay.” And suddenly it *was* okay. “I’m sure you were busy, organising bail or something.”

“Yes, that’s been done and they’ve been released. But when you called, I was in a meeting with Graves Kumalo.”

“The Minister?”

“One and the same.”

“How was it? You met with him because of this zero tolerance campaign?”

“Yes. But...” Sizwe caressed her face and stood up. “Let’s have that coffee.” He put on the kettle. Julia lay back on the couch and looked at him in the kitchen. He was wearing a white cotton shirt and dark pants, a change from his usual jeans and t-shirt. He’d found tea, coffee and sugar easily. His arm muscles were visible through his shirt as he stretched to open the cupboard above the kettle. Julia knew it was the most logical place for mugs. But it was too high.

“Under the sink.” She said. He bent down and took two out. Then opened the fridge for milk. “I’ll have rooibos.”

He brought Julia her tea and sat in the armchair with his coffee. She patted the couch next to her. He shook his head slowly.

“Later. I first need to tell you something.” He took a big sip of coffee, stood up and started pacing the room. “Julia, the information you found – it’s dangerous. Kumalo is up to something, I don’t know what, but I have suspicions. I’m a threat because I worked with him in the eighties – did you know he is a nuclear physicist by training? Anyway... his job was to track the apartheid government’s nuclear weapons programme. Find out how close they were to making the bomb. Along the way he made some interesting contacts. You’re a threat because you have found information he doesn’t want found. He is ruthless, Julia. He will stop at nothing if you get in his way. I think you should drop your research. At least you should make sure you do exactly – and only – what the Department asks you to do.” Sizwe said this all without looking at her.

“Sizwe, I can’t do that.” She spoke quietly. “I couldn’t live with myself if I gave in to that intimidation. Besides, I won’t feel safe until I know what is going on.”

He came and sat next to her, “why, what’s happened?”

She told him about the sms and the phone calls – the hang ups and heavy breathing. “But it also feels amateur Sizwe. Not like the photograph. I still can’t understand that. Did I tell you it was removed?”

“What do you mean removed?”

“It’s not in my drawer anymore. Not where I put it. Someone has taken it. I don’t have it. And then there’s parliament.”

“What about parliament?”

“My presentation was cancelled. I thought it might be because French funders are in town.”

Sizwe sighed, “Yes, that makes sense…”

“Well Jon said I was being paranoid.”

“Who’s Jon?” his voice had edge.

“Jon Roberts. He’s an old friend of mine. We had lunch together.”

“Jon Roberts? You told him about *this*?” Sizwe moved away from her. He was incredulous.

“What’s wrong? Do you know him? I guess you do. He seemed to know you. Or of you.” Sizwe stared at her. “I guess lots of people know of you. Sizwe, what’s wrong?”

“Julia are you out of your mind? Jon Roberts? Of course I know him. How do *you* know him? How did he make contact with you?” Sizwe demanded.

“Make contact with me?” Julia said sharply. “He didn’t ‘make contact’ with me. I’ve known him for years. We used to go out together a long time ago. Why, what’s the matter?” She asked again, taking his hand. He withdrew it.

“Do you know what he does?” The question was an accusation.

“He works for Joburg Metro. He’s in charge of service delivery.”

“More like service *non*-delivery. He decides whose electricity and water gets cut off.”

“Sizwe that’s an exaggeration. Maybe he’s not perfect, but he’s a good man. I’m sure he’s doing the best he can. It’s hardly an easy job.”

“The best he can?” Sizwe asked, dripping with sarcasm. “Some people think he works for the NIA.” It was Julia’s turn to stare. “The National Intelligence Agency Julia, the people who report on anyone ‘threatening state security’. Including us.”

“I know what it stands for Sizwe,” Julia said quietly. “What do *you* think? Do you think Jon works for them?”

“I think you shouldn’t be hanging out with people like him. No wonder my Comrades said you’d be trouble. I can see what they meant.”

“What are you talking about?” Julia asked with growing anger, “Do you think I’m going to tell him about SFA? What can I tell him? I know nothing that’s not in the newspapers! I know that you meet in little hushed rooms, all you macho revolutionary men.”

“You think this is a joking matter? You think we are doing this for fun? Getting arrested, drawing attention to these problems? You think its all a game? Huh?” He was almost shouting now.

“No.” Julia said. “I’m sorry, I shouldn’t have said that. It was stupid. But you shouldn’t have said that about Jon either.”

“Why? Are you two picking up where you left off? Is that why you didn’t want me here tonight? You better decide what you want Julia. You can’t play both sides.” He was really angry now and stormed towards the door.

“Sizwe, please don’t leave. Finish your coffee. Get some sleep. Please. You’re tired. It’s not safe to drive. You came here to tell me something more. What was it?”

“Watch out Julia. That’s all I can say. Just watch out.” And he left. Home to Soweto.

## 25

The streets were quiet as he turned off the highway. The afternoon storm had softened the earth. Water hung on the fences and signposts dripping gently. His headlights were harsh as they reflected off the wet surfaces into his eyes. He turned them to dim. His anger was gone. Sadness remained. Julia. He’d wanted to talk to her, to be with her, to warn her. Kumalo’s threat had not been idle. He suspected Kumalo wanted to reopen the Y-Plant – the facility that enriched Uranium. The Minister must have some shady business deal up his sleeve. He thought he might tell her, but it was probably good that he hadn’t. For her sake it was better never to see her again. To break off whatever they had. But he couldn’t do that. And then she’d almost done it for him.

Her mention of Jon Roberts had set his paranoid mind to work. Had she been recruited to watch him? He thought of their meeting in Copenhagen. The fact that her boss couldn’t come at the last minute... was it really co-incidental, or had Julia been sent to seduce him? Even if it hadn’t been premeditated, she could still be used. What

had he told her? What was she passing on? Kumalo was right. He did still think like a revolutionary in a police state. It was useful but it would ruin anything good. At a deep level he trusted Julia. Their connection was not fake. He shouldn't have left so abruptly. He should have told her his suspicions. They could figure it out together, whatever Kumalo's game was. His reaction had been as much about jealousy as fear for his work. He could see that now. He rubbed his eyes. He was far too tired. A good night's sleep would help get perspective on what was happening.

The streetlights on his road were still out, perhaps linked to the electricity cuts. He'd organised a team to do reconnections that evening. Kumalo would not have appreciated the tactic – negotiate while direct action continues. Sizwe wondered how they'd got on. The penalties were severe if caught.

Two men were waiting at the end of his driveway as he turned in; he liked them to report after a night's mission. It made him feel like he was still active, still prepared to take the physical risks in the streets, still out there, watching listening, checking for policemen or others who might give them away. He spent too much time now with words; reading, meeting and looking for clues that would force them to listen, force them to change. It made no difference; Kumalo and his ilk would not listen to reason.

The men came towards him as he slowed his car down. They moved through the shadows as he had taught them, wearing dark clothes with their eyes cast down so as not to reflect against any light and make themselves visible. He wasn't sure he recognised them, but it was hard to tell. He opened the door of his brother's BMW and spoke softly as he got out.

*"Maqabane..."*

The word was barely out and his feet not yet firmly on the ground when the bullet hit him. Straight through the chest. He fell back against the car door, then forward. He raised his eyes and looked directly at his killer. The man with the gun stumbled back a step, as though hit by the gaze; then angrily stepped forward again and kicked the body, emptying two more bullets into his back. The key was in the ignition. The two men dragged Sizwe's body to the side, jumped in and drove off. They didn't bother to check for a wallet.

long before she was ready. And her dreams had been turbulent. Pulling her into some horrendous black hole that was a spinning atom. All kinds of people were orbiting the centre – Pamela, Sizwe’s mother, Minister Kumalo, the Kenyan she had met in Denmark – they tried to grab her arm as she flew past falling more and more rapidly into the centre. And in the centre was a dark mass, a head of barely human form with the face of Sizwe. As she fell closer it turned to Jon, then back into Sizwe. The dark core spun more and more rapidly shifting between the heads of the two men, laughing and laughing a deep evil hollow laugh. She woke up exhausted, her heart racing and her mind full of dark angry thoughts. How dare they invade her mind this way. She clung to her half sleep hoping desperately she’d be able to drift off again into more soothing dreams but birds were chirping and traffic building up. Joburg springing to life was hard to ignore.

She rolled out of bed into the shower. It pounded her back with hot hard water. She willed it to take away her nightmares and memories of the evening before. Sizwe had seemed so *angry*. What had she done? The mere mention of Jon had thrown him into a rage. Was it jealousy? Or did he truly believe that Jon was the enemy of the SFA? She remembered her lunch with Jon. He had much the same feeling towards Sizwe. She was reminded of two dogs circling each other, looking for the first sign of weakness so they could go in for the kill. But these two men weren’t violent. And it was only yesterday that she’d come home to a threatening message on her answering machine. Not to mention the man on the hill. If she could choose a day to wipe out completely and entirely, yesterday would be it. She would go from Sunday to Tuesday. Monday would cease to exist. She threw her diary, notebook and cell-phone into her bag. Without bothering to eat anything, she locked her house and headed for Wits. Anything to be away from the memory of Sizwe leaving.

She opened her office window and threw herself into work. Prompted by her dream and conversation with Sizwe, she did internet searches on Grivas Kumalo, Minister of Energy and Water. It was difficult to navigate through the thousands of sites that referenced him – school openings, public talks, commentary on dams, water shortages, new power plants, coal reserves, book launches, campaign endorsements, etcetera; all the things that went with holding public office. Through all of this were references to nuclear energy. Kumalo’s views on the benefits of nuclear power never wavered. He was a strong supporter. And he was particularly vocal on the Pebble Beds. It was, to his mind, a South Africa innovation. Germany had begun the research but got nowhere.

South Africa was a technology leader; Afro-pessimism would be destroyed once and for all. Julia knew very little about nuclear technology. She was an economist not a scientist. Originally she'd been asked to look at the costs of conventional nuclear power. But Mandla's throwaway line at their last meeting meant she should probably include the Pebble Bed. She checked out wikipedia

The **pebble bed reactor (PBR)** or **pebble bed modular reactor (PBMR)** is an advanced nuclear reactor design. This technology claims a dramatically higher level of safety and efficiency. Instead of water, it uses pyrolytic graphite as the neutron moderator, and an inert or semi-inert gas such as helium, nitrogen or carbon dioxide as the coolant, at very high temperature, to drive a turbine directly. Also, the gases do not dissolve contaminants or absorb neutrons as water does, so the core has less in the way of radioactive fluids and is more economical than a light water reactor.

There was a lot more. She tried to make sense of it. Ultimately they claimed it would be a cheaper way to produce power. But now billions of Rand were being spent on it. None of the articles said exactly how many billion.

Julia wandered off to make a cup of coffee and see if she could scrounge a rusk. Her stomach was rumbling and she thought back to her morning and mood. She was no longer angry but was still upset. She wanted to speak to Sizwe, but didn't want to call him. As she wandered out of the kitchen with her cup of coffee, she could hear her cell-phone ringing from the far end of the corridor. She willed it to be Sizwe laughing his warm laugh, dismissing yesterday's tension, and started running. It stopped as she got to her office, but the missed call function showed it *was* him. She phoned back immediately, not waiting to hear if he had left a message. A woman answered.

"Hi. Please can I speak to Sizwe?"

"Julia. It's Nolitha Magona, Sizwe's mother. I thought I must tell you." She started sobbing, quietly.

"Mrs Magona, please, what is it? Is Sizwe there? He just phoned. I just missed a call from him."

Julia heard the sobbing continue, then grow more distant as somebody took the phone.

"This is Sizwe's brother. He was hijacked coming home last night. They took my car."

"And Sizwe? Where is he now? Is he in hospital? Can I visit him?" Julia was almost screaming.

“He’s dead. He was shot and killed. They left his body in our driveway.”

Julia switched the phone off and leant against her desk before sliding to the floor. She sat there clutching her knees tightly, dry-eyed, rocking herself gently, not making a sound.

## 27

Sizwe’s funeral drew crowds. Police were present, standing at the edges, ready for any spark that could turn the crowd into a stampede. Julia stood towards the back, closely surrounded by bodies pushing, trying to move forward. It was hot and hard to breathe. Some lucky ones were hoisted shoulder high looking to the podium. Many people wanted to speak. At first there were tributes to his life and spirit, interspersed with a lot of singing. Church hymns, struggle songs, everything was sung in deep harmony. Slowly the eulogies were replaced by political speeches. The crowd was told not to mourn, but to take up the struggle. Sizwe had fought tirelessly and selflessly. He was a leader, an example, even in his coffin.

Julia could feel the heat of people around her, the physical closeness of so many bodies. Her clothes stuck to her body, the sweet smell of sweat in her nose. Pressure was rising in the crowd. People started to move their feet in a rhythm. Groups toyed in response to the speakers. The funeral became indistinguishable from a political rally. Except his body was there. A gazebo had been constructed about twenty metres in front of the podium. The coffin lay under the shade cloth, open at the head.

Julia joined the movement of people heading forward. She didn’t want to see his dead face. But she also had to. Her memory was still of his anger – anger tinged with disappointment. It was unbearable. At least here in this hot sticky crowd she could merge with the masses, and not feel her pain so acutely. She’d learnt very little else from Sizwe’s family. He had been shot when he got home. The killers had taken his car. Maybe he had fought with the hijackers. Maybe he’d tried to reason with them. Maybe he even *knew* them. Did they have any idea who they’d killed? Her head felt ready to explode.

The line of people moved forward slowly chanting and swaying. Julia didn’t know the words. Her body didn’t move with the rhythm. But it was okay, she felt part of the crowd. The group behind her was standing very close, pushing her forward. The coffin was made of heavily varnished dark wood. The handles were ornate, moulded from

silver coloured metal. Inside, red cloth lined the box. His head rested on the plush material. She couldn't see his body. Nolitha said he'd been shot three times. The first bullet went through the front of his chest, the next two into his back. Julia was glad she couldn't see what had happened to his body. What did the killer feel when he pulled that trigger? Julia couldn't begin to imagine. She looked at his face and felt empty. This was not the person she knew. She wanted to turn her head, to move on quickly, but the group around her was singing gently, taking their time to look at his body. Somehow these mourners held her. Grief was not a personal thing, it was communal. She was just one of them. Looking again, she was able to see something of Sizwe behind his dead head. As the crowd pushed from behind, she turned and with a final glance, caught his face from a different angle. He seemed to be winking at her. Teasing, challenging, never complacent even in death. Julia walked on, tears streaming down her face.

"So the *Umlungu* decided to come to the funeral." She felt the jab of someone's elbow in her back. The voice continued, "Maybe she feels guilty."

"Maybe she wants to make sure he really is dead, you see." The second man pressed his knee in the back of hers forcing her to stumble.

"I think she's guilty." Julia recognised Zenzile's voice. "But I can't decide if it is because she let him drive home late at night or because she's been hanging out with NIA agents. What do you think?"

"Doesn't matter, you see. Both things killed him."

Julia was determined to ignore them. What could they do in a crowd? Immediately an answer came to her – a knife. They could stab her and no one would notice. The crowd would hold her upright long after they'd gone. She pushed forward. Zenzile grabbed her arm and spun her round until she was looking into his hard, angry eyes.

"He phoned us the night he was killed," he said quietly, "on his way home from you."

They turned and left, making their way through the thick crowd.

"Julia!" A man's voice was calling. "Julia! Over here."

She looked to her right and saw him, head and shoulders above most people. Jon. She started to walk rapidly towards her car. He was the last person she wanted to meet. Out of the corner of her eye she could see him making his way towards her. She ducked behind a loudspeaker. Her ears were bombarded with a booming voice giving directions to where the family would be receiving condolences and where the food was. He couldn't see her. She was safe if her eardrums could stand the pressure. He couldn't

possibly see her through the seething mass of people, most of whom were taller than her.

“Julia!” he touched her arm, breathless.

She pulled away without looking at him and darted into the crowd. She kept moving rapidly, snaking this way and that to avoid him. Hoping too that Zenzile and his friend had delivered their message and left. A fence at the back of the field blocked her way. About twenty metres to the left she saw a hole. The wire was bent back and rusted around the gap. It was just large enough to let in a child – perhaps they used this field for soccer games – or let out a small adult. She climbed through and made her way back to her car. Jon was nowhere to be seen.

## 28

Julia left a message on her work answering machine over the weekend requesting leave. She didn't want to speak to anyone. By Friday dirty coffee mugs and empty pizza boxes lay around her house alongside piles of newspaper. The TV was permanently on, droning at a subliminal level while the screen flickered through test patterns and soap-repeats. The volume was switched up for the news. She left the house twice a day, walked to the corner and bought a paper from the seller who stood at the traffic lights. She ignored his attempts to chat to her, was rude about his bunches of wilted roses.

The newspaper was her fix. She paged through it obsessively, looking for information on Sizwe's murder. The police were treating it as a random hijacking. They were doing very little about it. She cut out every article related to hijackings, SFA, Kumalo, nuclear power, Pebble Beds and the African Summit, filing them away neatly into a large folder with separate sections. It created the only order in the chaos that had overtaken her home. Soweto had twice the number of hijackings per person as the Gauteng average. Four times the national average. Why didn't the police do something about it? Perhaps they were involved. But the newspapers made no such connections.

There was some coverage of Sizwe himself. She read the articles over and over again, trying to find something of him in them. It was a poor attempt to bring him back to life. And to avoid memories of the last time she'd seen him. Why the hell had he died *that* night? *Why?* The Friday paper was a weekly. It had an in-depth interview with someone from the SFA. She didn't recognise the name. The interviewee was a hardliner. Although he made the usual comments on how appalling it was that activists

were murdered, his antagonism towards Sizwe was barely concealed. He was glad he was dead. Julia threw down the newspaper in a rage. Did no one *care*? Under the papers her cell phone was ringing. She kicked them aside. It was Jon. She let it ring. He called again. She deleted his messages without listening to them. He sent sms's. She deleted them without reading them. Eventually Pamela called to ask when she'd be back at work. And then to insist she check in immediately.

University of Cape Town

part two

University of Cape Town

Zuzi Dlamini sat in front of the mirror, and applied a deep plum shadow to her eyelids, blending it into the paler colour just below her brows. Her sleeping husband was reflected in the glass. A corner of the sheet rested on his abdomen; the remainder was wrapped tightly around his lower body, his barrel chest free. The corner fluttered with the rise and fall of his laboured breath. She wished she could help him relax. Perhaps once the Summit was over it would be easier. They would take a short break. A night or two of pampering at a private game farm. Now he needed to focus and navigate the many hurdles that remained. She hesitated to wake him after an uneasy night. They'd arrived late in Nairobi, and Graves had been determined to make love. His body refused. She was unable to persuade him it didn't matter. She loved him. That would never change.

She thought about what had brought her to this place – successful businesswoman, wife of a Minister, African role model, admired beauty. Forty-one years old. It was hard to believe. She looked critically at her face, seeking out the lines, the slight slackness to the skin, the signs of aging. There were none. She could be mistaken for thirty. Taking out a liquid black she outlined her eyes before adding mascara.

Daughter of a headmaster, Zuzi had grown up with relative wealth in Soweto. Aware of their precarious status within apartheid South Africa, her parents had lived by the rules. They'd encouraged their children to get a good education, not to question too much. Meeting Sizwe had changed that. Initially attending student activist meetings was a rebellion against her parents; an assertion of her independence. Her natural beauty and confidence inspired people. When she and Sizwe met, their attraction was instantaneous and all encompassing. He mentored her political education. They were an envied couple. She had loved the attention. And then he disappeared. The first weeks were unbearable. There was no way to know what had happened to him. She imagined the worst – detention and torture followed by a painful death. Alone. She moved into a psychological space no one could access. She stopped eating and barely spoke. Her presence was that of a ghost, insubstantial and frightening. Eventually Nolitha had phoned and spoken to her mother. Sizwe had sent word. He was alive and living in Amsterdam. Instead of relief she felt anger. Ice cold rage consumed her for days and nights. Then something inside her snapped. It felt physical, a total severing of something that had been part of her, a limb. That's when relief came.

Over the next few years she was the model daughter putting her heart and mind into studying. She won bursaries and obtained an engineering degree cum laude from Wits University. She dated men but had no serious relationship until a man approached her at a party. She'd been about to leave. For a reason she couldn't explain, she'd felt his intention long before he greeted her; had watched him walk across the room. His short body exuded power; his face was strong. A politician. They spoke briefly. She did not give him her number. Still, she was unsurprised when he called.

A friend told her some of his history – Graves Kumalo, senior member of the ANC, worked in intelligence when in exile. He had worked with Sizwe. The irony was not lost on her. Sizwe called when he returned. She refused to see him. He made no effort to dissuade her. Not like Graves. Graves pursued her with sweet language and gifts. His confidence excited her. He was the reason she was now who she was. She would not disappoint him.

### 30

“Julia?”

Julia looked into a familiar smiling face.

“It is Julia isn't it?”

She could understand why he might be confused. Since Sizwe's murder she had lost a lot of weight. Then, a week ago, she had gone to her hairdresser, told him to chop it all off and put in highlights. Solomon looked exactly the same.

“Hey my friend!” Julia stood up and embraced him warmly. “Sorry not to tell you I was coming. It was a bit last minute.”

“Like your trip to Denmark.”

“Exactly!” And it was true. Pamela had called her two days before and asked her to go to Kenya. She'd accepted it as a peace-offering. They'd been in a head-to-head battle since Julia had returned to work. Pamela insisted she work with the City in the lead-up to the Summit; Julia refused to see Jon. Sizwe's belief in him as an NIA agent had burnt its way into her skull. Why else had Jon got in touch with her now, when he'd returned to South Africa years before?

Julia was in the central courtyard of the United Nations complex when Solomon found her. She was sitting on a low wall reading the day's agenda. Next to her was a pile of newsbriefs, each giving a different view on the negotiations.

“So Solomon, give me the short cut. Why do these negotiations matter, who’s who, etcetera.”

“You serious?” He sat down next to her.

“Absolutely. I only know my piece of the puzzle. And even that’s confusing.”

“What’s your piece?”

“It’s the same thing I was working on when we met in Denmark. Now they want to use my research on nuclear costs to support their position paper.”

“They is the South African government?”

“Yes,” she hesitated, “at least I think so.”

“But you’re not sure?” Solomon’s question felt like an interrogation. Suddenly she was uncomfortable, unclear where her loyalties lay.

“Yes, of course it is the government. They commissioned the research.”

“And they’re happy with it?” Solomon assumed a lighter tone.

“No Solomon,” she laughed, “of course they’re not happy.”

“Because you say nukes are not a panacea?”

“Because I conclude they’re expensive.”

“Can I see it?”

“Can you see what?”

“A copy of your paper.”

“You still haven’t answered my question,” she countered.

“Ah... negotiations 101.” He closed his eyes for a moment to gather his thoughts. “It’s a complicated story...”

“Just give me the summary version.”

“Ok.” He composed his face like a newsreader. “In the beginning... nuclear power was supposed to solve all the world’s energy problems – it was an infinite resource, didn’t produce air pollution, broke reliance on the Middle East, and so on. But it had a shadow side – Three Mile island, Chernobyl, practically permanent toxic waste – that no one knew how to handle. It became less popular, went into a real decline in the 80s and 90s. A number of European countries declared themselves nukes free. Now it is set to make a come-back. If the nukes industry can convince the world it is a clean alternative to coal they will make billions.”

“Clean because it doesn’t cause climate change, not clean because it has no waste.”

“Precisely.”

The low wall they sat on separated a wide path from a square open to the sky. Agapanthus and strelizias were dotted around a small fountain. The air was hot and moist. Three men in suits strode by, deep in conversation. Another couple stood at the end, their voices too low to be heard. Julia turned to Solomon,

“I didn’t think Africa was exactly the hub of the nukes industry, so why does this meeting matter?”

“Well that’s not quite true. South Africa is making a lot of noise about rejoining the nukes club. You were a bit unpopular because of the apartheid bombs but that’s history. Now you are on the right side. Europe loves you, even America tolerates your criticism.”

“But...”

“That’s not the point. You’re right. The reason this meeting is so important is because it will draft the positions for the Africa Summit in Joburg next month. And the reason the Summit is so important is because defining nukes as clean hangs in the balance internationally. So far we’ve managed to keep them out. If Africa supports them, the G-77 – all developing countries – will follow. The G-77 is a powerful bloc internationally and could easily shift the balance in the climate change negotiations. If that happens, billions of dollars of tax-payers money will be used to subsidise nuclear power plants. Northern countries will be able to pay for nuclear energy in the South to avoid cutting their own carbon emissions from oil and coal.”

“Are you serious?”

“I’m afraid so. And there’s another angle. Africa is used by the north as the rationale for whatever it is they want to do. If ‘Africa’ wants nukes, they will tell their civil society activists to shut up, label them anti-development and so on. They’ll win the media war. There’ll be a serious clampdown on anti-nukes voices.”

“So it’s important for you.”

“It’s important for us all.” Solomon put his hand on her arm, “You don’t want a nuclear revival Julia.” He sighed, “and I’m worried. South Africa is the main problem.”

A group of people in jeans and struggle T-shirts walked by and greeted Solomon, “see you later?”

“Yes!” He waved at them and smiled. “Julia...”

She was looking at a man at the far end of the courtyard. He was tall, dressed in a fawn suit. He looked vaguely familiar. She shook her head and turned back to Solomon.

“Do you know that man?” He followed her gaze, but the man had walked round the corner.

“Julia. We need to see the South African position paper. Do you think you could get us a copy?”

### 31

Zuzi, in dusty pink suit, the skirt short and tailored, sat on a low plush couch. She surveyed the room. The best her UN contact could arrange. Cleared of papers, as she'd insisted, hand-embroidered cushions scattered on the couches. Not perfect, but it would do. Her scent was subtle in the room. She'd chosen it carefully. Not to compete with the thick summer air, but to bring it freshness. A perfect touch.

The Frenchman arrived.

She stood up as he entered. “Mr Corbusier. How kind of you to join me.”

He blustered a greeting, “The honour is all mine.”

She wasn't fooled; the man was sharp. They had met in Johannesburg briefly, long enough to know they had mutual interests. A deal was on the cards, a good deal, but she wasn't rushing it. She'd checked him out. He had an eye for risky opportunities that few would touch. Most of them paid off. He was ranked one of the richest men in Europe, with a special interest in nuclear energy.

They sat down, silently appraising each other.

“Some coffee?” Zuzi gestured towards the flask on the table. Shifted a white porcelain cup towards him.

“Thank you, no. I am not yet used to Kenyan mud. But please, help yourself.”

Zuzi ignored the jibe and returned his smile. “You indicated an interest to invest in *uMoya's* expansion, last time we spoke. Yes?”

“*Mais oui...*” He opened his arm, gesturing that the negotiation could go in any direction.

“You have a figure in mind, perhaps?”

Corbusier leaned back on the couch. “Ms Dlamini, I think it's a bit early to talk about figures, don't you?” The smug grin on his face added condescension to his words, “I'm still not clear on your business plan. How you see returns from the deal you are proposing...”

Zuzi took a piece of paper from her briefcase. She placed it on the table between them without saying a word. Corbusier took his time to look at it. She watched his face, observed the almost imperceptible change in his eyes. They sharpened briefly before reassuming their bored gaze. He was hooked. The negotiation could continue along the lines she had envisaged.

## 32

On the whole, Slimkop de Vriess was impressed. Kumalo obviously instructed his minions well. The position paper was the right mix of problem and solution. He couldn't bear the usual African political whinging – the hard done by continent, portrayed thus by men who were siphoning off millions. This paper was written with confidence. South Africa knew it was Africa's only hope. Again he marvelled at the transition. The details were different, but the tone, the sense of superiority was in keeping with the Nats' legacy. There were just two small amendments to make. Kumalo would not object.

De Vriess found the Minister in the VIP lounge and made his suggestions. He could now leave the negotiations to the South African team. It was headed by a man named Mandla Dumisi. He showed signs of independent, intelligent thinking. Kumalo would have a way to keep him in check. It was probably good that the key South African negotiator was respected for integrity. That way no one would suspect the real reason behind some of the positions.

Now De Vriess had other things to do. There were business deals to conclude. Weak links to identify. The French deal was almost concluded. Their interest in the Middle East had never been benign. But there was no harm in exploring the African market. It was unlikely that their technology would cope. Still, warring factions could always use a little help. And they'd be happy with the waste product. Payment in diamonds and precious metals was fine.

Politically, the main threat would not come from African governments but from the activists. It's why he'd arranged for Julia to be at the meeting. She would be his marker in the non-government world. That, and his small obsession. It was inconsequential. He would kill her if he had to. But while she was useful, he may as well enjoy watching her. He'd slipped a small camera into her hotel room, seen her undress from his room above. She took off each item of clothing and folded it neatly onto the chair. Then she'd

taken a lace slip and matching shorts from her suitcase. Sexier than he'd imagined. Her skin stretched taut as she pulled the slip over her head. She curled herself around a pillow and fell asleep. He felt faintly aroused to see her lying there.

The best place to be was the cafeteria. Even the old hands were careless. You could pick up a lot by just watching. A Minister talked to a junior official who then had lunch with an activist from another country; anonymous bureaucrats met across national boundaries that didn't speak in public; public enemies shared cups of coffee; notes changed hands in queues. De Vriess settled himself at a table with a cup of coffee. The coffee was disgusting, but he needed to order something. The table was behind a pillar near the entrance. He had a side view of everyone who walked in, and a clear view to the rest of the room. His face was in shadow.

The business deals would be left 'til night. He would take his friend Corbusier to a bar no expatriate had heard of. He would learn about his meeting with Zuzi Kumalo née Dlamini. It would have gone well. Perhaps if the Minister's wife had been a different person he would have introduced them directly. Ambition and ruthlessness he admired. But she hated him. A direct introduction would jeopardise the deal. So Corbusier had contacted Kumalo. The Frenchman wanted to invest. Energy was his thing – renewable, carbon trading, nukes, it didn't matter. The Minister had referred him to his wife. And what a referral it was! Zuzi would be rich, Yves would be rich, and he, Slimkop de Vriess had made it happen. It was just a side deal, not the heart of his operation, but it would give him pleasure nonetheless. And it was a back-up plan if the worst came to the worst. Corruption was the media's delight; never popular with the masses. He gave thanks to the human vices of greed and ambition that allowed him to scheme with confidence.

### 33

Julia was not quite sure where she was. The United Nations complex was vast. The corridors all looked the same – long dark passages with closed nameless doors. She'd spent the morning in an unbelievably boring negotiation. Pamela had asked her to report on the state of play. Clearly the official sessions were the last place to learn anything. She needed to find the South African delegation, see if she could get the position paper; and maybe those of other countries also. She turned a corner and almost collided with two men locked in confrontation. She jumped back, out of sight. They hadn't noticed

watched them queue for coffee. They chose one of the few empty tables. It was too far away to hear their voices above the din. He took out his iPod and put on the headphones. He directed a small mike towards where they sat. By adjusting the range, he could cut out most of the noise, their conversation clear.

“Mandla, I was wondering if it would be possible to get a copy of the South African position paper?”

“Listen Julia, we are very grateful for all the work you’ve done. It’s been extremely important in informing our strategy.”

“But the answer’s no?”

The diplomat coughed. An apologetic kind of a sound. “Julia I am sorry but at the moment it is confidential. Things are at a very tricky point and it is critical that we don’t play our hand too soon.”

“The hand being...”

He laughed. “No Julia, you won’t catch me like that. Tell me were you ever able to get data on the waste costs as you’d hoped? I’m asking not as a government official, but as a fellow researcher. You know academia is my background.”

“You would have been wasted at a University Mr Dumisi. The department is very lucky to...”

Her voice faded out. Someone had sat in the direct line of the mike. De Vriess thought of moving tables but decided against it. The main point was clear. Dumisi would not voluntarily hand over the paper. De Vriess wondered if Julia had asked for her own interest, or whether the Kenyan had put her up to it. Solomon Awori. He had done a brief check. Son of a Kenyan liberation leader, he was now well connected in the global anti-nukes movement. A leading activist. Greed and ambition were not his vices. Activists were trickier than the others. Pride was often a hallmark, and arrogance – a belief in their moral high ground. De Vriess had wondered if Solomon was Sizwe’s contact in Denmark. Aside from Julia he was the person Sizwe spent most time with. But in the end he dismissed it. Sizwe was too well informed. De Vriess found the global anti-nukes movement tedious. Their thinking was blunt. They had no understanding of the science. Driven by misplaced ideology and a sense of self-righteousness, he had nothing but disdain for them. Still, it would be useful to know what their plans were. Make sure in their ineptitude they didn’t unwittingly upset his operation.

her. The older man was leaning on a stick, his bloodshot eyes bulging. She flattened herself against the wall and listened.

“I don’t care what you think. You are not elected. You are not paid to think. You will listen to what I have to say. South Africa cannot afford not to have nuclear energy. Your job is to make sure it is down in black and white and agreed by all parties. That is what you are paid to negotiate. Not to come back with excuses about who does or does not support us and why.” Kumalo’s breathing became heavier, his voice deeper and more menacing, as he forced his points across. “Perhaps you are not aware of the value of the carbon-trading market? Perhaps you are not aware that with our innovative Pebble Bed technology we can capture that *entire* market for Africa. For your sake, I hope you were not aware of it, otherwise I would question how patriotic your thinking is.”

“Minister, with due respect, I was just pointing out that the changes you suggested could weaken our position in other areas. The President himself has reiterated the importance of human rights...” Julia recognised the calm reasoned voice of Mandla Dumisi.

“Those changes will stay! Do I make myself absolutely clear?”

“Yes Minister.”

Julia wondered what to do. She definitely couldn’t go forward. But she hesitated to move back. If they heard her and looked round... She waited.

“And I want a copy of the revised paper immediately. We will use it to brief the delegation after lunch.”

“Yes Minister.”

“And no one else is to see it. *No one*. No sharing with sympathetic governments, no handing out to curious researchers. No one.”

“No Minister. I will make the changes now and bring it to your room.”

Julia slipped off her shoes and eased herself backwards. Her bare feet made no sound on the tiled floor.

### 34

He heard Julia laugh as she entered the cafeteria. She was with Mandla Dumisi, the South African negotiator. Of course they would need to talk. Julia had prepared the research informing part of the position paper. The part he had changed. De Vriess

Julia wasn't happy about her plan. She liked Mandla. But she needed to see the paper. Not just for Solomon. For herself. Once she'd seen it, she would decide whether to pass it on or not. There were two places where printing could be done. The first was the NGO common room in the basement. There papers were churned out twice a day, informing delegates of the pitfalls and victories of the discussions. Issues were picked up – forests, human rights, militarism, democracy, water – and expanded upon. It was usually the best place to find out what was really happening. But she chose the second room. Reserved for country delegates. Fortunately she had a blue pass. Pamela had arranged her participation. Officially she was advisor to the South African government. It meant she could enter the room, no questions asked.

State of the art equipment filled three of the walls. The fourth was available for wireless connections. Printers and a giant photocopy machine were positioned in the centre. All were pouring out paper relentlessly. Julia looked around. Every terminal was busy. Mandla was not there. But he would come. She was sure of it. She sat on a stool at the entrance. No one looked ready to leave. A phone rang. A man reached into his pocket and barked yes without taking his eyes off the screen.

After fifteen minutes a woman stood up. She was beautifully dressed. Julia slid into her seat and took out her flash disk. The woman was still closing her brief-case.

“Ms Dlamini?” A young man approached with a pile of papers from the printer. “I believe these are yours?”

“Thank you.” Her voice was deep, melodic. Definitely South African. Julia looked up. Zuzi caught her eye. Julia nodded and smiled. The Minister's wife turned and left. Julia found her hand shaking as she inserted her flash disk.

She offered Mandla her terminal when he entered. He tried to object but she could see he was grateful. In the end getting the position paper was easy. She stood at the printer to pick up her sheets. Mandla's followed immediately. She picked them up, then opened the machine and swiftly removed the blank pages. A red icon flashed as Mandla joined her. She refilled the machine.

“You probably need to resend it. The last page of mine printed before it ran out.” She hoped her voice sounded calm. He raised his eyebrow in question.

### 36

Julia emerged alone. She looked around briefly before walking left towards the parking lot. She joined half a dozen others waiting on a grass patch. He could see her in his rear view mirror. Night had come quickly but the patch was illuminated by a streetlight. She looked perfectly calm standing there, briefcase in hand. A red Toyota pulled up. Solomon leapt out to open the passenger door. She climbed in and fastened her seat belt. Put her briefcase on her lap. He followed them for twenty minutes along Nairobi's dark suburban streets. Then the beat up car pulled into a long driveway.

De Vriess stopped a little further along and made his way back on foot. He walked on the grass verges to avoid the sound of crunching gravel. The avenue was lined with thick bushes. It was easy to make his way up it unseen. He heard the car doors slam. He inched his way forward. Half a dozen cars were parked at irregular angles in front of the enormous house. Lights flooded the entranceway as Julia and Solomon approached. The building was colonial style with a wide veranda and whitewashed walls. Creepers grew up the pillars, their scent sweet and strong in the breathless night air. The door was answered by a child who admitted the two visitors.

He waited to see who else showed up. And who left.

### 37

"How was the rest of your day?" Solomon asked as they pulled out of the UN complex.

"My day was fine. Good actually. I've never been to a negotiation before. It's..."

She searched for a word.

"Boring?"

"Well yes. But fascinating at the same time."

"You obviously didn't go to a plenary session." Solomon said grinning.

"Oh my God. Yes!" Julia sat upright, took on a grave tone, "Honourable Ministers. I would like to take this opportunity to thank my fellow Ministers and the..." she resumed in her normal voice, "it's unbelievable! I switched my headphones to Portuguese – thought maybe I could at least learn a new language. One guy took ten minutes. *Ten minutes!* I timed him. Just to thank and praise." She shook her head. "I can't even remember the point he was trying to make."

Solomon laughed. "It does seem crazy. It's all protocol. But I guess it traps the Ministers so the bureaucrats can go and do the real work in the negotiation rooms. Of

course the deals happen on the side. While your honourable Minister is congratulating the esteemed Kenyans on their wonderful hospitality, his team will be twisting their arms to open the continent to nukes.” He caught her eye, “did you get a copy of the South African position?”

Julia didn’t answer. They drove past high walls and large trees that marked Nairobi’s rich. Not unlike Johannesburg. But the roads were potholed. A city without maintenance. The silence stretched.

“You don’t want to give it to me.” Solomon said it quietly.

Julia started to protest.

“No Julia, it’s fine. I totally understand. Negotiations can be confusing. Your loyalties are split. Do you hand over something given to you in confidence by someone you respect? Or do you trust some loony activist you’ve only met once whose motives you don’t understand.”

“Solomon!” she protested.

“No Julia.” He flashed her a grin, “I’m serious. I would like to explain.” His tone was solemn. “South Africa wants to expand its nukes business. That’s obvious. Everyone knows it. Not everyone is happy about it. The question is how far are they prepared to go to change people’s minds. And what exactly are they wanting to sell. I think Sizwe knew something...”

“You think *Sizwe* knew something?”

“You sound surprised.”

She sat back in her seat and sighed. She wasn’t really surprised. All kinds of motives for Sizwe’s murder had gone through her head. It was strange to voice them. That was all. Part of her had buried them in the weeks after his funeral. She would need to go back to her files and dust them out.

“What do you need to know?”

Solomon put on the flicker and they turned into a long gravel driveway. He parked under a large tree. Neither of them made a move to get out. Julia undid her seat belt and clutched her briefcase. He turned to face her.

“Does it mention the Pebble Beds?”

“Yes.”

“Okay. That’s all I need to know.” He squeezed her arm briefly and got out the car. The passenger door didn’t open from the inside. Solomon yanked it and helped her out. They walked in silence to the imposing house. A small girl answered the doorbell. She

led them to a large room at the back. About fifteen people were scattered around the floor, paper of various sizes between them. A long piece of calico was spread in the middle. A woman dressed in a bright orange sari was carefully measuring out letters. Several people greeted Solomon as they entered. He stopped to chat. Julia looked around and her toe connected with a paint can. A pair of hands went out to grab it. The red liquid swooshed to the edges but settled without spilling.

“Sorry.” She looked down at a wiry man in his early sixties.

“No harm done.” The man stuck out his arm, “Robert. Rob. You wanna help?” Julia shook the offered wrist, avoiding the fingers covered in paint. “Here,” he said handing her a paint brush, “pick a word.”

In the middle of the room, Solomon was talking to the woman in a sari. She sketched something on a piece of paper. He nodded. Together they turned over the huge piece of calico. She began her task of measuring letters again.

“You South African?” Rob asked. His accent was hard to place. That of a universal traveller. She nodded. “You got your work cut out for you. All that nuclear proliferation. Tell me, what are the plans for the waste? Dumping, weapons or burial?”

“I’m sorry?”

“Is the waste being dumped, turned into weapons or buried?” his thin grey ponytail twitched each time he emphasised a word.

“As far as I know it’s being buried at Vaalputs.” She didn’t mention that the department’s financial data made no provision for waste disposal.

“Well that’s okay then.” He grinned at her.

“You don’t believe it?”

“Well the other options are more appealing. Dumping costs nothing – or virtually nothing – and you can make money from weapons.” He stroked his goatee, “but you’re probably right. South Africa is trying to be the good kid in the class – not do anything to upset its mentors.”

“Don’t you need highly enriched uranium for weapons? I thought that was the whole point. Uranium for power plants is not sufficiently concentrated to make bombs.”

“For the atom bomb – yes. But there are other possibilities.” Rob exchanged his red brush for a blue one. “You’ve heard of dirty bombs?” Julia nodded although she wasn’t sure she had. “Basically a whole lot of spent fuel is packed together and released when the bomb detonates. It contaminates the area and everyone in it with radioactive material.”

“Nice.”

“Welcome to the world at war.” He turned back to his painting.

Julia surveyed the room. The central banner was starting to take shape: ‘Pebble Beds = South African imperialism’ would not be popular with the Department.

It was late by the time Solomon dropped Julia back at her hotel. They’d eaten well and talked intensely. The posters had been finished. A small group was tasked to get them through UN security, into the main negotiation venue. A protest of colour to break the grey suits. Julia was tired as she walked through the lobby. She looked dishevelled. Her skirt was creased from kneeling on the floor, her hair matted from the humidity and paint.

She saw him too late. Jon Roberts was waiting at the lifts.

## 38

“Jules!”

“Jesus Jon! You gave me a fright.” Her shoulders tensed.

“Let’s have a drink. Please. I’ve been waiting for you for a while. Where’ve you been?” His words held accusation.

“Look Jon, I’m really tired. It’s been a long day. I need to go to sleep.” She rubbed her hands over her eyes.

“Oh come on Jules. Please. Just one drink. I’ve been worried about you babe. You haven’t returned my phone calls. I thought we’d reconnected. Now I don’t know what’s going on. This morning I saw you across the room – I didn’t know you were coming – I felt... look, I just want to see that you’re okay.” His tone was conciliatory, almost tender.

“I’m fine Jon. I just don’t want to see you right now. Okay?” The lift arrived and she turned to go. He grabbed her arm.

“Jules wait. There’s one thing I need to say. I don’t know how much you know or what your interest is, but if you are involved in any campaigning around the Pebble Beds you need to be careful. You won’t be popular if you criticise them publicly. It won’t help to embarrass the Minister... you could find yourself in a difficult position.” Julia flinched. “You have? My God Julia do you know what you are up against?” He grabbed both her arms, “do you have any idea what this is all about?” he was shaking her, trying to look her in the eye. Then he relaxed his grip, “just be careful. Okay?”

She pulled away. The lift doors closed behind her. She leant against the wall. The lift ascended. After a brief struggle with the lock she opened her door and slammed it shut. The décor of her room did not soften her mood. It was dark and stuffy. Everything in it was brown – the cabinet on which the TV stood, the wooden bed, the carpet, the bed-cover, a huge imposing cupboard, even the curtains. She'd tried opening the windows the night before but the service courtyard was full of grime and the smell of rotting cabbage. Resisting her temptation for a swim, she turned on the dripping air-conditioner.

The knock at the door barely penetrated through the clanking air pipes. She was mistaken. But she heard it again, slightly louder. Jon must have taken the next lift. She opened the door and immediately stepped away. She didn't want him to touch her. He stepped in and closed the door softly behind him.

"Jules. I want to know that you have heard me. That you realise I am serious." He spoke quietly. She stood at the window, her back to him. Her arms were clenched tightly round her body, her shoulders tense. The edge of the curtain rose and fell with the cold air creating a faint rustle. A tiny camera blinked on. It was outside her vision. Jon was still talking. She didn't hear the words. A sudden revelation had come to her. She spun round.

"You sent the photo."

"Jules..."

"You sent the bloody photo!" She stared at him, "Jon. I don't believe it. Get out. Just get out!" She was screaming.

Julia heard the door open and close in a haze. Tears slowly formed and then started streaming down her face. More and more until she was truly sobbing. She threw herself on the bed howling. It was well after midnight when she finally stopped. Her body was empty. She washed her face and put gel round her eyes to ease the swelling. Then fell into a disturbed sleep.

### 39

Kumalo's sleep was no less disturbed. His tossing and turning jerked Zuzi awake each time she was about to drop off. In the end she got up and went to the basement gym. An hour later she pulled out her computer and downloaded her email. She'd left the office in excellent hands, but she liked to check in. She alone was responsible for *uMoya's*

meteoric rise. She alone could make the decisions critical to its success. Start-up energy businesses were frequently on the market. People had good ideas but bad business plans. Zuzi looked for those in trouble, did a thorough investigation, then used her intuition for a final decision. Quite often she bought them. Originally *uMoya* was set up as an energy broker. It took advantage of climate change opportunities to develop strategies for cities and companies. Jon Roberts was one of her clients. The strategies were constantly changing as international rules on adaptation and mitigation became more and more stringent. They were cash cows, remained core to the company's business. But it was time to expand.

It's why she'd met the Frenchman. His funding would be useful, but only on her terms. There were plenty of people wanting to make money, and if they invested with her, returns would be high. It was all about timing. The Pebble Bed company would be listed soon. When it came on the market, she would need to act swiftly. The French money could be important then.

At six, Graves' cell-phone rang. Not many people had his personal number. She picked it up to check the caller. Slimkop de Vriess. She nudged her husband and gave him the phone. The Afrikaner was useful. She wished she could like him. Or trust him. Sometimes it felt Graves was naïve. He took the man at his word. After a brief conversation Graves put down the phone.

"What was it love?"

"They're planning a demonstration. I will *not* let them disrupt me."

"Of course not. What are you thinking?"

"Welcome everyone. It is good to see that we can all sit round the same table – government, business, civil society – when issues of key importance to South Africa and the Renaissance of the continent are being discussed. I know you have been well briefed by my colleague from Foreign Affairs," he gestured towards the Chair, "but I wanted to take this opportunity to stress the importance of maintaining solidarity on our position. We know there are elements who want to sabotage this initiative – elements who are acting as agents of conservative Western governments, people who do not want to see Africa succeed, people who are indeed Afro-pessimists, who believe that Africans are inferior. It is my privilege today to emphasise that this initiative comes from the President. He has personally crafted it with other eminent African leaders and he is

personally committed to its success. Anyone who detracts from this commits an act of insubordination against our democratically elected leader.”

Kumalo spoke slowly, weighed each word carefully. Occasionally he lifted his eyes but not his head to assess reaction round the room, “As Minister of Energy and Water, I take a particular interest in getting electricity to all Africans. If you look at a photograph of the world at night from space, you will see that we are indeed a dark continent. There are lights in South Africa and in the big cities of West Africa. But most Africans have no access to electricity. We will change that, as part of the African Renaissance, as part of our economic programme for Africa. South Africa’s investment in Pebble Bed Modular Reactors means that we will be in a position to assist our neighbouring states to meet the energy demands of their people and industries. Without this there can be no economic growth. Without economic growth Africa remains the laughing stock of Europe and America. I trust that I will hear of no South African who has criticised these important initiatives. No one. I advise you to use the various forums to promote the African Renaissance.”

#### 40

Julia left the briefing session. The Minister’s warning was clear. It confirmed Jon’s ranting. Maybe she was being paranoid, but the entire speech felt directed at her. ‘Pebble Beds = South African Imperialism’ was not a message that would go down well in the plenary hall. The media would be briefed to be there. Camera’s rolling. International embarrassment. One less researcher. A necessary casualty in the propaganda war. Crazy, but there it was. Everyone knew what was happening but no one wanted to say it. The emperor’s new clothes. Was Sizwe killed for *this*?

The media room was in the basement. She hoped to find Solomon there. But he’d left. No one knew where he’d gone or when he’d be back. No one had heard of Rob, the long haired activist. Julia checked her panic. Tried to talk herself through rationally. First the banners might not make it into the UN complex. A new temporary rule made it illegal to protest inside. Cars would be checked. That many banners would never make it in. Even if they did, they might not make it to the hall. How on earth were the activists planning to hang them? It was impossible. But even if they did... even if they made it into the hall, and they were hung, *and* the media were there to broadcast it to the world... no one would know that she’d been involved. She thought back to the

photocopy room. To Mandla's raised eyebrow. He would know. And for some reason that felt the worst. Worse than Kumalo's insinuated threats.

Solomon was not in the cafeteria but Mandla was. She joined him in the queue. Tried to make small talk about the meeting's progress. He brushed her off,

"Listen Julia things are pretty tense right now. I'm grabbing a coffee and heading back into negotiations. Let's talk about it when we're back in South Africa okay?"

The tall good looking man was standing ahead in the queue. Julia still couldn't place him. She asked Mandla. He sounded irritated,

"That's Slimkop de Vriess – v-r-i-e-s-s. Special advisor to the Minister."

The name meant nothing. The man caught her eye and smiled. She blushed briefly and looked away. Solomon was walking past. With a mumbled good-bye to Mandla, she rushed out the room.

"Solomon!"

He stopped. "Julia. Can we meet later? I'm in a real hurry." He turned to go.

"No Solomon. Please. Sorry. Just a quick word." She caught up with him, "the posters... the banner... what's happening?"

He looked at his watch. Ten-to-ten. "They should be up shortly. I guess they'll use the tea break. Why?"

"Solomon," she was breathless, "is there any way we can stop them?"

"*Stop* them? No Julia. Why would you want to stop them?"

"I can't explain now – it's too complicated – but I am worried about the repercussions. From the South African government..."

"Julia. I'm sorry. It's out of my hands. No one knows until the last minute who will do what – bring them in, hang them, and so on. That way no one can reveal the plan and have it stopped."

"So there's nothing you can do?"

"Nothing Julia. I'm sorry."

## 41

De Vriess saw Julia's panic. Guessed what it was about. In a way he admired her. She wasn't doing badly considering she'd just figured out that her ex-boyfriend sent her a photo threat. And she'd never played the international game before. It was hard for amateurs. He'd thought about letting the activists get on with it and hang the posters. It

would result in a crack down. He'd be happy never to see some of the faces again. Julia wouldn't survive of course. But that wasn't the reason he'd intervened. It didn't seem worth it. Things still hung in the balance. Let the hand play out in Johannesburg if necessary. At the Summit.

An anonymous phone call had tipped off UN security to a white delivery van. The driver pleaded innocence and was probably believed. The material was buried at the bottom of the regular stationary supply. The activists were becoming more professional. Their operation had military style elements. He enjoyed the rising challenge.

Negotiations hadn't gone as far as he'd hoped. But it was okay. There was time before the Summit. The text was sufficiently vague. Nukes were neither in nor out. Francophone countries had dug their heels in, more he believed because of antipathy to their Anglophone counterparts, than from any fundamental disagreements. He would work on them. He had some good contacts. By the Summit, there would be no ambiguity.

## 42

Children were playing gummee – one, two, three, turn, one, two, three, cross – in the driveway as Julia drove up. She parked on the side of the street. A girl, too small to be playing with the elastic, ran up to her car door as she stepped out.

“Are you Julia?”

“Yes,” Julia looked down to a head divided into neat squares with a short piece of hair tied inside each one, “what's your name?” The child grabbed her hand.

“Come,” she tugged Julia along, “you must come with me.” She led her into the house and into the room where Julia had sat during Sizwe's brother's birthday party. The room was much emptier. Instead of the elaborate array of colourful foods covering every surface, there was a single tray with a pot of tea in a home-knitted cosy, two cups with saucers, and a matching milk jug and sugar bowl. A plate of yellow cup cakes was placed next to it. Nolitha stood up from the comfortable chair as the child led Julia into the room.

“Welcome Julia.” She embraced her. The child hovered. “I see you have already met Mandisa, Sizwe's last born.” Julia stiffened. The old woman squeezed her arms, “there. You didn't know.” She smiled at her grandchild who left the room. Nolitha made her way slowly back to her chair and sat down with some effort. Her joints

obviously pained her. She gestured the chair opposite, “Julia, I am so happy you called me. Please, sit down.”

Julia sat in a daze. She could still feel the warmth of her small hand, confident and determined. Sizwe’s daughter. Nolitha continued,

“She’s come to stay with me for a while. Her mother has a new full time job and is not home enough. It’s nice for me. And the neighbouring children play with her.”

Nolitha poured tea into the two cups and passed one to Julia. It rattled in its saucer as she handed it over, her old hand shaking.

“You will help yourself to milk and sugar?”

“Thank you.”

“And a cake?” she offered the plate to her. “Mandisa helped me bake these this morning.”

They sat for a while in silence. Julia looked around the room. The curtains were drawn against the bright day creating shadows and dark corners. The room smelt faintly stale, the windows closed. Nolitha’s body was still as a statue; her hands balanced on her knees, her face showing nothing. She started to speak.

“His brother found him. He heard the car turn in and after a while the gunshots. He didn’t link the two for some time. Then when he didn’t hear the front door open, he put on a jacket, slipped on his shoes and walked into the kitchen to peer out the window. He could see a dark shape on the ground, but he didn’t know it was a person. Didn’t know it was his brother. Mandisa woke up and joined him in the kitchen, asking for her father. He picked her up and took her back to her room, stroking her head to soothe her back to sleep before going to look what was in the driveway. Sizwe was lying there. It looked like he had been dragged a few metres. His jeans were smeared with mud.”

Nolitha’s faced remained impassive but tears welled in her eyes and fell gently down her cheeks. Julia wanted to offer a tissue but sat transfixed, unable to disrupt the telling.

“He’d left the front door open and didn’t notice her. She must have stood for some time.” Nolitha brushed her tears away, “then he said he felt her standing there, her little body taut as a wire, absolutely still, staring. Staring at her father’s dead body. She made no sound. And she’d been so excited all day.” Nolitha smiled, “her mother dropped her off in the morning; she hadn’t seen Sizwe for weeks. He hadn’t known she was coming. All day she kept telling the other children that her father was coming. Her father was coming.”

Nolitha gestured to the table, “have another cake... or some more tea?” Julia shook her head. The old woman continued.

“He brought Mandisa to my bed. I tucked her in. Sang her a song. Then he called the police. They arrived sirens screeching. It must have been two hours later. They took statements and photographs. Then they insisted on taking Sizwe’s body. Said they needed it as evidence. I don’t understand that.” She sighed. “Hijackings are very common they said – as if we don’t know it, living here in Soweto – a green BMW wouldn’t stay green for long. It would be hard to find.”

“So they’ve decided it was a hijacking?” Julia asked, “they’re sure?”

“I think that’s the easiest for them. The most convenient solution. I’ve noticed this about the police. They like to close files, no different to the old days... Have some more tea Julia and tell me about yourself.”

Julia poured them both another cup.

“Thank you Mrs Magona for telling me.” Julia’s eyes were filled with tears. “I’m so sorry. It’s not right. It’s so...” Julia ran out of words. Parents shouldn’t bury their children, lovers shouldn’t be shot and killed, hijackings shouldn’t happen, children shouldn’t see their father’s murdered body.

“No Julia it is not right. But come, tell me something else. What are you busy with?”

She shook her head. Put down her cup.

“I’ve just been to Nairobi – to Kenya – for work.”

“Yes.”

“How well did Sizwe know Minister Kumalo? Personally I mean. Of course they knew each other in public. And Sizwe said they were in exile together.”

Nolitha showed no surprise at this change in topic.

“Yes, they knew each other. When Sizwe fled the country in ‘81, Mr Kumalo took him on as an assistant in Amsterdam. They were working in intelligence. I never asked him the details of those years; he never spoke about it much. But I knew they were investigating the nuclear weapons programme. How far the apartheid state had got. That’s why I smiled to myself that day you came here. Sizwe said you were looking at nuclear power. I knew there was a connection.”

“But I’m looking at nuclear energy, not nuclear weapons. It’s a different thing.”

“That’s what they said in those days too.”

“So you think...? No...” Julia shook her head, answering her own question, “that’s not it. South Africa gave up its nuclear arms programme with great publicity. The whole world knows how we voluntarily dismantled our bombs. There’s no way they would risk the international fallout of building it up again.”

Nolitha just smiled.

“But you also know the Minister?”

“We’ve met although I don’t see him much now. When he came back in ’92 I used to invite him round. And I went to his wedding. That was wonderful. He married the beautiful Zuzi Dlamini, Sizwe’s childhood friend. I thought they might marry; she was always quite keen on Sizwe. But of course I don’t see her now either.”

Julia thought about the elegant woman in the computer room in Nairobi. Sizwe’s first love. She felt bombarded by information about the man. Would she know him better dead than she had alive?

“Julia maybe you want to see his room. I don’t know. Maybe there is something you would like of his. I know he was so fond of you.” She looked at Julia with her warm eyes, “he couldn’t stop telling me about this woman who was like no other he had met.”

So Julia went to his room. On her own. She hadn’t seen it properly the day of the party. Then she’d opened the door to find him surrounded by comrades, plotting and scheming. Closed it too quickly to take much in.

The room was sparse. The single bed neatly made up, a colourful blanket of crocheted squares on top. A dark wooden cupboard stood in one corner. She opened it. Half a dozen shirts, neatly ironed hung on wire hangers next to two pairs of pants and a black denim jacket. His favoured takkies were the only shoes there, lined up neatly below the clothes. She remembered he’d been wearing a pair of brown polished shoes when he left her house. Smart clothes for his meeting with the Minister. The night he was killed. The left side of the cupboard comprised a row of shelves filled with folded struggle T-shirts in all colours, two pairs of jeans, three jerseys and several pairs of white cotton boxer shorts. She closed the doors and sat on his bed. His smell lingered faintly. How strange. He’d been dead more than a month and still she could smell him, a particular mixture of his body sweat, lux soap and axe deodorant. It was comforting.

She lay back on his pillow and looked at the ceiling. It was a dull white with stain lines where water had settled. Rain must drip through when it stormed. They looked old so perhaps the leaks were now fixed. She imagined him lying there. Staring where she

now stared. She imagined lying next to him. What would they talk about? What would he advise her now?

First she heard his laugh. Loud and infectious. Then he pulled her to him so she lay cradled in his body. A perfect fit. Julia sighed. In her fantasy he kissed her hair, nibbled her ears, whispered not to worry. It was a relief to hear this new voice replacing his angry tone. His accusations the night he died. This loving Sizwe trusted her. He wanted her to help him.

“I’ve written down two numbers for you.” Nolitha said passing Julia a piece of paper when she rejoined her in the sitting room. “Sizwe’s old office and Sergeant Ntini. The man in charge of the investigation.”

Julia dialled the SFA office from her desk. The phone rang for some time. Finally a breathless voice answered, slightly too loudly. A woman, “SFA. How can I help you?”

“My name is Julia Ratford. I was a friend of Sizwe Magona’s.”

“Mmhmm?”

“I... I was wondering... you see the police say he was hijacked and I...”

“Mmhmm?”

“Well, I wondered whether... well, if it would be possible...” This wasn’t going well. Julia had planned a speech in her mind but the unfriendly voice on the other end wasn’t helping. She tried again.

“I believe Sizwe was murdered and I don’t think the police are going to do anything about it. I wanted to find out if you – or anyone there – knew of any motive for his death or whether he had been threatened.”

The woman on the other end said nothing.

“Are you still there?” Julia asked. “Maybe I could give you my number and someone could call me if they know anything. Or I could meet with...”

“Give me your number.”

The woman cut the connection. Julia dialled the second number Nolitha had given her.

“Ntini. How can I help you?”

Julia introduced herself and asked for information on Sizwe’s murder.

“Listen, I’m off-duty now. I don’t have it all in my head, but we are investigating all possibilities.” Julia could hear a woman in the background, demanding the man’s attention. He continued, “Listen, if I have any information I will call in the morning.

Your number has come up on my phone.” He hung up. Julia didn’t expect to hear from him.

### 43

It was a beautiful day so he decided to walk. The Café was not far from his house. A few jacarandas held their purple flowers but most had turned to thick green creating a man-made urban forest. A car passed driving slowly, its passengers neatly dressed for church. Otherwise the streets were quiet. He turned into a side road. *A Cup Above* made the best coffee in Pretoria but didn’t yet feature in the guide books. He chose an outside table, ordered a double espresso and allowed his mind to relax.

The situation had become more complex, and like a chess game, a single wrong move could bring him down. He needed to see it as a whole again, get a feel for the intentions and strategies of the opposition, discern the important from the trivial. Not be tempted by a wrong move. This was what he loved – the moment of seeing the system in its entirety and then converting it into a step-by-step strategy. The moment of seeing couldn’t be rushed. He had to be relaxed. All the millions of pieces of information needed to come together in his mind and present a picture. He ordered a second espresso.

He’d spent too much time following Julia. It hadn’t been a waste. He’d learnt useful things. It just wasn’t efficient. It was time to change tactics with her, up the pressure, and concentrate on other things. For example Kumalo. He had left the timing to the Minister but he was too slow. If things didn’t move they’d lose the opportunity. The networks in Europe were ready but fickle. Things needed to go public. There was no reason for the Y-Plant to stay secret. The longer they waited the harder it would be. Some people would object, but the political weight of the Minister backed by industry would carry the day. It would be more than sufficient to counteract any opposition. It was after all in line with the Renaissance of Africa. And once it was public, he wouldn’t need the Minister anymore.

He was quite pleased with the side deal between Yves and Zuzi Dlamini. They were both predictable players motivated by self-interest. That deal alone could pay for his retirement in Paris; it would be a consolation if the riskier plan didn’t work out. Which it would. Once he’d announced the Y-Plant Kumalo needed to focus on services protests. De Vriess didn’t want him looking too closely at what happened to the yellow

cake. A threat from the ultra-left would distract him. Something potentially explosive. He'd lunch with the Minister tomorrow.

#### 44

"Julia. Sorry. Got held up in a management meeting," Mandla said as he sat down, swinging his elegant legs under the table. He always dressed with style. Even in the throws of nightlong negotiations he managed to look well turned out. He had an easy, approachable manner. Julia liked him. She believed he had integrity.

She'd chosen an outside table at the News Café in Hatfield where she could look into the square, a new phenomenon Pretoria. In the old days eating outside in public was forbidden – or so she'd been told. True or not, the new South Africa was bursting with never-before pavement café's. Europe once again making its way into African culture.

"Thanks for meeting me Mandla. I know it's short notice and I know you are really busy. I appreciate it."

"Don't mention it. What can I do for you?"

"I've encountered a problem."

He laughed, "I'm not surprised. What kind of a problem?"

"Well I am still having difficulty getting information. And I keep coming up with contradictions – or unexplained things – I don't know how much is department policy and how much is..."

"Yes?" he asked politely.

"Well how much is personal initiative?"

"I see."

The waiter arrived to take their order.

"I'm listening Julia." Mandla said, giving no indication of his thoughts.

"Okay. Well there are two main things. One is the Y-Plant. Have you heard of it?"

"Yes of course. It was set up in the late sixties or early seventies – a uranium enrichment facility – and it was shut down."

"Yes that's right, except I'm wondering... was it really decommissioned?"

He looked at her shrewdly, "what's the second thing?"

"The second thing?"

"You said there were two things."

"Oh, the second thing is waste. Nuclear waste. Do you know if there's a plan for it and what it is?"

“Yes. That I can answer. There is a waste management strategy. The Minister himself has approved it.”

“Your coffee sir.” The waiter handed over a steaming cup. A small amount had sloshed into the saucer.

“Thank you,” Mandla turned to smile at the young man, then took his napkin and folded it between cup and saucer to soak up the spillage.

“What does it say?”

“The waste strategy?” he took a sip of his coffee, “I’m afraid I’m not in a position to share that with you.”

“But you think it’s okay? You think it’s responsible and adequate?”

He smiled. His small nod was almost indiscernible. She wondered what kind of strategy was responsible and adequate for waste that would remain dangerous for two hundred and forty thousand years. It was a long time. Perhaps longer than the time left for the human race. Not a trivial problem.

“Tell me about the Y-Plant,” Mandla said. “What makes you think it is still active?”

“Not active,” Julia corrected, “maybe dormant.”

“And your evidence?”

Julia looked down. Mandla waited. She picked up a chip as though to eat it. Put it back on her plate. Then she looked straight at the bureaucrat and said quickly and a little loudly,

“It was in those files you gave me.”

She looked for a change in his expression. There was none. Not even his eyes moved. He must be a formidable negotiator. She continued, her voice now normal.

“There is a discrepancy in the cost of enriched uranium between the Koeberg and Pebble Bed calculations.”

Still, his face gave away nothing.

“I don’t know where those numbers come from or who provided them, but, I think it’s because they – you...” Julia trailed off. If anyone was responsible it would be the Department. Mandla was a loyal member of the Department. But she’d thought about it before asking Mandla to meet her. Either he knew about it or he didn’t. Either someone was playing a lone hand or it was approved government policy. She’d decided to confront him. See what he knew. She continued, “...are planning to re-open the Y-Plant. Or maybe it’s never been closed. It was very inefficient so the prices would be high, higher than on the international market.”

“Julia. I think you are making too much of it. There are many reasons why the uranium price could be different.”

“But *what*, Mandla, *what*?” Julia cut in, “I’ve thought about it a lot.”

“Well market fluctuations for one thing. The projections were done at different times. The price of uranium is highly volatile at the moment, but steadily increasing. It’s in short supply globally.”

“I know that...” Julia realised what an appalling negotiator she would make, unable to keep her views hidden.

“I expect the input cost of uranium for the Pebble Bed was higher. Am I right?”

“Yes.”

He smiled broadly, “See. No conspiracy there, just market prices.”

“But...” Julia took a bite of her sandwich, swallowed before asking, “is it possible?”

“Is what possible?”

“Is it possible that the Y-Plant will supply enriched uranium for the Pebble Beds? I mean, would you know about it if it was true?”

He sat still for a while before answering.

“Julia, this is not something I can discuss.”

“You can’t tell me *anything*?”

“In principle,” he said, “something like this would be discussed in Cabinet first.”

“Before even the *department* knew about it? But Mandla surely someone from the department would be developing the proposal that goes to Cabinet?”

“Not necessarily.” He looked at his watch. “I really must go. And Julia, listen I am talking in *principle*. I am not saying this is what is happening.”

“Of course not.”

He took out his wallet. Julia waved it away.

“Thank you. It was good to catch up.” He got up to leave. After a couple of steps he returned. “Julia,” he put his hand on her shoulder and bent so his mouth was close to her ear, “I haven’t actually seen the waste disposal strategy. It is only available to those with the highest security clearance.”

He straightened up and walked briskly away.

Traffic on the highway was light. Soon she was in her office. The papers on her desk were a mess. She put them into neat piles and switched on the computer. Then sat back

in her chair contemplating her next steps. Mandla's reticence and then apparent disclosure bothered her. There was a link between Sizwe's murder and Kumalo's nuclear drive. There had to be. She found the papers on the Y-Plant and reread them. It had been established in secret at the end of the sixties. In 1970 Prime Minister Vorster made a now famous speech to parliament. He announced that South Africa would develop the capacity to enrich uranium. For peaceful purposes. But the Y-Plant had produced no raw material for Koeberg the nuclear power plant. It had, exclusively, produced weapons grade uranium. By 1989, six bombs had been made. One writer suggested that similarities between South Africa's Y-Plant and German technologies implied ongoing collaboration. Sizwe would have known all that. The Y-Plant's main operation was during the eighties, while he was working with Kumalo in exile.

Julia put the papers down. This was ridiculous. There was no way South Africa would be involved in nuclear weapons production. International approval was too important. So what was it? Jon Roberts knew something. Taking a deep breath, she started to dial his number. Then she cut the call. Sizwe thought her phone might be bugged. She went to the cafeteria payphone. Jon agreed to meet her. Five o'clock at Emmarentia, a park where they could walk and talk. It was now one.

Someone had left a newspaper at one of the tables. She paged through it, her mind elsewhere. There was a small article on Zuzi Dlamini in the business pages. Her company was profiled as a huge success story. Zuzi was the frontrunner for businesswoman of the year. Julia put down the paper when her cell phone rang. She looked at the screen. 'Private number'. She pressed the green icon.

"I hear you're asking questions about Sizwe's murder." The voice was muffled, like the person was speaking through a cloth. "I might be able to help you. Someone was there. The night he died. I'll call again."

And he hung up.

## 45

"The briefing will be next week." With that, Kumalo cut the conversation. De Vriess didn't mind. Let the Minister think he was calling the shots. The Y-Plant was on track. He wanted to talk about other things.

"You must be worried about security for the Summit."

The Minister slurped his drink and set it down. They were in the Kumalo's private sitting room.

"Why should I be worried?" The use of 'I' instead of 'we'. Interesting. The man really was distanced from the government he represented.

"Well..." De Vriess opened his arms, "you have delegates coming from all over the world. The international media will be there. It seems an opportune time for insurgents to stage a massive demonstration." He stroked his chin, "I wonder whether there aren't even people in your own party who are encouraging them..." De Vriess left the sentence hanging. Took a sip of his tonic water.

"Nonsense!" Kumalo's voice was loud but held a trace of uncertainty.

De Vriess waved his hands to dismiss his earlier comment, "just a fancy Minister. I am sure you have impeccable sources." De Vriess smiled.

"It's bloody nonsense!" the Minister ranted. "These people have nothing to demonstrate against. Nothing. Who else in Africa has services? Who? And it's never bloody enough. Protesting against this, demonstrating against that. It's ridiculous. And I can't even blame that bloody skelm."

"You know in many ways Sizwe's death was most fortunate." De Vriess picked up on the cue. The Minister grunted in affirmation. "Yes," his advisor continued, "I believe there are some quite serious succession battles in SFA. Something you could surely play to your advantage? In fact that alone will probably stop them organising. Yes. I am sure the SFA will not be able to rally the masses against the Summit." This last sentence held a trace of doubt. De Vriess knew it would unsettle the Minister. But he had no chance to respond. A short knock at the door and Zuzi entered.

"Ah, your beautiful wife." De Vriess unfurled his legs and stood up to greet her. "I was just saying that Sizwe's death was a blessing – no more services unrest, no more excavating our history." He laughed.

## 46

He was sitting on the bonnet of his car in black jeans and a T-shirt smoking a cigarette when she drove in, his long legs dangled over the edge. He uncrossed them, stood up and stubbed out his cigarette. Julia turned off her engine. She got out of the car, nodded to him and walked through the hole in the fence. He followed. Park Management tried to discourage people from entering at this end. No one observed the rules, insisting in a

non-confrontational way on historical rights of access. The grass was green and the weir full as they crossed; it had been a wet summer.

“You’ve started smoking again.”

“I know. I really thought I’d kicked it for good.”

“What happened?”

“Come on Jules. What’s this about. You didn’t phone me to find out about my smoking habits. Last time I saw you, you told me to get lost.” They walked a bit further, “last two times actually.”

“I know Jon. I’m sorry.” She touched his arm briefly. “Thanks for the warning.”

He said nothing.

“The warning you gave me in Nairobi.”

“Julia, seriously. What is this about?” He cut her no slack. This was harder than she’d anticipated. She’d thought he would be flirtatious. Happy that she’d called. She’d try the direct approach.

“Jon, I’ve decided that you aren’t trying to intimidate me, that you don’t want to hurt me.” He laughed a dry humourless laugh. “And that you genuinely are – or were – worried about my safety. So you need to tell me what’s going on. Are you, for example, working for the NIA?” Julia slowed down and turned to face Jon. He strode on. She waited until he stopped, then walked slowly to catch up with him.

“Why would you ask me that?” he looked her straight in the eyes. She saw the familiar dark fleck in his left eye. A small spot in the ice-blue. But she could read nothing behind them. She held his gaze.

“Well to be honest, I’m confused. Maybe you’re just a city official intent on getting water to people. But then why were you at the SFA rally? And why do you know something about nuclear energy?” She looked down, “also Sizwe was convinced you were.”

He sighed, “Sizwe. I wondered when we’d come back to him.” He started walking slowly. She kept pace. He continued, “here’s what I know. Someone from Pretoria approached me a couple of months ago. I don’t know if she was from the NIA, I assumed so. Anyway, she gave me a spiel about the upcoming African Summit and how they suspected people would mobilise around it and use it as an opportunity to embarrass government.”

“She was talking about SFA,” Julia guessed. “She was talking about our democratic right to protest, she was...”

“Listen a minute. Let me finish. As I said, she came to my office and suggested it would be in my interest to monitor SFA and report on what I observed. She was worried there would be violent demonstrations and people could die. So am I. There is a lot of resistance to eGoli, most of it unfounded. Agents provocateurs will use the Summit to push their own agendas of anarchy and disinformation. They won’t care if people are killed.”

“But *Sizwe* was killed.”

“I know. And it started me thinking. So listen. She came back and asked me to sow some discord, encourage leadership battles. Sizwe’s death created a perfect opportunity, she said, to render the SFA impotent at the Summit. Now nothing would make me happier...”

“But...”

“Listen! Anyway – by the way Jules if you repeat a word of this I’ll deny it all. I’m speaking in complete confidence – anyway, I wondered about the perfect opportunity – maybe I caught it from you, but I wondered if this woman and whoever she worked for – the NIA –had not *created* the perfect opportunity.”

“Are you saying they *killed* Sizwe? This anonymous woman you know nothing about?”

“It’s possible. It’s unlikely Sizwe’s death was coincidental.”

“I know, but... oh I need to think about this.” They had walked the entire length of the park and were passing the lake where people were kayaking. The water was flat, the air still.

“You didn’t send the photo?”

“Jules, I don’t know what you are talking about.” He steered her to the tearoom next to the rose garden. The waitress offered them a green wrought iron table in dappled shade. They sat down and ordered Earl Grey tea and scones for two.

She could tell something was wrong when she turned her key in the gate lock. The key didn’t fit in smoothly as normal. She had to jiggle ‘til it caught and opened the Yale latch. She stepped inside cautiously and walked stiffly up the path, eyes and body alert. The branches that used to extend gently into the path had been broken roughly out the way. Crushed pieces of jasmine lay on the ground exuding their sweet smell. Her door stood ajar. She waited, stilling her breathing, listening.

*Tap, tap, tap.* The sound came from behind her. Her body stiffened. She turned slowly. A strand of wisteria was loose; the breeze knocked it against the pillar. *Tap, tap, tap.* No other sound.

They hadn't bothered to pick the lock. Wood and glass were hacked through. The handle hung loosely in its socket like a hand broken above the wrist. She nudged the door open with her elbow and looked around. The place was trashed. Broken glass lay at her feet, cushions were scattered across the room, ripped open, their innards spilt. Plates, glasses, mugs had been pulled from their shelves into a heap of sharp shards on the tiled kitchen floor. The tiles themselves were chipped and stained where bottles of chutney, orange juice and flour had been tossed. Julia walked to her bedroom. Clothes were scattered over the floor, her underwear slashed and lying on the bed, books torn and thrown along with the rest.

She looked for a place to put her bag down. Nowhere. Not a single piece of floor or surface was clear. Suddenly all she wanted was one small place, one tiny patch, one piece of her cottage that hadn't been violated. She fought off tears and turned her back on the bedroom. She stepped gingerly through the living room debris, back outside. She put her bag on a bench under the trellis and sat down. Her bag vibrated. She opened it slowly, took out her phone. Missed call. Anonymous number. The phone rang inside. She got there before it stopped.

"Hello," her voice was wary.

"Julia?" She was silent. She didn't recognise the voice. "Is this Julia Ratford?"

"Who is this?"

"My name is not important. But I need to know who you are."

"You called this morning? About Sizwe."

"Yes."

"How did you get my home number?"

"From the office. It doesn't matter. Listen. You are right. It wasn't an ordinary hijacking. The police are not going to bother with an investigation."

"Who is this? How do you know this?"

"Let me just say I was there. I know things Julia."

A mangy dog with a damaged leg cowered backwards whimpering as a child kicked it out of the doorway. A soccer ball flew into the road. She touched the ABS brakes a little too sharply. Three men lounged across a fence, beers in hand while their women hung up washing and tended to small children. Many stared as she went by in her pristine black BMW. No one recognised her as she drove, slightly out of her way, past the house she grew up in. She hadn't been there for more than twenty years.

The streets were all too familiar, although the area had been more spacious then. Shacks didn't yet occupy every back yard. She drove on thankful that her father couldn't see the dirt and poverty he'd fought so hard to avoid. She was finally starting to understand him. For him appearances were everything. The house was always painted; the yard swept clean; the inside immaculate. Now the house looked run-down. Paint peeled off the walls. Broken bottles nestled next to scraps of iron inside the gate. Zuzi turned the corner at the end of her childhood street without thinking. She had walked the route so many times.

It was further than she remembered. All her hours in the gym would never make her as fit as she'd been in those days – walking everywhere, running from the police, washing clothes by hand. But there was nothing romantic about poverty. Her resolve hardened, seeing what had happened to the world she came from. The only way out of misery was for each person to work hard, to fight their way. She no longer believed in the socialism of her youth. It was ridiculously naïve. Yet Sizwe had never given up. His skills, intelligence and connections could have got him any job in government or the private sector. Well paid. Growing the economy, building a business, making money, all of these contributed to poverty alleviation. You didn't have to live it. She was contributing to the country's transformation, in her way. No one could persuade her otherwise.

She turned into his street. The houses were more spread out. There were fewer shacks, the roads better maintained. She parked, opened her bag, and turned the mirror to check her face. She smoothed her hair and reglossed her lips. Then crossed the street. The door opened before Zuzi had a chance to knock.

“Look at you!” Nolitha gave her a huge hug then held her at arms length, her smiling eyes taking in her face, “the Minister's wife! My dear, welcome!”

She led her to their sitting room. Zuzi felt nervous. All her poise and training, her ability to speak to rooms full of antagonistic businessmen, her confidence in her beauty

and elegance, fell away. This woman was authentic. Zuzi felt overwhelmed by the warmth she exuded. And the memories flooded back, of late night meals and laughter, of intense debates, of strategies and tactics to beat the system.

“Sit down my dear.” Nolitha indicated the favourite armchair, “you’ll have to forgive me, I’m not as young as I used to be. My legs give me trouble.”

“Mrs Magona, Mam’Litha. It’s good to see you. You don’t look a day older.” Zuzi had forgotten how much Nolitha had meant to her. Her own parents had been distant, interested in keeping things looking right. Nolitha had emanated nothing but genuine kindness and love. The teenage girl had been drawn to her, despite her rebellion of all things adult.

“So my dear,” Nolitha began, “what brings you here?”

“Oh I’m so sorry. It’s been awful of me. I should have come sooner. When I heard about Sizwe... but even before. It’s hard to explain. My life...”

“There’s no need Zuzi. I do understand. You have a new life, which you should be proud of. I just hope you are happy...”

“I am happy,” Zuzi interjected.

“There. That is wonderful.” Nolitha spread her hands in an open gesture.

“I couldn’t have done what Sizwe did. I didn’t have it in me.”

“No my dear. Not many people do. God gives us many ways to live our lives. And in the end your choice might not be any easier. But... have some tea.”

Nolitha leant forward and lifted the teapot. Zuzi looked at her hands. They were those of an old woman, fingers thin to the bone except for the joints that were slightly swollen. Even with two hands holding the pot it shook gently and some tea spilled into the saucer. Zuzi reached out and took the cup from her.

“Thank you. No milk or sugar.”

“That’s how you keep that beautiful shape!” Nolitha sat back. “What is it I can help you with?”

Zuzi thought about explaining everything, putting it all out for Nolitha to examine. Her hatred for De Vriess whom her husband seemed to trust above all others, her doubts about what happiness wealth and power could really buy, the terror of failing in the public eye. Suddenly she felt so alone. Graves had withdrawn so much she couldn’t talk to him; her friends – well were they friends? There was a strange camaraderie amongst the new elite. But there was competition too. And she was one of the most ruthless; no

one would weep too much if she fell. But confide in Nolitha? She couldn't. Of course she couldn't. What she needed was information.

## 48

Every muscle in Julia's body ached as she stretched and sat back in the couch. It was still dark. The room was tidy and smelt faintly of ammonia. The door to her bedroom was closed. She didn't want to open it. A standing lamp illuminated the kitchen and sitting room.

It had taken some effort to get the sticky mess off the tiles and Hoover up the scattered feathers. Surprisingly the broken glass and crockery had filled less than one black bag. Anger and fear had given her enormous energy as she swept and scrubbed. She knew from swimming that almost any obstacle could be overcome with enough focus. With true presence of mind. But last night she hadn't been strong enough to face the invasion of her bed and clothes. Instead she'd phoned Jon. Just to hear a familiar voice. The conversation was ordinary. That in itself was a relief. She didn't tell him about the break-in.

She rubbed her face in her hands. She'd only snatched a few hours sleep, most of it sitting half up-right, jaw clenched, on the couch. More than anything she wanted a hot shower. She put on the kettle. A strong cup of coffee would help her face her bedroom, the only route to the bathroom. In the end she showered twice, once before cleaning her room, and once after. Seeing her torn underwear again made the intrusion very personal. She stuffed it to the bottom of a black bag, and scrubbed and scrubbed herself, the water as hot as she could stand.

She drove via the dump on her way to work. Threw out the bags with the broken goods and torn clothes. From her office she phoned a locksmith, arranged for new locks on her doors and ordered an extra security gate. At lunch time she went into Braamfontein. After buying new underwear and mugs, she went into Checkers. She'd arranged to meet him there.

He was at the back near the frozen meat. She recognised him immediately. Her body tensed. It was foolish to have come on her own. After her house. After his threats. Her anonymous caller was Sizwe's ex-comrade Zenzile. The man who had taunted her at Sizwe's funeral. The same man who'd stuck his knees into her back when she'd given him a lift, and threatened her.

She approached from behind and looked at him carefully. He was her height and thin, his wiry body packed with nervous energy. He looked like he'd snap if you touched him. She coughed quietly. He spun round on his heels. She stepped back in shock. He'd been badly beaten up. One side of his face was puffed up, his eye swollen shut. The muscles on the right of his mouth didn't work. It gave him a sinister sneer.

"He called me that night to meet him." She had to lean forward to hear. "Sizwe. I got there early and waited at the end of the driveway in the shadows. An unmarked police car drove past, then turned, drove back slowly and stopped. Two men got out, and the car left." He straightened up, a huge pack of frozen chicken feet in his hand, and turned to leave.

"Wait!" Julia said too loudly. He turned and swore at her. "I'm sorry, but please can you tell me the rest," she said more quietly.

"Bisto aisle," he said and walked away.

She almost laughed.

Playing the part, she threw a packet of fish fingers into her basket. Food for a child. Not something she'd eat. No matter. She walked along the back wall, past the milk and packaged bread looking for the section that sold sauces. The supermarket was full, typical of midday Braamfontein. Offices disgorged the masses for an hour. Enough time to do the weekly shop. A 'fresh deli' had opened up at the side. The salads looked limp, the meat old. Julia found her informant standing next to the pickles. She pulled one out and made as though to read the label. He continued.

"I jumped the low fence and crouched behind a bush. The men were whispering. One wanted a cigarette, the other said no – couldn't risk the light and they shouldn't really talk. Their voices got lower and I couldn't hear any more. I saw their bodies stiffen as a car came round the corner. They shrank into the back of the driveway as it pulled in. When Sizwe got out they shot him. I ran along the back alleys and out through another house."

Julia started asking a question, still holding a bottle of gherkins, "How did you know it was a police..."

"Can I help you?" a large woman in shop uniform asked.

"No, no. It's fine. I just..."

"Those are very nice. I took some home the other day, served them with potato salad."

“Yes? Thank you. I’ll take them.” And Julia thrust another unwanted item into her basket. When the woman eventually moved on, Zenzile had left also. She thought about him and what he had seen. It must have been horrendous. Perhaps that’s why he’d decided to tell her – tell someone – just to share it and make it seem little less awful. But why her? She could find no answer. Absentmindedly she emptied her basket onto the check out counter and handed over a hundred Rand note. She’d never get through that many pickled cucumbers.

## 49

Zuzi buzzed her secretary to bring some herbal tea. She surveyed her office. Perfect. Everything was perfect. The warm cream walls contained a space that was both professional and stylish. Three years ago she’d secured two original paintings – a Pemba and a Sekoto. They hung near each other giving voice to her taste and status. The tea arrived. Zuzi held a warm cup in her hands. She was confident that *uMoya* was already well positioned. Being the only Black Empowerment company operating in the energy market gave her distinct advantages. But it was annoying nevertheless. It’s why she invited him to see her.

Twenty minutes later she was mixing André Malan a drink.

“I see that you have decided to announce the listing.” Zuzi had her back to him.

“Yes.” He stretched his legs out and continued languidly, “Isn’t that what you wanted?”

“Of course André.” She said passing him his whiskey and soda. “That’s exactly what we agreed.” She sat facing him directly, her slim ankles neatly together “but I was expecting to see your press release before hearing it on the morning news.”

“Yes sorry about that” he responded not sounding sorry at all, “these things can get out of my hands once I send them through the system.”

Zuzi had met André Malan three years before at one of the endless dinners she attended as the Minister’s wife. She had liked him immediately. He was charming without being ingratiating. And he had style. She looked forward to cocktail parties where he might be present. He was also a useful contact.

“Nice flowers.” He said gesturing towards the generous display of lilies. “A gift from Graves?”

André headed the nuclear section of Eskom, the State's energy utility. His relaxed manner revealed nothing of his inner drive that had brought the Pebble Bed project this far. Now they were selling and Zuzi wanted to buy. She hadn't given him any details. Like had nothing to do with trust. And he seemed to be playing games of his own.

"I had hoped you would wait a few weeks." She said sipping her iced tea and ignoring his comment on the flowers.

"You having trouble with the financing?" He asked provocatively.

"Not at all." Zuzi responded sharply and put her glass down. "There is no problem with that side of the deal."

"So what's the fuss?" He ran his hand lazily through his blonde hair. "The company will be listed, which is what you want..."

"You know very well what the problem is Mr Malan." Zuzi tone was hard. "We had an agreement that you would not inform the media until the listing was secure. During the Summit."

André Malan smiled good naturedly, "Don't tell me you are frightened of a bit of competition Ms Dlamini?" He took a deep pull on his whiskey, "I thought you thrived on that!"

Zuzi smiled but it didn't reach her eyes. "Tell me André. What are you going to do when it is sold?"

"Are you offering me a job?" He laughed. Then looked at his Rolex. "Listen I must be off. Thanks for the whiskey." He stood up to make his leave. "Send my regards to Graves. He's in Nairobi?"

"Yes, finalising the text for the Summit." She said picking up his glass and taking it to the mini-bar.

"I thought that was a job for the bureaucrats..."

"Well it is. But he thought he should put some weight behind some of the terms. The Nigerians and Kenyans wanted him there."

"But he'll be back soon?" André adjusted his shirt sleeves after his jacket was on. The gold cuff-links were just visible.

"Yes. Yes. Day after tomorrow." She rinsed the glass and put it down on the rack. Someone would be in early tomorrow and clean everything properly. "André, there is one other thing..."

"Anything my dear," he said picking up his brief-case.

“There is a girl – a woman – working at CCRU. Julia Roberts. I think she is getting a little too interested in nuclear matters. Perhaps a phone call to her boss?”

## 50

“Julia? Thank God you’re back. Pamela says she needs to see you immediately.”

CCRU’s secretary continued in a loud whisper, “She’s in a really bad mood.”

Julia picked up her bag, removed the work papers and hung it on her desk chair. She took out a small mirror and touched up her make up before heading down the corridor to her boss’s office. Pamela as usual looked dressed to kill, a knee-length pencil skirt, soft white blouse and pumps with a small heel. She asked Julia to sit down.

“I’ve had no more calls from Jon Roberts – thank God. You must be doing something right there, or at least nothing destructive. But I have spoken to Mandla Dumisi.” Julia looked blank.

“Julia, don’t look confused. You know exactly what I’m talking about.”

“Did Mandla phone you?”

“No he did not. He is far too well mannered for that, but after a very interesting and somewhat disturbing call from an old friend of mine at Eskom, I thought I better phone him. I can see it was a good idea.”

Julia chose to say nothing. She didn’t know where this was headed, or what information Pamela might have.

“Mandla said he met you for coffee.”

Julia said nothing.

“He said you invited him. That is not acceptable Julia.”

“What?! I’m not allowed to invite someone for coffee? Come on Pamela. Mandla is helping me with information for our research. Research that the department wants!”

“Don’t shout at me Julia,” Pamela’s voice was steel-cold. “You are not sticking to your brief. What kind of information were you asking Mandla for? You seem to have a remarkable curiosity for the Pebble Bed reactors. Why?”

Now Julia was genuinely surprised. “Why do you think I do?”

Her boss did not reply. Perhaps he had said something about the Pebble Beds in passing. She hoped he hadn’t mentioned the Y-Plant.

“What did Mandla say?”

“Excuse me? I don’t like that tone of voice.” Pamela’s own tone was hard, brooking no opposition. Julia returned to her more natural conciliatory manner.

“Sorry. What did Mandla Dumisi say? Was he upset with me? Did he think I’d abused his generosity?”

“That’s better. No, as a matter of fact Mandla was kind about you. Said he thought you were doing good work.”

“But you said…”

“Yes Julia, I said that the way you have been interacting with Mandla is unacceptable. Mandla says you asked to meet him, and not in his office, but a restaurant. That is quite something to ask of a Director.”

“But he was happy to come. He said so.”

“Julia, I really don’t care. It is not correct protocol. You talk to him on the phone and, if absolutely necessary, you make an appointment to meet him that will not inconvenience him. And you adhere strictly to your brief. From now on, I don’t want you to so much as make a phone call to the department or anyone else without clearing it with me first. You leave this building, you ask me. Do I make myself clear?”

“Yes. Crystal clear. Maintaining good relations is more important to you than getting accurate answers,” Julia said. “And I must say I am disappointed. Part of the reason I applied for a job here is that CCRU has a reputation for quality non-partisan research. I can see it is not a deserved reputation.”

“Oh come on Julia. You can’t be that naïve. You are absolutely right. Our research is rigorous and excellent. I will not accept low standards and neither will the Board. And I trust our conversation hasn’t encouraged you to do a half-baked piece of work. But non-partisan? What does that mean. You should know there is no such thing as ‘objective’ research. Research is determined by who pays for it. We were set up to support government. We can’t afford to upset them.”

“But…”

Pamela put out her hand in a ‘stop’ gesture, “Hold on! I’m not talking about confirming everything they say and do. Not at all. Often our work has contradicted policy and helped amend it for the better. No, I’m talking about the complete lack of respect you seem to have for busy, important people who have better things to do than pander to your paranoid questioning.”

Julia looked at her, astounded.

“Yes Julia, it seems that your work has turned into more of an investigation than a research project and I want that to stop.”

“But Pamela...” Julia didn’t quite know how to continue.

“Yes Julia? I suppose it is better that you argue with me than with the department or the City.”

“There are enormous vested interests in South Africa’s foreign policy and preparations for the Summit. Particularly on nuclear energy.”

“Well of course there are vested interests. Why wouldn’t there be? We have invested billions of public money in the Pebble Bed. It is a state of the art technology. It is a clean technology. It makes sense to try to recapture some of that investment.”

“But the carbon market is worth what? About thirty billion Rand a year?”

“Precisely. So if we position ourselves well, and if nukes can be listed as a clean fuel then some of that money is ours.”

“But Pamela...”

“A lot of ‘buts’ Julia.”

“Okay, this is the last one. What about the risks of nuclear energy and the disposal of waste? No one is taking that into account.”

“Well then you probably shouldn’t worry yourself about that either.”

## 51

Slimkop De Vriess let himself into the door at the back of the building. There were only two keys for it and he held one of them. It was not a key that could be copied. The room was small with freshly painted white walls and a single desk. Numerous filing cabinets hugged the left side. There was no extra chair; a visitor would have to stand. He stepped behind the desk and slid the small rug aside. His second key turned the lock in the trap door and he opened it noiselessly.

The stairs led him down to another small room. In the old days it had been used for storage. Now it served as a control room. He surveyed it. The computers were all in place and the electricity connected. An overhead fluorescent light gave off a gentle hum. Air circulated through vents in the very tops of the walls. It looked ready.

His final key opened a low door on the other side of the room. Stepping through he saw they could start with a moment’s notice. He marvelled at the huge chamber that’d been dug out of the earth, the entire operation done in secret. The rocks and stones and

soil had been moved by a team of men bound by a code of allegiance to the Volk. Not even Kumalo knew it existed. Now the space was filled with machines, also brought in at night, thanks to his ex-colleague and local commander. De Vriess had paid the men well. No one would talk.

He locked both doors and returned to the above ground office. The computer on the desk was connected to the internet. He checked his emails to make genuine his excuse to be there. He'd had a good week. Malan was receptive to his idea of announcing the Pebble Bed listing earlier. It was good to keep Zuzi Dlamini on her toes. She was astute and it wouldn't do for her to think too much about what was going on. Sooner or later she would figure it out, but by then she would be in too deep. So far she was still dancing to the right tune.

Most of his email was routine. A number of legitimate deals were happening in Europe. He sent the necessary advice to move them along. There was a message from Corbusier. He would be arriving the day before the Summit. That was good. De Vriess wrote and told him about a new restaurant in Pretoria that he would take him to. Before switching off he thought he'd check on Julia's correspondence. The Wits internal server came up on his screen. He'd figured a way of accessing it long distance. He checked the most recent ten, the ones she hadn't yet read. The first three were part of an anti-nukes listserv. He scanned them quickly. Nothing new. The next was from Jon Roberts. He opened it.

To: Julia Ratford  
From: Jon Roberts  
Subject: tonight  
Hey Jules – I'll pick you up at 7. Looking forward to it. Jon

De Vriess drummed his fingers on the table. The implied cosiness was new. He didn't think they'd seen each other since she'd thrown him out of her room in Nairobi. Something had happened to change her mind. It wasn't good news. He'd have to do something about it.

That evening Julia took a hot shower, blow-dried her hair and pinned it up leaving a few wisps to fall gently round her face. She scrubbed, toned and moisturised her skin before applying powder, eyeliner, mascara and a hint of glittery brown eye shadow. She chose a soft pink lipstick and placed two small matching roses in her hair. She took out her

timeless black dress – cut to accentuate her neat figure, placed a string of pearls around her neck – a gift from her mother, and stepped into a pair of funky heels. The doorbell rang as she was dabbing *Poison* from a tiny bottle onto her wrists and into her cleavage. She placed the perfume in a small silver handbag along with lipstick, some money and her phone.

“Coming.” She called into the intercom.

Jon was waiting in the driveway. He gazed at her as she walked through the gate,

“You look stunning babe,” and kissed her chastely on the mouth.

“Not bad yourself,” she returned, looking at his blue linen pants and Nehru-necked cream shirt with a gold thread. He had cut his thick black hair short, just longer than military style. It accentuated his chiselled bone structure. Dark lashes framed his piercing blue eyes.

“How are you babe?” He asked putting his hand on her thigh as they drove towards 4<sup>th</sup> Avenue.

“I’m okay thanks Jon.” She moved his hand. He turned to look at her as they waited at a red robot.

“You look like you’re having a tough time.” He caressed her cheek. She felt tears spring to her eyes. Willed them back.

“I’m fine Jon. But you’re right, I have had a tough week.”

“You can tell me about it over dinner. Once you’ve got some food inside you,” he slid into first then rapidly changed up gears reaching almost ninety before he had to stop again at the next light.

Jon and Julia looked perfectly in place as they walked into the candle-lit restaurant. Other couples were scattered in the intimate setting, pausing over a wine list whose cheapest bottle could have fed a family for a week. They were seated at a corner table where Galief, with model good looks, brought them service and advice without being pushy. Everything about the restaurant was quiet and tasteful. And little by little Julia started to find it obscene. Even the perfectly trained Galief raised his eyebrows when she insisted on drinking tap water. Jon chose the wine. It was superb. As was the food. But it stuck in her throat.

“Have you been here often?” She asked.

“No. It’s just opened. A colleague told me about it. Said it was a cool atmosphere. You?”

“Never.”

“What’s the matter Jules?” She was picking at her food. “Don’t you like it?”

“It’s delicious.” She gave him a tight smile. “Thanks.”

“Come on Jules, what is it?” He seemed genuinely interested.

“Well...” she waved her fork around, taking in the room. “It’s this. It reminds me of my father’s relatives. An elite club – except of course they’d all have been white – I don’t really fit in. I don’t really *want* to fit in. And I didn’t think you did either. It’s not really *us*.”

“I didn’t think there was an ‘us’”, Jon said.

“Well there isn’t. But you know what I mean.”

“No Jules, I don’t think I do. This feels to me like a really nice restaurant. It’s got a relaxed vibe and everyone is kind and well mannered. Look around Jules. You would never have seen this ten years ago. Every one of these people has worked hard to get where they are, to overcome the legacy of apartheid. It hasn’t been easy. They deserve to be able to eat good food and drink good wine without coming under criticism.”

“I’m not criticising them Jon. I’m talking about us. About you and me.” She leant back, exhausted, “oh God, maybe I’m just talking about me...”

“What’s going on Jules? Really. I’ve been worried about you babe. Has anything happened since you were sent that photo? I assume not or you would have told me when we had tea...” He took one of her hands in hers and stroked it with his thumb. She didn’t say anything for some time. Galief came to refill her water glass. Then she told him. About Zenzile and the break-in with her clothes ripped apart and her conviction that Sizwe’s murder had something to do with nuclear power, but what she could not say or why, if it did, the were police there the night he was shot.

Jon honed in on one thing. Her vandalised house.

“Jesus Jules. Did you report it?”

“What’s the point? Nothing was taken. Someone was trying to warn me, that’s all.”

“That’s all! Jesus Jules, that’s hectic. That’s intimidation. You should tell the police and let them find the bastards. Why didn’t you tell me when you called? I’d have come round immediately. God Jules, you really must report it to the police. Go to Rosebank.” Jon was really angry and visibly upset.

“Leave it Jon. It’s okay,” she shook her head.

“It’s not okay Jules. It’s definitely not okay. You *must* do something about it.”

“What if it was the police?” she asked.

“What? You think it might have been the police. *Why?*”

“Jon, you’re getting really worked up about this. I just don’t want to go to the police. Okay?”

“Okay babe. I’m sorry. I’m really sorry. It’s just I see red when I think about anyone doing anything to you. Listen, why don’t you come and stay with me for a while?”

She laughed in dismissal.

“I’m serious Jules.”

“I know Jon. Thanks.” She squeezed his hand and gave him a tight smile. “Will you take me dancing instead?”

“I’ll take you dancing.”

They paid and headed to Rosebank where a Congolese club played a mixture of Central and West African music. Fabulous rhythms. Julia lost herself on the dance floor with others who looked like they’d stepped straight out of the larny restaurant. The chic new South African elite plus their continental counterparts were sipping cocktails and moving to the jive. Jon sat at the bar and watched her.

## 53

“And in our top story: A cache of stolen cars has been found in Soweto. Police involvement suspected.”

Julia switched off the radio and got out of her car. The inevitable gang of children thronged her as she walked to the front door. They touched her bag and clothes, grabbed her hands. Mandisa wasn’t one of them. Julia admired their braids and smiles before they turned and ran back to their games. She knocked on the door.

“It’s open!”

Nolitha was sitting in her favourite chair. She didn’t get up. The tea tray was set out in front of her. Julia kissed her cheek and sat down.

“Are you okay?” Julia asked with concern.

“No, no. It’s nothing. My legs are paining me a little. That’s all.”

“Can I get you anything? Disprin? Or hot water to put your feet in?”

Nolitha laughed. “You and Sizwe!” Nolitha adjusted the blanket on her lap. “No, I’m fine. Took my medication a short while ago.”

The sound of children playing floated through the windows. Shrieks of laughter interspersed with running feet. Nolitha poured them each a cup of tea.

“Zuzi Dlamini came to visit me.” She said, handing Julia a cup. “I knew her as a teen-age girl of course. Looking so hard for meaning. Such a beautiful girl,” Nolitha gave a small sigh. “So passionate to find out what was really going on. Not wanting to bury her head in a comfortable world. Of course she and Sizwe fell in love. But they were so young. She took it hard when he left.” Nolitha was silent for a moment. Julia waited. “Now there she is. The Minister’s wife. Still wanting to know what is really going on but now to protect her comfortable world, not to upset it.” Nolitha gave a small shake of her head. It seemed to contain a world of sadness. “She came to ask me questions.”

“About what?”

“Well about you amongst other things.” A dry chuckle escaped Nolitha’s throat. “Of course she didn’t ask directly but she came to get information.”

Julia’s eyes opened in question.

“No Julia. I told her nothing about you or about Sizwe’s time in exile. But the way she spoke made me wonder about what you are doing. Do you know what you are stirring up? These histories run deep. Perhaps you know that. Perhaps you are brave enough to prod the sleeping lion.”

There was a knock at the front door. It opened and a voice called out. Footsteps made their way down the passage. Then a tentative knock at the sitting room door before it was pushed gently open. Julia recognised the young woman. She’d met her at one of the rallies. An assertive activist with attitude.

“Phumeza my dear,” said Nolitha gesturing towards a chair, “come in. Sit down.”

The young woman hesitated then walked across the room and sat in front of the window. She smiled briefly at Julia. The cockiness was not there. Julia watched as Nolitha asked after her health and offered her some tea. The woman was polite but clearly nervous. Nolitha turned to Julia.

“Phumeza said you called the office.”

The young woman interjected, “I didn’t know who you were. I mean I did know I’d met you I just didn’t know why you were asking or who really wanted to know about Sizwe.”

“That’s okay.” Julia responded to the unspoken apology.

Phumeza chewed her thumb nail. Her eyes darted round the room. Nolitha broke the silence.

“Phumeza my dear. I think you should tell Julia what you told me. Sizwe trusted her.”

If possible the young woman looked even more uncomfortable. She squirmed in her seat. Picked up her tea cup and put it down again. Then started speaking very fast.

“You see it’s like this. I think... well not only me but others also – some of us – think that Sizwe was killed to stop us organising for the Summit. I mean to stop SFA organising. We want to have a massive protest. We... that’s why we didn’t trust you because you came just at that time and... well you see it must be someone who knew what was going on. It’s just that Sizwe...” she looked at Nolitha who appeared perfectly calm, “... it’s just that Sizwe’s death has left a mess. And someone knew it would make things difficult. There are people who want to lead but they don’t know how to. Now our plans for the summit are not so advanced. So you see...”

Julia decided to break the floundering monologue. “I had a call from someone called Zenzile. Is this who you mean?” Julia remembered his bruised face in the Braamfontein Checkers. It seemed no one trusted anyone else. The phone rang. Nolitha rose slowly and left the room to answer it.

“Zenzile,” Phumeza said leaning towards Julia, “how the hell did he get your number?”

“I don’t know. I thought it was from the office. From you...?”

Phumeza was now angry. “Not from me. No way. I would never give it to him. What did he want?”

“They’ve found his car.” Nolitha made her way back to her chair. “That was the police. They say they’ve found the car Sizwe was killed for.” She put her head in her hands and wept.

## 54

Julia’s day began with a staff meeting. Once in her office, she dealt rapidly with eleven new e-mails before concentrating on Solomon’s.

To: Julia Ratford  
From: Solomon Awori  
Subject: tech com says nukes clean  
Dear Julia.

Bad news. The technical committee preparing the draft text on energy for the Summit has listed nukes as clean. This is a serious setback as we thought they would leave it open ‘til Joburg. Can we skype later today? Would be good to bring you up to speed and get some help from you. I’m sure you realise the SA govt is key driver behind the position.

Hope you are well.

Solomon

She looked at her watch... almost noon in Kenya. Skype showed his name in green. Ready and waiting for contact. She put on her head set and swung the mike in front of her mouth. She could hear nothing else with them on.

“Goo moh ing Jew ah.” Solomon said when he connected. Modern technology never quite lived up to its reputation.

“Solomon, hi. What’s happening? Sounds a bit drastic.”

“Yes it’s not good. *Really* not good. And we don’t quite understand because there was no mention of nukes – either for or against – in the ehr ya draf. We want... insert a clause rejecting nukes now ... lucky to get them omitted altogether, or a more neutral statement. So lih en is wah ... nt yooo... do.”

“Solomon. Sorry. I can’t hear you.”

“ee nee ... oo ind ...rom ...”

“Solomon... can you text? You’re breaking up.”

Solomon: Rather not text. Sensitive info. Maybe landline?

Julia: Not gr8 at office. Been given warning re work brief. Call u at home l8r?

Solomon: Fine. Maybe get some background on SA posn & strategy? Thnx.

Julia: K. Ciao. J

Julia set up a new hotmail account, took three deep breaths and picked up the phone. The morning staff-meeting had been illuminating. Her boss Pamela was on an advisory board for the Pebble Bed project. They had met that week. A man called André Malan was the convener. The Eskom switchboard put her through to his secretary.

“Mr Malan’s office. How can I help you?”

“Good morning. This is Dr Swart from the CCRU,” Julia tried to sound brisk, “Mr Malan said I should ask you to forward me the minutes from the meeting we had last week Friday.”

“Is that the internal review meeting on the Pebble Beds?”

“Yes, that’s right. I know you’ve probably sent it to my Wits address, but the server’s been down so could you forward it to my hotmail account? That’s [ccru@hotmail.com](mailto:ccru@hotmail.com) Thank you very much.”

Julia put down the phone and waited. Her hands were shaking.

Half an hour later she checked the account. Mr Malan’s secretary had outdone herself. Not only had she provided minutes from the meeting, but she’d also attached background material. Details Julia had been looking for, for months. She couldn’t

believe Pamela had not given it to her, or at least told her that it existed. Her research project now seemed pointless, just a political exercise.

Julia quickly saved the files to a hidden directory on her computer. She thought of disabling the hotmail address. Decided not to. If Mr Malan's secretary tried to send something else it would bounce back and she'd probably forward it to Pamela's real address. Her boss would immediately suspect something. Julia didn't think there was any way of discovering who had set up the hotmail account, but she couldn't be sure. Best if no one tried to find out.

The documents contained damning information. Government had poured billions of Rand into the Pebble Bed. Their rationale was that others would invest also. But no one had. If the Pebble Beds were going to make any money they would have to be sold – either the physical plants, or the design. Initial calculations were done on selling to China. Rapid industrialisation was triggering a huge demand for electricity. But China was building its own nuclear capacity. The other obvious place was Africa. But Africa had no money. It was too busy shovelling dollars back to Europe and America for never ending debt. And of course on arms. Africa, like its Northern mentors, spent billions on arms. Which left no money for infrastructure or services.

She closed the files and sat back in her chair. She could hear the sound of traffic outside her window. The occasional pedestrian voice filtered into her window, the words indistinct. Her cell phone rang. Jon. She hadn't seen him since their fancy night out. It had left her feeling ambiguous about him again. And unaccountably sad. She let the call go to voice mail and continued her train of thought.

Until now, government had invested billions in a technology that no one would buy. Of course they didn't want anyone to know this. They responded to questions with hints of protecting technological innovation and industrial competitiveness. They pretended the world was trying to steal their trade secret, instead of exposing a bad investment. And they had two new tactics – one, up-the-market for nukes through international climate change policy and two – sell the company. The buyer would benefit from the billions of public money that had been invested. They would be buying the asset, but not the risk.

The argument that nuclear power would solve problems of global warming was nonsense. Nuclear research had been going long before policy makers took climate change seriously. No amount of rational thought helped. She needed a swim.

People were training at the Wits pool, so she went to Zoo Lake. She changed, put her clothes in a locker and stood in front of a lane. A couple of people were already in the water. She pulled on her green cap and started stretching. At the side, a man was sitting watching the swimmers. He had long legs and was wearing a broad-rimmed hat. He caught her eye as she twisted her body to the left, and raised his hat in greeting. Everything inside her went black. In one instant she recognised the man. He stood up and walked towards her with slow elegant strides. She had seen him in Nairobi. And in Denmark. He was the Minister's advisor. He was the man who'd helped her onto the train in Copenhagen. And now he was here. At Zoo Lake. His name eluded her. She continued stretching, ignoring the tight knot in her stomach. When he was alongside her, he nodded.

"Miss Ratford," he said, before walking on. His voice was deep with a slight accent. The sound of a European speaking English.

Or an Afrikaner.

Not German. South African.

It took all of Julia's will power to finish stretching and dive into the pool. She swam as fast as she could, drawing barely enough breath to do intense tumble turns. She kicked away from the wall with all her strength, propelling herself through the water. She could feel the sweat rising on her body. It felt good. Twenty lengths didn't feel enough. She did another ten. When she got out she was physically exhausted but her mind was clear.

At seven she phoned Solomon. Her mind kept drifting to the man at the pool. What had Mandla said about him? It hadn't been much.

"Julia. Thank you for calling. I will be brief. We have asked our contacts in Europe if they can find out if any of their governments are putting pressure on any African countries to adopt a pro-nukes agenda."

Julia doodled on a notepad. She found herself writing the man's name. Slimkop De Vriess. Brainbox, with an extra 's' on the common Afrikaans surname.

"We are particularly worried about France and Germany but unfortunately most of our strong contacts are in Scandinavia. Anyway, they will see what they can do. And we have asked our Pan-African network to make sure that where governments are sympathetic to our no-nukes position, they stand firm. This will probably be the hardest if there is serious pressure from Europe."

“And what do you want me to do?” She scratched out his name and gave her full attention to Solomon. Before the conversation ended she told him about the Pebble Bed files.

## 55

Julia didn't have time to google De Vriess before leaving for Soweto. Nolitha phoned early to tell her where Sizwe's car was being held. It was not far from SFA. She called the office but Zenzile wasn't there. She left a message. At the corner garage, Julia turned onto a short gravel road. Huge gates opened onto a giant scrap yard. At the far end were piles and piles of crunched cars. She parked near the entrance. On her left was a container that had been converted into an office. A man emerged, clipboard in hand, wearing blue construction pants and a cheap cotton shirt. Sweat made the shirt cling to his large stomach. His arms looked like they could lift a chassis.

“You are?”

“Julia Ratford. I phoned. I wanted to see the green BMW belonging to Mr Magona.”

“Oh yes. Come with me.” He put out his hand. “Petrus.”

They fell into step and chatted about the weather and scrap metal. He'd been running the business for ten years and loved it. Most of the cars in the heap had been written off by insurance companies. They'd been pulverised in collisions. An image of blood and flesh stuck to pieces of upholstery and windows flashed into Julia's mind. Petrus continued chatting. She tried to rid herself of the image; not to think that Sizwe too could have left pieces of his body in the car. They stopped at the far end of the compound in front of a shiny row of blue BMW's.

“It's not green any more.” He said grinning.

Julia looked up and down the row. There was no way she would recognise the car.

“Which is it?”

He consulted his clipboard.

“Over there,” he pointed, “second from the end.”

“Did you notice any bullet...” she didn't finish her sentence. Their attention was grabbed by a white Toyota pulling into the compound, tires screeching. A thick-set man jumped out and started shouting. As he stomped towards them, Julia could see he was in dark blue uniform and boots. A policeman.

“What the vok do you think you are doing?” He was angry.

“Detective Ntini,” said Petrus, unfazed, “good morning.”

A man emerged from the container office to watch the activities. He lent languidly against the outside wall. Seargeant Ntini turned to Julia,

“Who the vok are you?”

Before Julia could answer, Petrus chimed in, “what’s it to you?”

“I am conducting an investigation. If I find you have been tampering with police evidence...”

“Oh come on Ntini. The Provincial Commissioner ordered the cars here because he didn’t trust you guys. What are you so worried about?”

Detective Ntini ignored him and turned to Julia.

“You,” he jabbed his finger at her, “You’re that girl, the one who’s been asking questions, the one who phoned me.”

“And you’re the one who said he would phone me back.” Julia countered, sounding more challenging than she felt or intended.

“Jy! Jy! Don’t talk to me like that. What’s a vokken white girl doing getting mixed up in Soweto? Huh? None of your vokken business. And you!” he turned to Petrus, “You have no right to show her anything.”

Petrus shrugged.

A shrill ring broke the silence. Julia fumbled in her bag and pulled out her phone hoping it would be Zenzile. It was Jon. She let it go to voice mail. Ntini marched away swearing. He kicked her bumper hard. Then he climbed into his car, slammed the door and screeched off. She and Petrus resumed the examination of Sizwe’s car. There was no visible evidence of a hijacking. Julia left Petrus with her contact details. He promised to phone if he heard anything. Zenzile still hadn’t called. She contemplated dropping in at SFA anyway but decided not to. She was already late for work.

Julia took the back stairs to her office, hoping to avoid Pamela. As she walked past the toilets, Pamela emerged. They greeted each other. Pamela said nothing about her late arrival. Julia closed her office door, switched on the internet, typed ‘Slimkop de Vriess’ and hit ‘search’.

That night she double checked the locks and put a chair under her bedroom door handle when she went to sleep.

Despite her anxiety, Julia fell into a deep sleep. A sound jerked her awake. In her dream she'd been floating down a river, the afternoon sun caressing her skin. Her body looked golden-red in the tannin rich water. Suddenly an explosion ripped the water and she was tossed onto the shore panting. Hundreds of fish were lying belly up on the once smooth surface. When she opened her eyes, her skin was wet with sweat, her pulse beating fast. She lay still, willing herself to be calm and listen. She could hear nothing but the *tap tap tap* of the wisteria against the pillar and the occasional rustle of a gentle breeze through the leaves. She switched on her bedside light, slowly put her feet on the floor and tiptoed to the door. The chair was still in place. She moved it silently, opened the door and went into the sitting room. Nothing moved. She put her ear to the glass pane and listened. Nothing. It must have been her dream. Or a car backfiring.

Julia went back to bed but couldn't sleep. It was quarter to four. Eventually she got up, put on classical music and cleaned her house. She vacuumed and scrubbed 'til it shone. At 5:30 she sat on her couch with her feet up and dozed for half an hour. After a shower and quick breakfast she got in her car and headed for the office. Pamela would be pleased; she'd be in before 7:30.

Traffic was in full swing on Jan Smuts and Julia had to wait a while before turning right for Wits. Luckily most of the cars were headed out of town towards Sandton. It was a strange logic of the wealthy classes – leaving the dangers of the inner city for the illusions of safety. But poor and rich alike gravitated towards money. It wouldn't be long before the streets of Sandton were full of the very people the powerful had fled to avoid. In the meantime the northern suburbs were growing too fast for themselves. They didn't have the infrastructure to support them. Julia smiled to think of all the corporate suits leaving their offices as sewerage backed up from overload. The smell.

Her car shuddered as she turned onto Jan Smuts and pulled heavily to the left. She straightened it and drove on, wedged between a delivery van and a silver Merc. The Merc was driving behind her. Very close. As she topped the hill, the pulling got worse. She put on her hazards and slowed down. The car was shaking severely. It took all her strength to hold the wheel straight. The Merc screeched around her. The driver threw a zap sign before disappearing in the next lane. At the slipway onto Empire Road, Julia managed to pull out of the heavy traffic. Her car shook violently. Then the floor fell from her feet. Her head hit the roof. Her body jerked forward and was thrust back by the seat belt. She heard an enormous crash in the far distance. The car skidded forward.

When she was sure the car was still she took her hands off the steering wheel and touched her head. It felt tender but there was no blood. She stretched her fingers. They worked. She looked at her shaking hands. They did not seem attached to her body. Someone was shouting. She turned her head slowly. It hurt. She undid her seat belt and noticed the handbrake was down. She pulled it up. A man outside her window was gesturing with his hands. She tried to open her door to hear what he was saying. But the door was jammed. She tried the window instead. It opened an inch.

“You okay?” the man asked. She nodded. “You’re going to have to get out the other side,” he said. She leant across and pushed open the door. Then climbed out. Her front right wheel was lying on the pavement. The man had retrieved it from the middle of the road. The right side of her car was on the tarmac. Her hazards blinked furiously, but cars were hooting anyway.

“Let’s change your wheel,” the man said. Julia stretched back across the front seats and flicked the switch that opened the boot. She sat on the pavement and rubbed her neck and head while the man jacked up the car and put on the spare.

“I’ve double checked the nuts,” he said, “this one shouldn’t come off.” He put the errant wheel in the boot, and went on his way. It was almost eight when Julia pulled into a garage. The mechanics weren’t there yet. She waited. To hell with Pamela. This was an emergency.

Her office phone was ringing when she eventually walked in. Mandla Dumisi wanted to know if she thought the anti-nukes lobby would accept a compromise position. Julia struggled to concentrate on what he was saying.

“We’re trying to bring all views into the negotiations and as Chair I’m trying to find a way forward without compromising South Africa’s interest in nuclear energy.”

“That’s a tough one Mandla. I’ll...”

Pamela stormed into Julia’s office without knocking.

“Mandla, sorry, I have to go. I’ll think about it and give you a call.”

Julia put the phone down. Pamela looked murderous.

“He called me Pamela. Honestly.”

“I don’t know why you can’t listen to me. Just who do you think you are?” her voice was not loud but it was hard as steel.

“Pamela, I’m serious. Mandla phoned *me*. I couldn’t refuse to talk to him. I...”

“I’m not talking about Mandla Dumisi.”

“Oh...” she remembered, “I was late.”

“I’m not talking about that either, although why you can’t get to work on time like every other person, I don’t know. I’m talking about you lying and cheating and insinuating yourself into someone else’s confidence.”

Julia looked blank.

“Or do you make a habit of pretending you are someone else?”

She must have found out about the minutes.

“Well Julia? I’m listening.” She stood firmly, her arms folded across her chest. Julia stayed silent. Pamela couldn’t be sure it was she who had phoned André Malan’s secretary. She could suspect but she couldn’t prove it. They stared at each other until Pamela eventually spoke.

“Well as you seem incapable of speech. I’ll tell you what happened. Despite my specific directions to the contrary you phoned André Malan’s secretary, pretended to be me and got her to send you confidential minutes. You set up an anonymous e-mail address from your computer and downloaded them.”

Julia said nothing.

“Yes Julia. I’ve gone to some trouble to engage the Wits computer team and they assure me that address was set up from this computer. So unless someone has unauthorised access to your office, I can only assume it was you.”

Julia broke the uncomfortable silence, “I don’t know what you expect me to say.” Her tone was neutral, her hands relaxed and open at her sides.

“Jesus Julia. I really don’t think I have ever worked with someone as difficult as you. I won’t try to find out *why* you wanted that information. But if it turns up anywhere in any form, you will be totally and utterly discredited. As far as you are concerned that information does not exist. Where is it? The computer boys say it is no longer in the hotmail account.”

“I deleted it.”

“Well make damn sure you did. I’m sending them in to scour your computer and delete any illicit material.”

“But you can’t...”

“Damn right I can. And you are under suspension as of now. You have hardly proved yourself an honest researcher. You can clear out your personal things but you may not step foot in this office until I have investigated. Then, you will either be reinstated, which I doubt, or fired.”

“The President in his State of the Nation Address indicated that Government will be accelerating preparatory work to ensure greater reliance on nuclear energy and other renewable energies. With regard to nuclear energy, the Department recently tabled a draft nuclear energy policy and strategy in Cabinet. The policy will guide the expanded nuclear build programme and address the issue of investment in uranium beneficiation. The policy will ensure that uranium output from our mines shall always be used to first satisfy our own beneficiation needs. Safety and our commitment to peaceful uses will always guide our beneficiation programme.

The expanded nuclear programme is expected to result in the development of a nuclear energy industrial complex, which will lead to the creation of jobs in the nuclear sector. This envisaged energy complex will be anchored on uranium beneficiation and power plant manufacturing infrastructure.”

The Minister enunciated each word of his budget speech slowly and deliberately. Zuzi looked around to see how the members of parliament were taking it. She sat in the visitors section with a clear view of her husband. The parliamentarians were beneath her. Most were nodding their heads, sympathetic to Kumalo. A couple were dozing. Only one – an opposition member of a fringe party – looked concerned. The Minister finished his speech and opened the floor for questions.

“Minister, with due respect, there are still concerns about the expansion of South Africa’s nuclear capacity. Indeed throughout the world, citizens are saying that they don’t want it. For example the Spanish government recently declared itself a nukes free state. I am worried that if South Africa goes down this path we will regret it. Not just for environmental reasons, but because we will damage our trade relations with Europe and other countries.”

“I am not looking for a speech, I am looking for questions.” Zuzi could see her husband was agitated. He hadn’t been himself for some time. But they’d discussed this all the night before, agreed on how to handle it.

“My question Minister, is how will this be financed?”

The opposition member turned off his mike. Kumalo put his hands on the lectern to steady them. Zuzi noticed that the shaking had got worse. He really needed a break. But his voice remained steady and authoritative.

“We will not, under any circumstances allow ultra-leftists and elite environmentalists to destroy what we are building. This initiative will boost the potential of young people and women by supporting their participation in targeted nuclear associations and programmes. Our development is *not* dependent on the north. We will follow a path that is relevant to our own needs and expertise.”

After a pause, the opposition member switched on his mike,  
“and the financing?”

Kumalo rubbed his hand over his bald head. Many of the parliamentarians were still not engaged. In a way Zuzi had grudging respect for the questioner. He took the process of governance seriously. She had little respect for the cattle-truck politicians who just nodded their heads, assuming someone else knew best. They were lazy and stupid, self satisfied that the transition had brought them a secure job and a bigger belly. At least the fringe guy could still think. But his thinking was wrong. She waited for her husband to correct him.

“The Y-plant will be opened as a strategic research project. It will be financed initially through Treasury and a small amount from an international donor. For the first few years it will be in an experimental phase. After that, it will be self-financing.”

Zuzi watched him lean forward as he emphasised his next point.

“South Africa is poised on the edge of technological history while at the same time expanding service delivery at an unprecedented rate.”

She could see how he struggled with the pain in his body. Others would pick up on it. Soon a younger man would emerge. One not afraid of the power Kumalo had once commanded. He would build up his allies and, when it was time, challenge Kumalo for his position. A young lion, going for the ultimate kill. She surveyed the room, wondering who it might be. A TV camera zoomed in on her. She smiled. Perhaps he wasn’t there. Perhaps he would come from the side.

When Zuzi first met Graves she had wondered if he might become president. He had all of the personality traits. His role in the struggle was well known. It was his power and charisma that had attracted her. She was not sorry that he wouldn't hold the ultimate post. Part of her was relieved. This man, her husband, deserved a peaceful end. He should have the chance to enjoy a comfortable and secure life without responsibilities. If the deals worked out this is what she would be able to provide. A state pension was worth nothing.

Perhaps, if they timed it right, the country would be ready for a woman president. Someone well respected in the business sector. Kumalo's political credibility would be invaluable.

## 58

Julia poured herself a cup of coffee and opened the newspaper. Since her suspension she'd turned her mornings into a ritual. She woke at seven, pulled on her tracksuit pants and walked briskly to the far end of Emmarentia Drive. There she greeted the vendors and bought a paper. At home she dived into the landlords' pool – more bracing than a cold shower – before changing and fixing herself breakfast. Making fresh coffee was a new treat for her. The aroma filled the room and she found herself relaxing.

Buried in the business pages of *The Star* was a short article from a parliamentary reporter. Minister Kumalo had announced the reopening of the Y-Plant.

### **Electricity generation no longer a problem**

Routine shutdowns of Koeberg's reactors for maintenance would no longer lead to electricity shortages according to Minister Kumalo. He was addressing the Parliamentary Portfolio Committee on Energy and Water. Fast tracking of a new nuclear power station and building a number of pebble-bed modular reactors would ensure that electricity generation would meet the demands of industry and growing urban consumption. The Y-Plant, a facility to enrich uranium would be reopened to provide fuel for the increase in nuclear power generation. Environmental activists would not prevent this happening as government had made a clear policy choice to diversify into nuclear energy, he said.

Julia read it several times. She'd convinced herself that Sizwe had been killed to stop him talking about the Y-Plant. It's why she'd been sent the photo. But she had no evidence and Sizwe had. Hence the warnings to her and his assassination. Somehow he'd found out Kumalo planned to reopen it secretly and illegally. And could prove it. And now Kumalo announced it in public. It made no sense. She called the Department.

“Mandla Dumisi. How can I help you?”

“Mandla? Oh good! I hoped you wouldn’t be an answering machine. It’s Julia Ratford. I’ve just read a strange thing in the paper and I wanted to check if it was true.”

“Yes it’s true.”

“Do you know what I’m talking about?”

“Of course. The Y-Plant. Minister Kumalo announced that it will re-open. His full budget speech is on our web-site if you want to check it.”

Julia’s landline was ringing as she closed the call on her cell.

“Julia? It’s Nolitha Magona. I wanted to let you know that there is a new investigating officer. She came around and asked me all the questions all over again. She didn’t know what had happened to the old one or the information he’d collected.”

Julia stepped to the edge of the kerb as the white Opel approached. He’d given her the registration number. It wasn’t the car he usually drove. The passenger door opened and she got in. They drove north along Oxford road, away from the City centre. It was a full ten minutes before Jon spoke.

“Thanks for agreeing to meet me.”

Julia shrugged her shoulders. She had nothing better to do. Since this morning it made no difference to her what happened. After talking to Mandla she’d logged onto the internet and downloaded Kumalo’s full speech. It elaborated what had been in the paper. Very little was new. They were re-opening the Y-Plant. It was public. Sizwe’s death was unrelated. A random hijacking. And now there was a new investigating officer trying to track a cold trail. They’d never find anything. *And* her job was on the line. She spoke this thought out loud.

“I was suspended.”

“I heard,” Jon said.

“You heard?” Julia swivelled round to face him, “how did you hear?”

This time Jon shrugged his shoulders.

“Seriously Jon. How did you hear?”

Jon shifted down a gear as he turned onto a road that led out of the City. Julia stared out of the window at the passing world. Ugly semi-industrial buildings. Trees struggling to grow, people selling carved figures on dusty gravel patches. She turned back to Jon,

“Where are we going?”

“For a drive.”

“Why Jon? Why are we going for a drive?”

“I was worried about you babe.” Jon took his eyes off the road for a moment and looked at her. Julia rolled her eyes and looked away. Back out the window. She wasn't interested in his concern. She would not let him draw her back in to his space. The attraction was there, but she'd been a *teenager*, a teenager for God's sake. Her attraction was not to this Jon. It was to a memory. This man sitting next to her was an enigma.

They passed a settlement of corrugated iron houses, built close together by people desperate to get something from the City of Gold. Perched on its edge. Waiting to be let in. Julia felt Jon's hand resting on her knee, gently stroking it with his thumb. She remembered this about him. Oh Christ! His ability to suddenly shut up. Everyone knew him as the guy who never stopped talking, who always had something to say. But he could be quiet too. Very quiet. These had always been moments of intimacy. She shifted her leg away. He put his hand back on the steering wheel.

The car slowed down. A gateway advertised fresh scones and cream. They drove in. Seated opposite each other on a bench in the autumn sun, it was harder for Julia to look away.

“Tell me about it,” he said.

“Jon, I don't know where to start. Really.” She hoped her voice sounded steady. Contained.

“Why were you suspended?”

“I impersonated my boss.”

Jon laughed, “You?” pointing at her, “Pamela? No ways!”

Julia smiled, “not in person you idiot. I... well I wanted some minutes from a meeting and I phoned up saying I was her.”

“And?”

“Jon, why do you want to know?”

“Sorry Jules. I was just concerned. That's all. You don't have to talk about it. It's not why I invited you out.”

“...which was?”

“Here's our tea.” A plate piled high with scones was placed between them. They ate their way through half of them. Julia's mood lightened. Jon kept her entertained with stories from the City. He was very funny. He didn't mention anything related to work again. Not until he dropped her back home. Then he asked her to do him a favour. To

send an email. She refused to agree until he told her why. When he told her, she wished he hadn't.

## 59

De Vriess spent the day finalising preparations for Corbusier's visit then, out of habit, checked Julia's email. Things would be easier now that Kumalo had made the public announcement. Meetings could happen. Corbusier wanted to see the Y-Plant. It was a pain, but fair enough. After all he was putting in a lot of money. But the email bothered him. She had been suspended, she shouldn't be sending mail from her work address at all. Perhaps her home internet was down, but why not go to a cyber-café and set up a hotmail account? The email could be a hoax. Someone trying to set him up.

He hadn't seen her for a few days – he'd been up at the Plant ensuring everything was running smoothly. Soon that too would be official. Kumalo would let others know that he Slimkop De Vriess, former Chief Engineer of the Y-Plant under Vorster's government was assisting with design and operation in the new South Africa. It was a dream story of transformation. Expertise from the apartheid era being put to good use in the fledgling democracy. But the timing had to be right. The media had to get the right spin. Otherwise it could be disastrous. The anti-nuclear movement would have a field day with it. He could see the headlines – apartheid nuclear scientist secretly advising Minister. And if they dug carefully enough they'd find a lot more.

He remembered Vorster's speech to parliament in 1970 that South Africa was establishing the capacity to enrich uranium... for peaceful purposes. It was remarkably similar to Kumalo's recent budget speech. De Vriess had not been in charge then. He'd watched with disdain as his bosses had fiddled around, producing nothing. It wasn't until he was running the show that they finally manufactured what they'd intended. He applied what he'd learnt in Europe. The West Germans had been very helpful. Then came 1978. He remembered the year clearly. They produced the first batch of weapons grade enriched uranium. Far more complex than enriching uranium for electricity production. Anyone visiting the plant would have realised that. Hence, this time, his secret room. Then they hadn't even bothered to produce a single gram for electricity generation. Now things were different. The world was watching and a façade was necessary. Besides, there was money to be made.

All this reminiscing. He was getting old. He brought to mind the email. His photographic memory recorded it word perfect.

To: Jon Roberts  
From: Julia Ratford  
Subject: touching base

Hi Jon, sorry not to see you since we went dancing. Things have been a bit hectic for me – was suspended but am at the office anyway because there are a million things I said I’d do for the Summit. Including some for you! (I mean the City). Also a bit freaked out because I saw this guy when I went swimming who is supposed to be the ministers advisor but when I googled him it seems he was high up in old regime and has links to arms dealers. Do you think he could have sent the photo? Couldn’t get you on yr phone, hence the email.

Be nice to see you soon, xxx Jules

It was unfortunate she’d got so cozy with Jon Roberts. He was supposed to be watching her. And perhaps he was. This information might go straight to Kumalo. But he couldn’t count on it. De Vriess rapped his fingers on the table thinking through what to do. The Summit was starting on Tuesday. Everything was in place. The text all but finalised, the finances guaranteed, the media well primed. There was no need to change any of that. But a back up plan might be a good idea. A corruption scandal. After all Kumalo was now dispensable. He dialled an international number,

“Rob? I have a story you might find interesting.”

part three

University of Cape Town

Hundreds of people filled the hall. Some in suits and ties, others in struggle t-shirts and cut-off jeans. Drills were drilling, hammers, hammering. Many on cell-phones barked orders, or received them. Sound engineers and electricians tried to do their job whilst being bombarded with requests to lay the wire a little bit this way, or secure it just an inch higher. Through this chaos, order emerged. Displays took shape. Julia left Solomon to put out his materials and wandered through the complex. It was huge. Three auditoriums were fitted with equipment for simultaneous translation. Numerous small rooms were accessible from the corridors. She tested the door of one. It was locked. The next one opened. Tables were arranged in a small horseshoe, water and mints spread at regular points. Ready. She wandered on in search of a bathroom.

Voices drifted from around the corner, the words too low for her to hear. She slowed, not particularly wanting to bump into anyone. Through an ajar door she glimpsed two men in conversation. She pulled back. The man with his back to her was Slimkop De Vriess, she was certain of it. The other man she didn't recognise. The Minister's advisor was in a cream jacket. He looked relaxed and was talking animatedly but quietly. As she inched backwards, the other man, the stranger, looked up and saw her. He had thick lips and flesh that was too loose for his face. She averted her eyes and walked away. She would find a bathroom later.

The corridor was quiet. She rounded a corner and waited. A faint hum came from the hall. She could hear nothing from the direction she'd come. She moved on. The bustle of the main lobby was a welcome contrast. Solomon bounded over smiling his irrepressible grin. Her heart beat returned to normal. He'd found a Kenyan technician who'd agreed to help him set up a media briefing room the next morning. They wandered over to his stand where his colleagues were milling about. Julia nodded to the long haired man she'd met in Nairobi. Rob. He smiled and waved. Julia complimented Solomon on the impressive stand. He said they were keeping the best for after the media briefing. He hoped their corruption story would make a splash.

In the centre of the hall was an open space with large screen TVs surrounding it. A man with a belt of tools connected a plug and hit a switch. All of the monitors went on. He smiled. A colleague came, hit him on the back and they wandered off. Julia stood watching the news. The background picture was the Soweto scrap yard. Petrus gestured the line of BMWs while the voice-over explained that these stolen cars were the tip of

the ice-berg. Some were taken in hijackings. The stolen cars were sprayed and railed to Harare. Because they were second hand, there was no import tax. Police ran the hijacking arm in Soweto. The image cut to Sergeant Ntini, now a state witness.

“We had to do it. Everyone knew if you wanted promotion you had to play the game.”

She was still staring at the screen when Solomon came to say good-bye.

## 61

Zuzi Dlamini was glad she'd been given a warning. It was unfortunate but not unexpected. She stripped off her gym clothes, tossed them in the laundry basket and headed for the sauna. The media briefing was at ten. She still had time. A rough strategy had been prepared for months. She would use the time to examine it carefully, plan which tack to take.

Emerging from the steam room, she knew what role to play and how to play it. She would need to spend even more time networking with other funders. Zuzi opened her cupboard and selected an African print skirt cut in a modern style. A tight shirt, fitted jacket and heels completed her outfit. She appraised herself in the mirror – an astute businesswoman. Elegant with a trusting face.

It took her almost an hour to get to the Convention Centre. Her husband was waiting in a secure private room as she'd requested.

“Graves my darling,” she said giving him a kiss on the top of his head. “I’m so sorry to call you out like this. I know you’re preparing the opening address. I just felt it’s not something we can discuss on the phone.” Her voice was soft but commanding. “Something’s come up and it’s important we say the same things to the media.”

“What’s their bloody problem now?”

“The French financier – Corbusier – has been investing in companies similar to *uMoya* all round the world.”

“So? Why shouldn’t he?”

“Exactly. But the anti-nukes movement has got hold of it. They are saying that African states are supporting nuclear power because of financial pressure. It seems he was behind some of our start-up funding, although he used a front company to do it. I didn’t know of the connection.”

Graves tapped his foot against the floor, seemingly unaware of the movement and the level of agitation he was displaying. Zuzi stretched out her hand to soothe him.

“And that’s not all they’re saying.” She hesitated before she continued. “They are asking questions about *uMoya* and how it is in a position to bid for the Pebble Bed company. Corruption is the word they are using.”

## 62

In the distance Julia could see the march approaching. She’d wanted to join from its start three kilometres away to show solidarity. She remembered the woman who’d talked about not having water. The Soweto rally seemed years ago. Sizwe had teased her, challenged her to make her work relevant. More real. He had been so alive. She stopped her thoughts going down this well worn track and headed towards the march.

As she circled, the view opened up and she could see for miles. There were thousands and thousands of people. On the edge of the ridges Caspirs stood, blue-yellow and khaki. Both the police and army were present. The sound carried up the slopes, faint at first. When she closed her eyes she imagined a distant swarm of bees with a rhythm – *oes, a’oes a’oes... oes, a’oes, a’oes* – from the voices and – *tah, ta-taah... tah, ta-taah* – the feet made a deeper echo. Gradually she made out slogans being shouted. The background beat never wavered. She stood for a while watching people move past her in packs of blue, then red, then green; banners grouped around a specific issue – water, electricity, peace, women. She was about to merge with a group when a poster caught her eye – Sizwe’s face. She wound her way down the hill.

There were twenty or thirty posters held aloft by people in red SFA t-shirts. He was smiling his broad grin. MURDERED had been written across in big black letters. Other hand written placards said ‘police=murderers’ and ‘reconnect: Sizwe’s legacy’. Julia navigated her way through the people until she was walking next to Phumeza. She recognised a man she’d met with Sizwe marching a couple of steps behind. They waved at each other.

“Julia!” Phumeza was friendly. “You see, they couldn’t stop us.” She waved her hand at the extensive march, at the tens of thousands of people, each with their own statement, each with their own reason for being there. Phumeza was holding a picture of Sizwe.

“What happened?” Julia asked.

“It was after you came,” she said breathlessly between chants, “when I met you at Nolitha’s. We thought about it and you were right. There were too many things happening for it to be a coincidence. Thabiso and I talked about it and there had to be a plan...”

A comrade drew Phumeza aside. Julia focussed on the march. It really was incredible. She stripped off her jersey and rolled up the sleeves of her white cotton shirt. She could do nothing about her hot stockings and slip on shoes, made for corridors not streets. Someone passed her a black t-shirt with white lettering. She put it on. It almost hid her knee-length charcoal skirt. She looked at the image on her front – a large nuclear sign crossed out. She looked behind and the woman who had handed it to her spun around so she could see the back, ‘invest in renewables not toxic waste’. She smiled when she faced Julia again.

“You see, we learnt something Com. You can keep it!”

And she left. Dancing. Protesting. Phumeza was back at Julia’s side and continued the conversation that had been broken.

“It was obvious Zenzile was up to something so we confronted him. And he confessed.”

“Yes,” Julia said, “he told me. He witnessed the hijacking. Said he thought it was the police.”

“Witnessed?” Phumeza turned, her voice scathing, “Witnessed nothing. He was there yes. He was there because he pulled the trigger.”

“What!” Julia grabbed Phumeza’s arm and forced her to stop dead still, “what do you mean?”

“The police involved in hijacking paid him for the car. This Sergeant Ntini who’s on the news now. But Zenzile killed him.”

“Where is he? Where is he now?”

“They found his body behind the shebeen. Stabbed. He must have got into a fight.”

“But...”

“Leave it Julia. Leave it.” And Phumeza marched on, poster held high. The crowd parted as it reached Julia and joined again, like a lazy river around a rock.

Julia slowly made her way back to the Summit. People were milling about in suits. She stripped off her anti-nukes T-shirt and rolled down her sleeves. Huge TV screens dominated the central lobby. As she approached the image shifted to a photograph of a

man's face. She recognised him instantly. It was the man who had stared at her the day before. The man with thick lips who had been speaking in an out-of-the-way room with Slimkop de Vriess. She stopped to hear what it was about. The image changed before she heard who it was. Now they were doing a live interview with Zuzi Dlamini, wife of the Minister and a powerful figure in her own right. The press was going wild, thrusting microphones in front of her face.

“Did you know you were receiving black-listed funds?”

“What is your response to these accusations?”

“Did Minister Kumalo put you up to this?”

“Where did *uMoya* receive its start-up funds?”

“How does this affect the Black Empowerment status of the company?”

Zuzi put her hand up and the crowd quietened down. Her voice was soft but carried well. Julia admired her poise.

“Thank you for letting me speak. I was made aware of this press conference a short while ago and came to listen to what was being said. I have to say I am shocked. If – and I say if – these reports are true, then I must admit to making a grave, grave mistake. However, I am not convinced of their veracity. It is true that *uMoya* has received funds from both the French and German bankers mentioned but never, not once, have they tried to steer the direction of our investment. I am acutely aware that my marriage to the Minister places me in a privileged position, and we have both taken great pains to ensure that my work is not linked with his and that my company does not receive special status. More than that I cannot do. But be sure, I will engage with this report, and see whether there is any truth to it, whether it is anything more than hot air blown by people with an axe to grind. Thank you.”

She stepped down from the podium.

The camera turned to Solomon and his colleagues. So *this* was their story. For Solomon's sake Julia tried to concentrate. It was a major victory for their movement and must have taken a lot of hard work and investigation to bring it to this point. But she couldn't get the image of Zenzile out of her mind. His body tossed like a piece of rubbish onto the dirt.

De Vriess saw her standing there. He still hadn't decided exactly what needed to be done. He knew he was wavering because it was her. No one else would have stood a chance. But then he didn't have all the facts. Acting without complete knowledge was always a last resort for him. So he stood and watched. He could see the exhaustion in her face. She tried to hide it with smart clothes and impeccable make-up. But it was there, in the way she held her body, in the slight dilation of her eyes. They still had not met. Not really. It was time to invite her for a cup of coffee. And a chat.

"Julia? Miss Julia Ratford?" He put his hand out to greet her. "Slimkop de Vriess." She looked startled, like a rabbit caught in the headlights. "I have seen some of the excellent research you have done for the department. I wondered if I might buy you a cup of coffee?"

"No, I... well it's..."

"Please. I am interested in some of your findings. Really, I would like to buy you a coffee." He took her by the elbow and steered her away from the lobby. She was too polite or perhaps too surprised to resist.

"Julia!" She turned round towards the voice. "Julia!" A man came running up to her. "I need to speak to you." He looked at de Vriess then back at her. "Urgently." De Vriess felt Julia's grip tighten on his arm.

"Jon, I'm busy right now."

"Julia, please babe. I wouldn't ask you if it wasn't important."

De Vriess flinched mentally at the use of the word 'babe'. Of course he knew that Jon Roberts was Julia's ex-boyfriend. The implied intimacy of 'babe' angered him. A little. He wasn't going to give in without a fight. And of course there was more at stake than a cup of coffee.

"Mr...?"

"Roberts. Jon Roberts," Jon said extending his hand. "I'm so sorry sir, but I really have an urgent matter I need to discuss with Ms Ratford. It just can't wait." He looked De Vriess straight in the eyes when he said this.

"Very well Mr Roberts. Miss Ratford," he said, taking her hand between his two and squeezing it gently, "it seems this man has something burning to say to you. Perhaps we could meet for that coffee a little later? Say in an hour?"

They walked off. De Vriess was gratified to hear the irritation in Julia's voice, "I can't believe you did that Jon." But De Vriess believed it. And it meant he had less time than he'd hoped.

As soon as Jon and Julia had turned the corner he called Air France and booked a flight to Paris. That afternoon. It would give him just enough time to get to his apartment before the airport. Not that he needed to. His passport was always on him in case he had to leave in a rush; he had spare clothes in his Paris apartment. But there were one or two things to conclude before he left. Jon Roberts. The one part of the operation he had left to Kumalo. He hoped it wouldn't backfire. He couldn't take the risk.

The highway was surprisingly empty and he was in his flat within half an hour. He pulled a small case down from the cupboard and selected some clothes to pack. It caused less suspicion if you travelled with something. Added a scented scarf. Julia's. From her house. He cleared the bathroom and looked round the flat. Nothing out of place. Nothing to indicate what kind of a person had stayed there. Except the photo. He picked it up and looked at her. She looked into his eyes. But of course she was looking at Sizwe. He would always know that. It was one of the loose ends he needed to tie up. He turned the picture upside down and placed it in the case before zipping and securing it with a small padlock.

From a hidden drawer in the dresser he extracted a new sim card – untraceable – and put it into his phone. He would shift the investigation away from international nuclear finance to a sordid local spat between a Minister and his wife's ex-lover. This would protect his hidden room in Pelindaba until it was ready to be reactivated. The calls could be made on the way to the airport. He turned his mind to Julia. A call or two could sort her out also. It would be ironic if she died the same way as her lover. That had been easy – a quick call to an old colleague in the police force and an apparently random hijacking. With a few carefully placed witnesses, that call would now have come from Kumalo.

On the whole he thought it probably best to do nothing about her. It wasn't just sentimentality talking now, but realism. She was an amateur. Sizwe's death had driven her. With Ntini's confession she could now drop it. Still, she had been tenacious, even after he'd loosened her wheels. But no. He would leave her, at least for the time being. There would be too much suspicion if she disappeared now. Jon Roberts, he felt sure, would investigate anything that happened to her thoroughly. But if, from his watch-post

in Paris, he saw things change, it would be simple enough to eliminate her. That settled, his mind relaxed. Everything would go according to plan.

He handed his keys and car to the man at long-term parking and made his way to counter 81, tossing the used sim card into a bin as he went. The Air France woman smiled sweetly at him as he gave her his reservation number and passport. His visa was in order. After so many years of flying back and forth to Paris, he now had year long multiple entry visas to Europe. She returned his boarding pass, confirming his pre-booked window seat upstairs. With his platinum flying card, he always got the seat he wanted. The queue at passport control was surprisingly short. He walked up to a window and handed over his documents. The woman scanned his passport but held on to it. A security policeman approached the window, caught her eye and addressed De Vriess.

“I’m sorry sir, there seems to be a small problem. Can you come this way please?”

“A problem? What sort of a problem?”

“I really cannot say sir. Please. Can you come this way.” Another three security men had appeared silently and were now surrounding De Vriess.

## 64

“So what did Jon say when he pulled you aside?”

“Apparently he – or should I say the NIA – were worried when the story about Zuzi’s company blew. Although they predicted something like that.”

Julia was sitting with Nolitha at her home in Soweto. The tea was prepared as usual, but it had not yet been poured.

“Solomon and his colleagues only revealed a part of it. I think they only knew a part of it. But that was enough to keep support for nukes out of the Summit declaration. And it turns out that Sizwe was right. Jon was working for the NIA. He lied to me.” Julia said. “He said he’d been approached by someone from Pretoria who he thought was the NIA – that was Zuzi and Kumalo – to watch Sizwe and me, but he knew they weren’t genuine because he was already working for the agency. He pretended to be caught in the middle of something he didn’t understand. He lied! And... oh *god!* Sorry Nolitha. But it seems such a waste. Such a mess.”

Nolitha looked down as she spoke. “There are many kinds of truth Julia. And there are times people have to lie. Even to the people they love. In the end he was true. That is what you should remember.”

Julia sniffed. “Anyway, what they were tracking was more than corruption. They were looking for signs that someone would use South Africa’s power generation as a cover for trade in nuclear weapons. Somehow they thought I could help them in this. Jon made me send him an email – I think they suspected De Vriess had tapped my computer. The idea was to make him nervous, put on some pressure. And maybe he would show his hand.”

“But surely that was dangerous?”

Julia shrugged. “No. I don’t know, maybe. I don’t think De Vriess would have hurt me, but they weren’t sure. It seems he was following me. But there was so little time between then and the Summit. Perhaps he thought it wasn’t worth doing anything. I don’t know. But it seems clear now that he was involved in nuclear weapons trade. They’ve found a facility ready to convert yellow cake into highly enriched uranium – the stuff they use for bombs not electricity. It’s under the Y-Plant Kumalo was so proud to re-open.”

“Yes.” Nolitha nodded, “I think Sizwe suspected something like that. I suppose that’s why they had to kill him.”

Julia pretended not to hear. She went on, “there was also a side deal. Something Kumalo *was* aware of. Maybe even initiated. The waste would be sold to dealers in dirty bombs. Through networks he knew from the 80’s.”

Nolitha poured them both a cup of tea before asking, “but this Mr De Vriess... he’s been caught you say?”

“No. They stopped him briefly at the airport for questioning, but didn’t have enough to hold him. He’s in Paris. The French have refused his extradition.”

They sat for a moment in silence, each wrapped in their own thoughts when Julia’s phone beeped. An sms. No number was displayed. She clicked the envelope.

Dear Julia humble apologies for missing our coffee. Something came up. I hope we may reschedule. I will be in touch. Yours, Slimkop de Vriess.