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CRYSTAL NIGHT

A SHORT NOVEL

SUBMITTED IN FULFILLMENT OF MASTER OF ARTS IN CREATIVE WRITING

STUDENT NAME : DAVID ROSEN
 STUDENT NUMBER : RSNDV003
 CONTACT DETAILS : email davy@vst.co.za / cell 082 453 3408
 FACULTY : GRADUATE SCHOOL OF HUMANITIES
 COURSE OF STUDY : MA IN CREATIVE WRITING SSHM04
 SUPERVISOR/S : PROF J M COETZEE / PROF S WATSON
 DISSERTATION TITLE : CRYSTAL NIGHT
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CERTIFICATE OF ORIGINALITY

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

Signature:

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ABSTRACT

Crystal Night is a teenage love story that takes place in South Africa in the 1980s between Rachel, a Jewess, and Danny, a Catholic. Initially the Jewish fear of intermarriage and anti-Semitism that Rachel inherits from her parents challenges this relationship, and when Danny is conscripted into the army by the Apartheid state, his mysterious death ends it.

By 1998, when Rachel and Danny's son Dane is thirteen, the political landscape is vastly changed. It is post-Apartheid with a democratically elected black government. A Truth and Reconciliation Commission has been established to discover the truth of human rights violations since 1960, attempting to reconcile both victims and perpetrators of such events. In such a world Dane seeks his emotional and spiritual identity and his quest forces Rachel to complete her own unfinished journey.

The tapestry of stories that are told, seen through Rachel's eyes, all search for truth on many levels: literal, political and spiritual, and they navigate the political turmoil of war-torn Europe, the depths of Apartheid and the very heart of the new South Africa under the gaze of the Truth Commission.

Rachel's faith is restored when the circumstances around Danny's death are unveiled and Dane undergoes his rite of passage, and the novel's resolution is an affirmation of life against death, light versus darkness, and joy over sorrow.

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University of Cape Town

HEBREW GLOSSARY

amidah	A prayer said silently and alone
Ashkenaz	European pronunciation of Hebrew, for example, suffixes spelt with a 't' are pronounced as 's'. So 'Shabbat' is pronounced 'Shabbas'; 'tallit' is pronounced 'tallis'
Bar Mitzvah	A ceremony held when a Jewish boy attains thirteen years of age and becomes a man, signified by his being able to pray or daven a portion of the Torah
Bat Mitzvah	A ceremony held when a Jewish girl attains thirteen years old
Bimah	A platform or dais at the centre of the synagogue from where the Rabbi and other men lead the congregation in prayer
brit, brit milah	refers to male circumcision which is one of the covenants made between God and Abraham
cheder	A school or class for Hebrew or Jewish studies
Chevre kadisha	Literally the 'friends of the bereaved or mourners'; a community body that arranges burials, including preparation of corpses, and other welfare acts on behalf of Jews who have had deaths in their families
Daven, davening	The Jewish form of praying, usually accompanied by some form of swaying and bowing. Pronounced like 'oven'.
Goy	Literally 'other nation', used by Jews to denote non-Jews
Haftorah and Maftir."	Two portions of the Torah read every Shabbat and which the Bar Mitzvah boy reads as part of his ceremony
Kabbalah	A form of Jewish worship and meditation involving occult formulas and numerology
Kaddish	The prayer said for the dead, repeated for one year after the death of a departed soul
Kosher	Food prepared according to strict laws for consumption by Jews.
Le Chaim	Literally, 'To Life'; A toast and blessing often said at Weddings and Happy festivals
Lag Ba'Omer	A festival on the 33 rd of the Omer
Mitzvah	A good deed
minyan	A quorum of ten Jewish men who have had Bar Mitzvahs; the minyan is necessary for any shul service or burial
mazeltov simchatov	A good thing, a happy event, an exclamation on happy occasions
mikvah	A ritual bath performed by women for purposes of physical and spiritual cleansing
Oy oy oy	An exclamation either for great joy or great sorrow
Sephardic	Middle Eastern pronunciation of Hebrew, for example, suffixes spelt with a 't' are pronounced as 't'. So 'Shabbat' is pronounced 'Shabbat'; 'tallit' is pronounced 'tallit'
Shabbat	The Jewish Sabbath; The Seventh Day or from Friday night till Saturday night

Shabbat Shalom, Good Shabbas, Shabbas, Shabbat	Various greetings given on Shabbat
Shul	Synagogue
Spinoza	A medieval Jewish philosopher excommunicated for his heretical views
tallit	A fringed white garment worn by men in shul on certain occasions; 'tearing of one's tallit' is customary when a relative dies
Torah	The five books of Moses or The Old Testament
tsalem	Christian cross
Trayf	Non-kosher
yidel	Literally a small Jew, referring to infants or children
Yomtov	Literally a good day, a generic term for all Jewish festivals
Yotzite	The day of remembrance for any departed relative on the anniversary of their death
yarmulke	A piece of cloth worn on the head by male Jews when they daven or enter a shul

SOUTH AFRICAN GLOSSARY

Afrikaner	Literally 'an African', but denotes Afrikaans speakers of South Africa of European descent
Apartheid	The system of racial separation of whites from other races – called non-whites - embodied in legislation which governed where people lived, schooled, worked etc
Afrikaans	A derivative of Dutch spoken in South Africa
Amandla Nguwethu	A slogan meaning 'Power to the people' (Xhosa)
Aluta continua	'The struggle must continue', a slogan used by anti-Government campaigners (Portuguese)
ANC	The African National Congress, ruling party since 1994, banned in 1960
Browns	A brown working uniform of SADF soldiers
Braai	A local form of barbeque, a fire on which meat and vegetables is cooked
Balsak	a bag given to soldiers in the SADF in which they kept all their clothes and possessions
boeredans	An dance popular with farmers
Commy	Communist
Caprivi	A town in Northern South West Africa (now Namibia) on the border of Angola. The 'Caprivi strip' was a concentration of military camps used by the SADF for training and operations
Die Stem	The South African Afrikaans national anthem pre 1994
dominee	A church minister
drol, hond, perd, voel, vark, piel, hol	piece of shit, dog, horse, bird, pig, cock, arsehole
ECC	The End Conscription Campaign
fynbos	Indigenous fauna and flora of the Western Cape
lekker	Literally 'sweet', but colloquially used for 'good, nice, very good, very nice'
Kloof	Ravine
Karoo	A semi-desert area in the interior of South Africa
Kaffir	A derogatory term for a Black-skinned person. Comes originally from the Arab slave traders' <i>kafir</i> or non-believer and has extremely negative emotional use
koppies	Small, rounded hills
Kaffir music	Black music, a local form of Jazz favored by Blacks
Luderitz	A town in South West Africa
moffies	Derogatory name for homosexual
MK	Mkonto We Sizwe, the Military Wing of the ANC
Non-white	Apartheid race classification for all other races not classified 'white'

NUSAS	National Union Of South African Students
Ons sal lewe / Ons sal sterwe / Ons vir jou Suid Afrika	Fragment from Die Stem meaning: 'We shall live / We shall die / For you South Africa'
orange-white-and-blue	A reference to the South African flag with its three stripes of orange, white and blue
Oranjemond	Town in Southern South West Africa where the Orange River meets the Atlantic Ocean
pis	'urine' or 'urinate'
rooigevaar	Literally 'red danger' or 'communist danger'
rooibos	A locally grown tea
Richtersveld	A mountainous terrain east of the Skeleton Coast and north of the Orange River, where rivers have wended spectacular canyons and gorges
swartgevaar	Literally 'black danger'
saki-saki	A local Afrikaner dance
Samil	A military truck
soutpiel	Literally, 'a salt penis'; derogatory term for non-patriotic English speakers who 'have one foot in South Africa, one foot in England, and their penis hangs in the sea'
State of Emergency	A time during which the state forces are granted additional 'special' powers of Law and Order, and all state forces are on full alert
SADF	The South African Defence Force
TRC	The Truth and Reconciliation Commission
Total Onslaught	The philosophy that South Africa was bombarded by a Total Onslaught of pro-Communist Anti-Christian forces both within and without South Africa, popularised by the government of PW Botha in the 1980s
twasa, twasa kancinci	A twasa experience; 'twasa' is an altered form of consciousness that 'icquiras' or 'witchdoctors' experience early in their lives; it has psychotic and disintegrative manifestations and hence many white psychotics would have been described as having a twasa experience by Xhosas.
Townships	Suburbs and towns designated for non-whites or Blacks. These were usually shanty towns or slums, mostly without tarred roads, electricity, running water or any amenities, and were usually patrolled by state security forces
Voortrekkers	The first trekkers from the Cape Colony who opened up the interior of South Africa and founded the Orange Free State and the Transvaal??
Viva, Viva Mandela, Viva Biko	A form of cheering used by anti Government campaigners
Xhosa	A major black tribe of South Africa

CRYSTAL NIGHT

A SHORT NOVEL

University of Cape Town

Part One: 1967 - 1985

University of Cape Town

A. *Shattered Glass*

1.

In 1967 Camps Bay was a quiet suburb nestled between two majestic mountains that sloped gracefully towards the Atlantic Ocean. The Kornfelds lived in a wooden bungalow at the edge of a large forest called the Glen from where a trail led up towards the mountains and down towards Glen Beach.

Rachel grew up in a world without darkness: her bedroom walls were yellow and her curtains were pink; her bedtime stories had no big bad wolves; she went to sleep with a smile and protected by a loving God. In the morning, she looked onto a row of bright yellow sunflowers where birds sang as they sucked up nectar.

Her father took her to the fair, bought her candy floss and a ride on the painted horses of the carousel, his eyes twinkling as he watched her throw her head back and laugh with pleasure. People said she looked just like her mother, with her chestnut hair and almond eyes that flashed when she spoke, and this made Rachel feel warm inside.

The first time Rachel walked up the mountain her mother told her Lion's Head was the Queen: "See, its gentle contours flow like robes downward towards the sea, and the olive green bushes are the buttons on her coat. Table Mountain is her King, with big square rocks tumbling down its face like a long gray beard."

When they reached the summit, Rachel couldn't touch the sky - she had expected a hard, blue umbrella. "Many things we believe," said her mother, "turn out different." Seeing Rachel's disappointment, she added, "But not Love; Love is like the sky: there's no end to it, there is always more."

Then they watched the full moon rise, suspended in the kloof between the King and the Queen, while the sun sank into the sea. It was a vast sight, with the whole ocean spreading around them. Rachel imagined the sun and moon telling each other of their journeys across the sky. She felt safe as her mother's gaze shone on her, and she looked down at the tiny houses and trees in the valley thousands of feet below them, like patches in the quilt of a perfect, fairytale world.

2.

She went to the local Jewish school in Cape Town where they taught the Sephardic Hebrew of modern Israel rather than the Ashkenaz of Europe that her parents spoke. Her father beamed as he drove her to school and she carried the exercise books her mother had devotedly covered in plastic. She loved her blue uniform with the Hebrew symbol of life embroidered in white on her chest, and wore her thick, long hair in two tidy plaits.

At break time, she giggled with her girlfriends, sharing the sandwiches her mother packed for her in a lunch tin, sitting under the pine trees and feeling the sun warm on her face. After school she sometimes practised the recorder or played netball, and her parents waited and watched in silence from the sidelines.

It gave them great joy that she belonged in this modern new world cast like a jewel on the South African shore, far from the ghettos of Europe. Her happiness was the focus of their lives, and they poured their hopes and wishes into her, as if only she was alive, while their flames had already gone out. And Rachel *was* happy and *did* burn with a bright light: she was a Jewess, of the ancient race of Queen Esther. She was Daddy's girl and Mommy's gift and she told herself, 'I am a young woman of Sharon and the blood of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob flows through my veins.'

3.

“Shabbat is the holiest day, the seventh day when God rested, and the celebration begins with the first star tonight and ends at sunset tomorrow, a full and glorious twenty-four hours when God enters our house,” her mother told her.

Her mother taught her to prepare for the Shabbat meal and together with Bella, their Xhosa maid, they filled the kitchen with the smells of chicken soup, potato fritters, blintzes and sweet cinnamon buns baking in the oven.

She chopped vegetables and laid the white tablecloth with bread and wine; she placed the silver cutlery and a crystal glass by each mat. “Take special care with the crystal,” her mother said, and showed her how to polish it until you could look clear through it and see the world in the purest images.

Once she stood on the verandah watching the sunset and waiting to sight the first star and there was a golden-red glow and a ladder of light that reached from the horizon right up to her feet. Like Jacob’s ladder, she thought, and recalled the words from Genesis ‘... *a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven.*’ She imagined this beauty was the power of God spread like a blanket over the earth and the sky.

She walked to the shul in her smart clothes, between her mother and father, each holding one of her hands. Her hair smelled of lavender. She sat with her mother on the women’s side and they looked across at her father who was the choirmaster. They followed each syllable of the introspective Amidah when each prayed alone, and she looked down with longing at the men davening. As if reading her thoughts, her mother placed her hand over hers.

Mrs. Kaimowitz and her daughter Cynthia sat next to them and chattered throughout the service without even once opening up their prayer books. “You are too religious, Rachel; it’s not right for a girl to daven like you do. She’s such a pretty girl, Leah; why don’t you

come round to the store with her one day, and my ladies will fix you up. Every jewel deserves a good casket.”

Rachel’s mother thanked her but winked at Rachel, who knew they would never visit her boutique. Mrs. Kaimowitz, with her good intentions and patronising tone, was South African-born and looked at Rachel’s mother as if she was a new immigrant. Rachel liked her because she was kind, but was very aware of how she and her mother stood apart from the other women, who were heavily made up, and wore ornate jewelry and expensive dresses.

This observation led her to thoughts about beauty in general and she recalled the path of light over the sea she had seen earlier. She waited in anticipation for those parts of the service not reserved for men and at the joyous conclusion she sang with an eagerness that was electric, and at the words ‘*great is the living God and to be praised,*’ she understood beauty to be part of God.

The next morning she took the Children's Service and the children sat in a ring around her in the shul garden. A boy asked her what God looked like. "He is invisible, but He is everywhere, in all things: in me, in you." She placed her finger on the little boy’s heart and looked into his eyes; when he laughed, all the other small, bright faces looked back at her trustingly. They all laughed together. She was overcome with a spiritual lightness, as if God’s glory was upon her and she felt the wonder of Heaven and Earth.

That was how the Shabbat was for her in those days: it was the centre of her world.

4.

Rachel felt a deep spiritual longing and searched below the surface, behind the appearance of things. After the shul service, everyone shook hands, hugged, kissed and wished each other, and Rachel sipped the Friday wine with the rest of the children. She

and her parents joined the throng slowly streaming out of the shul past Rabbi Gold, who stood at the gate greeting each member of his congregation.

"The choir was fantastic, Isaac," her mother whispered, and her father's eyes lit up. "I liked it best when the men hum," said Rachel, and her father took her cheeks in his palms.

"Shabbat Leah," Rabbi Gold said. "The choir was especially good tonight, Isaac." He turned to Rachel and she wondered if the ring so tightly fitted round his finger didn't hurt. "And how's my pretty girl? Wait - let me see, what have I got for you." He mimed a magician and then dipped his hand into a pocket and came out with a chocolate wrapped in silver paper. "Here you go. What a good girl, hey?" She thanked him, and he slobbered a wet kiss on her cheek, the second part of this ritual, which she accepted with a grimace.

She left the synagogue walking hand in hand with her parents and the stars shone down from a purple sky. She threw the chocolate in the bush and thought how Rabbi Gold had not noticed that her longing for the sweetness of God's Name was stronger than for syrup-filled chocolates that had been lying around in his cupboard since last Yomtov.

5.

It was a memorable Friday night when she first experienced the other side. It was after shul and they had guests for dinner: Rabbi Gold and his wife Auntie Bessie, her mother's bachelor brother Uncle Hymie, Doctor Kay and Mr. and Mrs. Ginsberg. Her mother blessed the candles and her father blessed the bread and wine. Then Rachel went into the kitchen and her and Bella brought the first course, chicken soup, to the table.

"One day you will marry a nice doctor, no? Or a professor?" said Mrs. Ginsberg, as Rachel placed a bowl of soup in front of her. Mr. Ginsberg just smiled and drank large draughts of the Shabbat wine. Rachel wondered if he was either a doctor or professor.

Her father showed Uncle Hymie a hand from his bridge game at the Yiddish Club.

“Isaac, it’s Shabbat: leave the cards alone!” said Rabbi Gold and her father hurriedly put his cards away.

“Isaac, I can get you a special deal on a new Mercedes: last year’s model but still brand new,” said Uncle Hymie. He was a motor mechanic and repaired her father’s old Hillman from time to time.

“Forget about it,” said her father.

“It’s just a car, Isaac.”

“I’m not buying German,” said her father, “and that’s that!”

Under his breath he muttered a private curse, “the bloody bastards!”

“Isaac, don’t be silly. I can get you this car as a trade-in, think about it.”

“Hitler promoted this car!” her father shouted and banged his fist on the table. Then he took one of her mother’s beautiful crystal glasses, wrapped it in a serviette, and threatened to stamp on it.

Rachel was frightened and wondered if her father had gone mad. Her father sensed her fear and came to stand next to her. “We must never forget, Rachel – never! They destroyed over seven thousand shops, they burned down most of the shuls, thousands were sent to concentration camps and hundreds were brutally murdered - there was glass breaking everywhere.” He closed his eyes. “Aahh, that was just the beginning ... the Crystal Night ... when the plague that killed our entire families began, when we shattered like glass.”

He opened his eyes and looked at Rachel. “That’s why we break this glass at weddings: so we never forget.” Everyone around the table was nodding, he spoke for them all.

Uncle Hymie broke the silence. “OK, so don’t buy German if it makes you feel better, but why bother keeping the laws?”

Rabbi Gold looked unhappy. Rachel knew Uncle Hymie never went to shul and could see the Rabbi disapproved of him.

“Did it make any difference?” Uncle Hymie said, “We still ended up in Auschwitz and Babi Yar.”

“You are confusing the metaphysical God with a moral God,” said Mr. Ginsberg. “There is a view that God as the first cause is separate from what He set in motion – the so-called Rationalist defence for the Problem of Evil.”

Maybe he *is* a professor, Rachel thought.

“It is bad to second guess God and His ways,” said Rabbi Gold.

“Hocus pocus,” said Uncle Hymie.

“Come, come, not in front of the girl, don’t upset her,” said her mother, pushing the soup bowl closer to him. “Eat. We’re in Africa now. Let’s eat.”

“We’re in Africa, but how can we stand it?” Uncle Hymie went on, “It’s not right – the government is treating the blacks just like we Jews were treated. We can’t just stand aside and watch.” He looked around the table imploringly. “We can’t be part of this - surely this is obvious to you?”

Whenever Uncle Hymie spoke like this her mother looked uncomfortable.

“Not in front of the girl, Hymie! Please!” said Auntie Bessie. Rachel didn’t know whether she was referring to herself or Bella, who was silently and invisibly taking away the empty plates.

“Remember that marvelously funny part in *Fiddler on the roof*,” said Mrs. Ginsberg, “when Tevya says to God: ‘And weren’t you busy enough – you had to make my horse sick?’ If this time He’s forgotten us – let’s not remind Him!”

“I still say Sholem Aleichem showed disrespect for God in that play and has a lot to answer for,” said Rabbi Gold.

“Why? Don’t you think God has a sense of humour?” said Mrs. Ginsberg.

Rachel looked down to hide her smile.

“You and your pink friends can say what you like, Hymie,” said Doctor Kay, “but they let us live in peace here. It’s *not* our fight. Let’s for once enjoy a bit of life, hey? It’s no crime. Let them pick on someone else for a change.”

“I can’t see how you can trivialise this. It’s not right,” said Uncle Hymie, “it’s absolutely shameful.”

He threw down his napkin. Rachel’s mother frowned, said, “How’s the soup, Bessie? Another helping? With some blintzes this time?” She judged the success of an evening by how much food was consumed.

“The soup is outstanding, Leah,” said Isaac.

“Outstanding huh?” her mother echoed, enjoying the compliment. “So eat, Hymie. It’s not the soup’s fault.”

Uncle Hymie laughed, then picked up his napkin, winked at Rachel, and resumed eating his soup.

Rabbi Gold said another blessing over the soup. Rachel looked at the Rabbi, looked at Uncle Hymie, and decided, even though Uncle Hymie wasn’t religious, he was a real human being.

When they moved to the lounge for coffee and chocolate, Rachel lay down on the floor and drifted off to sleep to the sound of the adult conversation and the image of the shattering glass.

6.

So it was that she learned that Jewish history was one of struggle and persecution, and for every Queen Esther, there was an Haman just under the surface. The unspoken, hidden stories, which influenced her parents' every thought, every word, every act, weighed Rachel down. The silence grew louder, and the omissions greater, until she could bear it no longer and started asking questions. She dipped into the well of their past and gently drew the stories out of them.

They had been in the Nazi death camps and she – an only child – listened spellbound as they told of large families, of brothers, sisters, aunts, uncles, grandparents and scores of cousins that had been processed through the concentration camp machine.

“Like mince,” her mother said, “by the end of the war, they had killed our entire families.” Rachel had an image of six million Jews going into a gigantic mince grinder.

Thereafter, she observed the number tattooed on her father's wrist reverently, as he lit the yotzite candle on the Day of Remembrance. The candle burned throughout the night in its waxy glass. She didn't comment on her mother's inward stare as she washed dirty plastic bags and prepared them for re-use. She got used to her mother's habit of putting aside food salvaged from waste - toasted mouldy bread, boiled, rotten cabbage and whipped sour milk – which she knew her mother ate alone and in secret.

Their house was at the edge of the Glen. Her father once told her: “I chose this house for the position. As long as you're near a forest you can escape.” His eyes misted over.

“When the soldiers killed my whole family, I hid in the forest for a whole year before they caught me and sent me to Auschwitz.”

She was aware of which questions had answers and which did not, and was careful not to frighten her parents back into their silence. She understood that though she hadn't lived through the Holocaust, her parents had created her in its image, by what they didn't tell

her. She became aware of two worlds: hers of life and light and the future; theirs of death and darkness and the past. And she developed the sensitivity to live in both worlds, becoming an interpreter for them of the new one.

7.

Just before her twelfth birthday she found out why it is written in the Morning Prayer '*...and thank you God for not making me a woman.*' She ran home from school, and once inside her room, locked the door and stripped.

She threw her crumpled school clothes in the corner, wrapped in a bloodstained towel, and studied her reflection in the mirror: the thickening, tipped nipples and the stretching hips. She felt ungainly and no longer recognised herself.

She looked at the bloodstains on her panties and the panic began again. She lay back on her bed and unwrapped the tampon that her teacher had given her, opened her legs and, after struggling for some time with the strange new object, inserted it, then put on a clean pair of panties.

Afterwards, she lay face down on her pillow, thumping it and shouting into it, until finally she wept into its muffled balloon. She heard her father playing a Gypsy dance on his violin inside the house. Its short phrases: *da-da-da da-da-da* were too cute, too sweet! She wanted to hear Bruch! Something wilder, more passionate. Something *angry!*

She lay on her bed, fuming, until there was a knock at the door.

"Rachel. Open up!" It was her mother.

"Go away!"

"What's the matter, Rachel? Open up."

"I don't want to talk to you! Go away."

"Rachel please."

She heard her mother's feet shuffle on the other side of the door.

"Rachel!"

Rachel flung open the door. Her mother's eyes expressed a fear even greater than her own.

"What?" Rachel said, subdued, suddenly aware of her nakedness. Overwhelmed by shame, she covered her breasts with her hands and walked backwards into the room.

Her mother entered the room quickly, shutting the door behind her after a sharp backward glance. She sat on the bed and pulled Rachel down beside her.

"Tell me what happened." Her eyes, wide with horror, made Rachel unsure of her own anger for a moment.

"Why didn't you tell me? I was so embarrassed! There was so much blood. I thought I was sick ... bleeding inside. I never want to go back to school again." She covered her face and sobbed. "Why didn't you tell me?"

Leah's shock changed to understanding. She put her hands on Rachel's shoulders, then hugged her.

"My darling, O my darling."

She combed Rachel's thick, long hair between her second and third fingers till her sobs slowed.

"Ah, where do I begin?" she said, and picked up the soiled laundry.

She led Rachel out of the bedroom into the washroom in the yard. While she washed the soiled clothes, she explained. Her voice had an unfamiliar, hollow tone, as if she were speaking through a funnel.

"You are always wondering why only the men daven, while us women are kept separate in shul? Well, some rabbis say it is because of this mystery: God is Time and beyond

Time. The duty which glorifies His aspect of Time - morning prayers, afternoon prayers, evening prayers, new moon prayers - we women do not have to say, because of our cycles, because we are already in tune with Time. Now that you are a woman, you are like the moon, and every new moon is a celebration and a cleansing. You are closer to God because now you're closer to Time." She smiled at Rachel. "That's why the Shabbat is likened to a woman, and the men sing: Come my bride."

Rachel was entranced. She felt she was being initiated into the mysteries of her mother's life, her own life and of *all* women's lives. Her anger and shame were replaced by a calm new knowledge.

Then she noticed there was a discrepancy between the magic of her mother's words and her dark brooding expression.

"One day," her mother said, "this cycle will find fulfilment with a man."

Then without warning her mother started choking, clutched her throat and grabbed Rachel's arm. Her mouth contorted and the blood drained from her face.

"Mama!"

Rachel gripped her mother's shoulders.

"Rachel, I'm sorry I never told you. I'm sorry you were so embarrassed."

Her mother tried to compose herself. She wiped her eyes and blew her nose.

"I've known for months I should be talking to you ... before it happened ... but I couldn't - I just couldn't bring myself to." She began to cry again. "I just couldn't."

"Why, Mama. Why?"

Before the question had left her lips Rachel feared this was one of the stories she would never hear. She resigned herself to silence, but her mother did answer.

"They did things ... they made it hard for me ... I was just a young girl, like you. I had only bled once ... " She stopped, looked into the distance, then back at Rachel. At that

moment, Rachel felt closer to her mother than ever before, as she gleaned a sense of the horrible pain within her.

"It's OK Mama, you don't need to talk about it."

Her mother squeezed Rachel's hands.

"One day - when I am stronger, when you are older - I will tell you."

Her mother got up and wrung out the last of the water from the clothes, then hung them on the line. Rachel watched the neatly pegged, clean clothes flutter in the breeze and felt comforted by the ordinary, familiar scene. She smiled at her mother.

"Let's go in and prepare supper," her mother said, "You can help me peel the onions."

Rachel was more eager than ever to help and they joined Bella in the kitchen. Bella placed her strong black hands on hers, and Rachel felt truly a young woman standing between Bella and her mother.

8.

Later that night, voices in her parents' room woke her. Doctor Kay and her father were sitting on either side of her mother, who was sprawled on the bed.

"Doctor Kay has given Mama a sleeping pill," her father said.

"It's for her nerves," said Doctor Kay.

Her mother moaned incoherently. Doctor Kay rubbed her neck and held her hand.

"It's OK now, Leah – it's only bad memories. They are gone – it's over! Do you understand? It's over."

Her mother nodded several times.

“Yes, yes, I understand,” she said, “just stay with me, don’t turn the light off - stay with me.”

“It’s OK Leah, we’re not going anywhere,” Doctor Kay touched her forehead. “We’re here. We’re *all* here. Hush now, you must rest.”

Her mother looked as if she was behind a thick glass screen. Rachel knew that no doctor could rewind the Holocaust and remove whatever it was that they had done to her, that was linked to Rachel’s own bleeding womb.

They sat in the bedroom until her mother sank into a drugged sleep. They covered her in a warm blanket and switched on the sidelight. Rachel saw words bubble out of Doctor Kay’s mouth as he turned to speak to her father, but she couldn’t hear a thing.

After Doctor Kay had left, she lay awake for a long time, reflecting on her mother’s pain. Deep inside herself she wondered how God allowed it, why He was so cruel. Instantly she crushed this rebellious thought, pushing it back into the depths. She felt ashamed that she could think such a thing, yet resented the long shadow her mother’s history cast over her own life; resented the invisible memories that were too bad to be spoken, but remained forever alive.

The burden crushed her.

9.

“She must have a Bat Mitzvah,” Rabbi Gold proclaimed.

He sat in their garden, slurping his tea from the saucer and dunking his biscuit in the old Russian way. The crumbs from the soggy biscuit stuck to his beard. She looked at her mother and her mother fluttered her eyelashes.

“Yes, it is not only boys who are having this Mitzvah,” he continued, “Of course, it is not compulsory, like it is for boys, but it is allowed. And it is a sign of the times, when God has given us Jews this season of peace.”

“That is wonderful,” her mother said, and gave Rachel a long look that said *so now we have a chance*.

The following Tuesday afternoon Rachel went to her first Bat Mitzvah class at the shul, where she joined a class of eight other girls. They would have a joint ceremony in six months, on the festival of Lag Ba’Omer, when they would each recite a Psalm of David and a verse from the Song of Songs.

She walked home through the Glen that was between the shul and their house and sat down to rest at the foot of one of the large pine trees. She liked to take her shoes off and trample the pine needles with her bare feet, listening for their crackle, and on this occasion she watched a leaf fall from a poplar tree to the ground. Inspired, she put some words on a page, describing its shape, its tenderness, its fall to the ground, and this developed into a poem about human fate.

Her walks in the Glen every Tuesday took on a new and deeper meaning and she walked about with her notebook and described what she saw. Sometimes she arranged words in shapes. Sometimes she mixed English and Hebrew, already aware of the majesty of the words in the daily prayer book. She was exhilarated by the discovery that she could move the words around and achieve different results and found she could even take one word and change the individual letters around to create a new word. She also learnt the numerological values of each of the Hebrew letters of the alphabet and played with their arithmetic. Thus she calculated that *tree* was worth 160 and *sun* 640.

During Hebrew class one day, she answered a question using her newfound skill.

“Who knows the meaning of the word *emet*?” Morah asked.

She put up her hand.

"It stands for the truth which was in the beginning, is now in the middle, and will be in the end, and this is represented by the numerological position of each of its three letters which happen to also be the first, middle and last letters of the alphabet."

"That's brilliant, Rachel. Well done. That was a first-rate answer, class."

Morah gaped at her and asked her to stay after class.

"Rachel, I can see that you have a flair for the language, but leave these numbers alone: this is Kabbalah and it's only for great Rabbis to ponder - and even they have to be forty years old. So stay away from it," she said, "it is not for a young girl."

"But it's only simple arithmetic, Morah, and just playing with a word's shape and form. Everyone does it with English, and Mrs. Dobson has encouraged us to write poetry."

"But English is not Hebrew, my dear. It is not a *holy* language. The Hebrew words have power; that is why they are used for prayer. The study of Hebrew is not a game."

"But Morah ..."

"No buts. You know the story of the four rabbis who each saw the Truth? One went mad, one died, one lost his faith and only Akiva survived, because, as it is written, 'no man sees My face and lives.' " The bell rang. "Run or you'll be late for your next class. And send my regards to your mother."

Morah's warning only served to intensify her interest in the shape of the letters. She believed they *were* only words and any power they had was due to her own inventiveness. And yet, every time she was in shul, she saw clearly the meanings of the words strung together and pondered the mystery of mysteries: why God's name was never to be pronounced; why certain words were treated with such awe; and why the recitation of the psalms uplifted her.

Her mother looked at her with growing happiness as each day brought them closer to the event when she, a girl, would finally have her chance to participate in these rituals, to pray on the bimah, to be a full-fledged member of the congregation. There was an unspoken sense of that day being a turning point, after which their lives would somehow

be different. Her mother seemed to brighten looking forward to that day; the gloominess which was usually just below the surface disappeared in the light of this new promise. And so Rachel also placed on the coming event a great expectation and sacredness, seeing in her new gift of poetry a sign that God had blessed her and was preparing her - them - for something.

10.

As it turned out she was not prepared. The darkness her mother had always carried dormant within, erupted in a cancer which struck quick and hard. Soon she was confined to bed. Rachel rushed every afternoon after school to her bedroom, where she did her homework. She watched her mother try and eat, but the best she could do was drink a little chicken soup.

She remembered Uncle Hymie asking, 'why follow these Laws?' The big question that had always been asked in their house - 'Why had God treated His chosen race as He had: in Babylon, in Spain, in Germany?' - was now replaced by - 'Why was God letting her mother die?' Her parents had always followed the law and had regularly observed the Sabbath and all the festivals, so how could God deny her mother - so kind and good, having suffered so much already - how could God let her die?

For four months Rachel watched the cancer eat away at her mother's insides and with every cell of life that died, she watched her own faith slowly fade.

11.

It was the day before her planned Bat Mitzvah when her mother succumbed to the death for which she had always seemed to long, as if the intervening years had merely been a distraction between one horror and its final resolution.

Rachel and her father sat side by side on the couch under the window listening to her mother struggle for breath. Suddenly Leah opened her eyes.

“Rachel, come here,” she said.

It was dark but her mother’s light seemed to fill the room.

“Don’t cry, Rachel: I am happy to go. I look forward to the rest. I’m in great pain.”

Her mother’s voice was clear and soft. Rachel took her hand.

“I am happy that *you* have your life and have such a bright future.”

So much of her had been eaten away that her mother was a waif, but she rubbed Rachel’s wrist with unexpected strength.

“Live your life to the full. You will always have my blessings. Remember me when you are happy, and try not to be sad. Be a good Jew and don’t worry.”

There was sudden gap in the universe as she and her father watched her slip into the next world. One minute she looked at them; the next she was gone. Her father paced the room and knocked his knuckles from one hand to the other. Her parents had loved each other as companions in a lonely existence that few others could comprehend. Their affection had derived from the experience of two survivors who had endured great hardship together and they had needed no words to communicate; instead, they used a vocabulary of expressions and gestures. After circling her bed for some time he suddenly clutched

Leah's hand and held it to his face, then collapsed in a cacophony of sobs. Tears burst from him like rain from a swollen cloud.

When his crying slowed, Rachel slipped under his arms and they both held onto her mother's still warm body. Her father closed Leah's eyes and caressed her high cheekbones. Rachel admired her mother's still unblemished skin - the cancer that had wasted her entire body had not removed her beauty.

Rabbi Gold soon came, with his wife and a man with a pale, yellowish complexion from the chevra kadisha, to take away the corpse. Rachel begged them to let her mother stay but Rabbi Gold said that they needed to 'prepare her body'. She asked her father to intervene but he was himself so distraught that he couldn't speak. When Mrs. Gold tried to comfort her she shrugged her away.

"We'll bury her tomorrow," Rabbi Gold said, "I'll organise the minyan and everything."

The man from the chevra kadisha wrapped her mother in a sheet and put her in a body bag and wheeled her away.

Doctor Kay gave them both sedatives. The night passed in a daze, as friends of the family came and went, offering their condolences.

At the cemetery the next morning Rachel and her father had a final look at her mother in a small curtained room. Her mother's face had lost its ethereal countenance. Her face was rigid with an unnatural expression that she had never worn in life. She was really dead.

Rachel supported her father as they followed the coffin to the graveside. Rabbi Gold recited the burial service, mechanically, in a learned Hebrew. When the time came for the mourner's Kaddish her father looked up at the sky before he began, then he stood over the coffin and sang the mournful lament. His voice vibrated but he pronounced each word clearly, with proper meaning; the pauses were hushed and pregnant.

When they lowered the coffin and called upon her to take up the spade and scatter the coffin with lumps of white sand, she dug and turned, dug and turned. She wanted to fill up the whole grave - she did not want strangers to do this last duty. As she dug, the

thought that it was the day before her Bat Mitzvah rankled inside her; the day she and her mother had meant to celebrate the joy of God's light together ... but God wouldn't give them that; God couldn't give them that; God deemed that they had not suffered enough.

A dark shadow spread its wings in her mind, that there was a lie somewhere, a flaw in the glass, something unlucky about the chosen people. The shadow invited her to be glad that her mother's pain, which had haunted her with its perpetual presence, was now buried in the grave.

She dug and filled ferociously. She was unaware that she had filled up half the grave, that there was a queue of mourners behind her waiting to sprinkle their symbolic spadeful. Tears streamed down her face. Her father took her by the elbow and gently led her away.

"Come, let's go back to the shul for the final part of the service," he said.

Back at the shul Rabbi Gold read the mourners' comfort prayer and blessed them: "May God comfort you with all the other mourners of Zion..."

For him it was routine, an empty ritual, and as he performed it, she got angry. Who was he to speak for God, or for her, or for anyone for that matter? God hadn't just taken her mother's life; He had *played* with them; He had *teased* them. It was just the cruelest joke! She felt like her head wanted to explode. She wished her brains *could* explode; that she could forget herself, not think any more, not have to know the awful, sad, cruel reality of her mother lying in a wooden coffin, pickled in the chemicals of the chevra kadisha, under white sand that reminded her of the sandpits of her childhood where cats buried their stools. Her mother buried - no more would she come to her bedside and put her hand over hers or look at her with those flashing eyes of hers. Rachel felt as if her right arm had been torn off, her heart ripped out.

Where was the 'reward of the righteous'? There could only be one answer: *there was no God*. Her questions crystallised into a sudden rejection of Him and a great anger at the whole religion: His Law; His cruel, male authority; all the contradictions. He, upon whose righteousness Judaism was built, could not be. God as an illusion was less

frightening than if He actually existed, because she would rather have no God than an uncompassionate one.

If she had been a man and had a tallit, she would have torn it, denouncing and denying Him. Instead, when she got home, she tore up her Bat Mitzvah notebook with its pages of poetry, and she took her mother's crystal set, and threw each glass against the stone wall. The glasses shattered noisily, never to come together again.

Her father found her bent over the dining room table, her hair covering her face, and splintered glass scattered around her feet. She looked up at him, her face hot and wet from crying.

"Daddy, God is also dead."

Her father swept the glass and helped her to her room. He called Bella from her room in the yard. Bella ran a hot bath with salts, then undressed Rachel and sang to her while she bathed her.

B. Nature

12.

Her father accepted her rebellion without a word, but she saw the disappointment on his face when he went to shul without her. She cared for him as if he were a child. She brought him tea in the morning and drew up shopping lists; she took control of her own affairs to spare him the worry.

"Ah, what can you do Rachel, we're all waiting our turn. One day it's this one, then it's that one. It's like in the races, you never know which horse will come in." He shook his head sadly. "It's always been bad for us Kornfelds: we've always met bad ends. My poor mother, and all your cousins." He sighed and tapped his fingers. "But what can you do? What can you do?"

Rachel watched her father light the special yotzite candle to pray for her mother's departed soul. Tears found creases in his cheeks and snaked down his weathered face as the solitary candle flickered in the well-worn glass.

'How can he stand it?' she wondered, as he performed the lonely ritual of wrapping a tallit around his head and reciting Kaddish. Listening to the prayer only increased her emptiness. 'His heart has known so much pain ... he's received little, if any, comfort from God,' she thought, 'How does he still cling to his belief?'

When he had finished, she tried to comfort him, said, "When the sun sets, even though we can no longer see it, that doesn't mean it's disappeared... maybe that's what death is."

He cradled her face in his palms and gazed into her eyes. She ran her finger down his cheek, traced the path of his tears and thought, 'How strange that I, the nonbeliever, comfort him, the believer.'

For days and weeks and months, grief permeated their lives; they shared a deep awareness of death, she a young girl in her teens, and he, a man in his sixties.

13.

She missed her mother every day and repeated her last words, "live your life to the full," trying to understand their mystery, but she couldn't shake off her sense of emptiness. She continued to score A's for all her subjects, and got distinctions in music and art, and her teachers praised her as an example. She was tipped to be a junior prefect the next year, but nothing filled her.

She still loved language and her English teacher, Mrs. Dobson, noted the depth of the philosophical concepts she expressed in her writing and often asked her to stay back to discuss her work. Her Hebrew teacher, Mr. Cohen, was also impressed with her mastery of the language, but was disturbed by her open rebellion in his Torah classes. He didn't like her feminist objections to God the Almighty, nor did he enjoy being asked to explain obvious contradictions, like how the commandment, *Thou shalt not kill*, is negated in the many stories of God helping the Israelites smite their enemies.

He too asked her to stay after class, and whilst discussing the reason for the sudden change in her attitude, she noticed him looking at her in an unfamiliar way. She trembled. The sensation was bewildering, pleasant and unpleasant simultaneously.

Her friends began to appear silly and frivolous, and as much as she tried to hide this new perception, they felt it. Equally, her gravity and lack of playfulness alienated them and her controversial opinions angered their parents. Jennifer Segal's mother told her: "You're no longer welcome in our house" and she overheard Michelle Erdman's mother saying: "I want you to stay away from her."

Hurt and confused, *she* stayed away from them and at lunch breaks sat on the far side of the tennis court behind a tree, alone. She had little appetite and seldom ate the

sandwiches Bella made for her - cheese and pickled cucumber on rye - just like Mama used to make.

She developed a new sense of style. She visited the Hippie craft market in Long Street and bought handmade leather sandals, Indian cotton print dresses and hand spun woolen pullovers. She read about Spinoza and started smoking hand-rolled cigarettes.

She grew dramatically - three inches in three months. Her hips widened and her breasts swelled to the size of small melons. She hated the way her hips swayed when she walked and the way her breasts bounced. Her naked body in the mirror was ugly.

One night Bella found her trying on a vest that flattened her chest: "What are you doing?" She stroked Rachel's hair. "You are beautiful! Just like your Mama. The man who marries you ... shoo ... he's a lucky man." Bella sat down on the bath. "But he'll have to come and ask *me* for permission first!" Rachel laughed and felt better.

Later, when she went to kiss her father good night, he held her hands and looked at her with tears in his eyes, then said, "You look just like your Mama."

She didn't believe either of them. She felt like a freak and thought: 'I'm alone ... sailing uncharted waters ... rebelling against God!' She lay in the dark, eyes wide open. 'What's going to happen to me?'

14.

She stopped going to shul altogether by the time she was fifteen, but Friday nights were every bit as rich as they'd always been. She lit no candles and prayed to no God. Instead, she followed the stream through the Glen, then walked along the beach. She climbed the promontory that jutted into the Atlantic and watched the sun set.

She lingered there, long after dusk, and was soothed by the sea: it's silvery sliding roar, the spray of mist as each wave hit the shore, its smooth receding. Waves crashing against

rocks thrilled her. When a wall of water struck a rock and shattered into scintillating drops - each droplet enjoying its instant of individuality before falling back into the bosom of the ocean - she was enraptured.

Aware of the seasons, the moon, the tides, she remembered her mother, and saw herself as part of the nature that surrounded her. 'Nature won't let me down,' she thought, and embraced the rock as her synagogue and the domed sky as her ark.

The beach became a sanctuary for her. An elderly couple that regularly walked their labrador greeted her. She recognised a lone fisherman with his knapsack of hooks and bait. She became aware of the surfers who gathered by the steps next to the shower. Joggers smiled at her.

One day she noticed two of the regulars look at her. She looked away. The boys whistled. She turned and stared at them. Caught out, they waved stupidly. The tall, lanky boy with a gap between his front teeth grinned.

A surge of excitement gave her goose bumps. She was her own person, no longer a Jewess: a young woman in control of her destiny. She had a sphere she belonged in, a wider world. The seagulls swooped along the shoreline. She skipped down to the ocean, and just for the fun of it, walked right in, dress and all.

She smiled all the way home, wet and sandy and alive.

One night she went to 'her' rock. She had a book about Spinoza and her cigarettes with her. She tried to light one in the warm North-Easter, her hands cupped around the flame, when she was interrupted by a voice.

"Can I help you? I'm really good at that."

It was one of the surfers, the tall one.

"I'll show you," he said.

He was already on his haunches with his hand extended. She gave him the matches and he lit one, then steadied the flame inside his hands. She leant towards the flame and puffed a few times to get the cigarette going.

"Thanks."

His eyes were a lapis blue. He sat down next to her, tapped his foot and nodded awkwardly. He looked at her and then at the waves, then at her again. When he spoke, it seemed like he couldn't stop.

"Look, I'm sorry I just came and sat next to you. I've been meaning to for a while, and you know, why should we have to hide behind convention ... I mean, dogs just go and smell each other ... ants touch every ant they meet ... so why shouldn't we?" He nodded energetically. "But people, hey ... human beings have got such hang-ups. D'you know what I mean?"

Rachel laughed. She knew exactly what he meant. She liked him immediately. He was awkward but cute and sincere. His self consciousness didn't last long. Within minutes they were talking easily, as if they'd known each other for years.

"I didn't even ask your name ... I'm Danny," he said and put out his hand.

"I'm Rachel." She took his outstretched hand. It felt strong, yet his long fingers looked sensitive enough to play the violin.

"Did you know the sunset looks different depending on which angle you look at it from?" He pointed towards his right. "If we were in Sea Point now, it might look red; from

Llandudno it might be more orange. The air on the horizon acts like a prism, splitting the white light into colours.” He spread his fingers to show her what he meant. He watched her put her cigarette out, then asked, “How old are you?”

"Fifteen."

"Does your mother know you smoke?"

"My mother is dead."

"Hey, I'm sorry. I'm really sorry. What a dumb thing to say. Sorry hey?"

His eyes softened and she felt his empathy wrap around her. They sat in silence for a while, listening to the ocean. When he leaned over and kissed her, it felt the most natural thing in the world to be kissing this boy. Her heart sang. He put his arm around her and she snuggled up to him. It was the best sensation she had ever experienced. They sat together in a timeless zone, watching the sun set and the first star come out.

He took her to meet his friend Jack who was sitting by the shower on the beach. Jack smiled at her, then looked up at Danny and winked.

"Hi," she said.

Jack shoved Danny. He was much shorter than Danny, but stocky and strong. In a moment they were wrestling on the sand. Suddenly Rachel remembered her father would have returned from shul, that he'd be waiting for her.

"I've got to go," she said.

"Okay, see you around," said Danny.

"Bye," said Jack.

"We're always here, you know, me and Jack," said Danny.

"It was nice meeting you, Jack. Bye Danny."

She walked back along the sand and up over the rocks. She turned around to have a last look at Danny. He was watching her. She smiled and waved. His face lit up as he lifted his arm in a salute.

All the way home she went over their conversation in her mind and was amazed at how freely it had flowed.

16.

Her father was sitting at the table when she got home, but had not yet said the Shabbat blessing over wine and bread.

"Papa, I'll be a minute. I've just got to shake off this sand," she called. A moment later, she ran into the kitchen. Bella stared at her.

"What?" Rachel said, "Why are you looking at me like that?"

"How is she looking at you?" said her father, coming into the kitchen.

"I don't know ... like ... now you're also looking at me that way," she said.

Bella put her hands on Rachel's shoulder. "You're late and we were worried." Bella glanced at her father. "Then you come in here looking like an angel, glowing and fresh like a spring morning ... you look beautiful. How can we not look at you?"

"O Bella," she said, and hugged her.

She kissed her father on the cheek, "Shabbat Shalom."

"Let's eat, otherwise the soup will get cold," said her father. They went to the table and he recited the blessing for the Shabbat meal.

Later, in bed, she thought about Danny. She couldn't wait to see him again and her whole body tingled in anticipation. 'But he's not Jewish – he's a goy,' she realised and her heart

sank. She knew he would never be accepted into her world. 'Mama, you wanted me to be happy. This boy, he makes me happy. Does the joy you want me to experience include this?' She squeezed her eyes tightly shut and buried her head in the pillow.

She dreamed that her mother rose from the grave, eyes glinting, like ruby through crystal; that she stood on the beach gazing towards the horizon. Her long, black hair curved across her body, mirroring the shoreline. A cracked, crystal goblet floated above the ocean, upside down. The wine did not spill.

17.

The next morning, her first impulse was to go to the beach, but she forced herself to stay at home. 'I wish I still took the children's service,' she thought, 'that would distract me.' She made her bed, ate breakfast and cleaned her room, but by ten o'clock she couldn't find anything else to do and found herself running to the beach.

The beach was empty and she tried to appear nonchalant as she ambled along the rock to the same position as the night before. She took her book and cigarettes from her satchel and pretended to read. She didn't want him to think she was chasing him. Unable to concentrate, she closed the book and gazed out to sea, her chin resting in cupped hands, as if deep in thought. She resisted the urge to turn around.

Eventually, she succumbed to temptation, and cast a furtive glance sideways when she saw some surfers getting into their wetsuits. Convinced it was him, she swung round and opened her book again. Ten minutes passed. It was getting hotter and she developed a slight headache from the glare. In her haste to leave the house, she had forgotten to take a bathing costume or hat. Sweat was forming in beads on her brow and under her armpits. A shadow passed in front of her and she heard footsteps. She braced herself for the sound of his voice, the surprise she would enact to see his face. But it wasn't him.

She sat for another twenty minutes, then packed her book and cigarettes - she hadn't smoked one - in her satchel. She got up and walked the long way round, past the steps where the surfers congregated, to increase the possibility of bumping into him. He wasn't there.

Hot and sweaty, she walked home. The streets were empty. It was Saturday, and people were shopping, or if they were Jewish, at shul. All the way up the hill her shadow mocked her - attached to her feet, yet always out of reach.

18.

She went to the beach on Sunday. He wasn't there. On Monday. Not there. On Tuesday she saw him the moment she turned the corner. He stood at the foot of the steps, surfboard under his arm, laughing with Jack. Suddenly unsure, she stopped. He saw her and waved. Her heart skipped a beat.

"Hey Rachel, come over here," Danny called.

She walked over to them, the sand squeaking under her bare feet. Danny adjusted the surfboard, then said in a rush, "Can I walk you home?" She nodded.

They walked over the rocks and along Camps Bay beach. The incoming tide swirled around their ankles. His leather sandals hung over his shoulder, bouncing with each step. She watched his feet displace the wet sand and couldn't think of a single thing to say. She looked up at him, saw curly, sun-bleached hair, freckled nose and blue eyes, as deep as pools. He smiled and touched her shoulder. She relaxed.

They sat down under a palm tree. He said, "Your eyes are beautiful."

A tingle went up her spine and her face felt hot. When they got up, he took her hand. They walked, hand in hand, to the top of Tree Road.

"Are you going to the beach tomorrow?"

When she nodded, he said, "Good, I'll see you there."

He leaned over and kissed her on the lips.

She skipped up the track in the Glen. She noticed every stone, every root, every twist and turn on the path. 'I won't put a foot wrong,' she thought, 'I can do anything.' When she reached her front gate, she turned around. The sea sparkled and the mountain shone in the crystal clear light.

19.

On a Saturday night, three weeks after their walk along the beach, they went to a dance at the local soccer club. When the DJ played *Whiter Shade of Pale* they slow danced - breast-to-breast, eyes closed, breathing with one breath. As the song faded he whispered, "I love you."

Later, in the garden of her father's house, they lay wrapped in each other's arms on the lawn. They stayed there all night. As the birds began to sing, they watched the edges of the sky lighten.

"I'd better go in, Papa will wake up soon."

She took the key from under the mat, blew him a kiss and opened the door. Barefoot, she crept to her bedroom and slipped, fully clothed, under the sheets. Breathing heavily, she watched light spread across the ceiling. She closed her eyes, imagined touching his naked body ... saw her hand slide down his belly ... then her eyes flew open. What if he's not circumcised?

20.

"Dad, I want you to meet my friend, Danny," said Rachel.

She had feared and postponed this moment for weeks, but knew, unless Danny and her father met, her happiness would be marred.

"I'm very pleased to meet you," said Isaac. He tilted his head and looked intently at Danny's face as they shook hands. She forced herself to add: "Dad, he's my boyfriend."

"Aah," said her father, nodding his head. "May I ask ... if you don't mind ... you're not Jewish are you?"

"No, sir, I'm not. I wish I was ... " Danny swallowed. "I'm Roman Catholic."

Rachel saw her father's eyes harden for a second. Her stomach tightened.

"You wish you were," her father repeated, "Do you know what your people did to the Jews during the Spanish Inquisition?" He shook his head sadly. "How they helped the Nazis in Poland?"

The questions hung uncomfortably in the air.

"Mr. Kornfeld, I want you to know that I love and honour Rachel more than I can say. I would never do anything to hurt her. I appreciate what a great race the Jews are and how much suffering and persecution you've had to go through ..."

"I'm sorry my young man, but you can understand nothing. You can know from nothing about this!" His whole body trembled. "I'm glad Rachel's mother never had to see this." He lifted his hands, shrugged, "What can I say?"

He turned and walked into the garden, a newspaper folded under his arm.

The mention of her mother stung Rachel. She took a deep breath, then looked at Danny. His face was red and his right eye twitched.

“Don’t worry,” Rachel said, “My father is a kind man. He just needs a little time. He doesn’t bear grudges.”

She watched her father sit down, stare into the trees. He looked so alone. It was his habit to study the races, sitting in a wicker chair, under the red and blue umbrella. She knew he wouldn’t read his newspaper today.

“I’m sure he’ll get used to us,” she said.

Danny looked at her incredulously. She didn’t believe it either.

21.

She paused in front of Danny’s house - looked at her shoes, smoothed her skirt and took a deep breath. It was a quarter past seven. She opened the gate and walked up to the front door. The porch was clean and neat. A fisherman’s waterproof jacket and yellow boots hung next to a hat stand; bright, pink fuchsia tumbled over the rim of a hanging basket suspended at eye level.

She rang the bell. Immediately she heard footsteps. Danny stumbled into view. He had one shoe on and his hair was dripping. He kissed her on the cheek. She followed him into the dining room where the rest of his family waited.

“Ma, Dad, this is Rachel.” They smiled at her in unison. “Rachel this is my mum and dad, my brothers, Jay and Michael,” he looked around, “Oh, and here’s my sister Linda.”

“Come sit next to me,” said Mrs. Rademan and patted the chair. Rachel noticed Mrs. Rademan had a strong accent and hoped it was Dutch or Scandinavian. “Danny, you sit next to Rachel on the other side.” Danny had his mother’s eyes, the same gentle expression.

The family linked hands while Danny's father said grace. An engraving of St. Peter hung on the wall. She knew Danny's father was a fisherman, that he spent weeks at sea. His hair was blond and curly, his face tanned and creased. Danny had clearly inherited his hair from his father. She watched Mr. Rademan's big hands as he cut the bread and these too she recognised.

Mrs. Rademan served her husband first, then Rachel, because she was a guest. Rachel noticed the accent again and knew what it was. She calculated how old Mrs. Rademan would have been in the war. 'Old enough,' she decided. She accepted the non-kosher meal of roast pork with oven-baked potatoes and peas, but ate without relish. Danny sensed her disquiet and asked to be excused before dessert was served.

They went to sit in Danny's bedroom. His clothes were all over the floor and he kicked them out of the way. He hugged her. "It wasn't so bad hey?" Rachel stiffened. "What's wrong?"

"Let's go somewhere else, Danny."

"What's the hurry? I haven't even shown you my things yet."

"Another time," she said, "Please. I *have* to leave."

"Okay, let's go for a walk."

They walked in silence for a while. Stars twinkled in a clear sky.

"You didn't tell me your mother is German."

"She's half-Afrikaans – as well as my dad, but we were raised speaking English. I didn't think it was important." He stopped. "Is it?"

She sighed and told him about her parents ...

"... so you see, for me, Germany - the people, the language, German products - is the personification of evil." She shuddered. "I have nightmares all the time."

"Mum was brought up in South-west Africa," he said. "She's never even been to Germany. She had nothing to do with the Nazis."

He held her close, stroked her hair, mumbled soothing sounds.

When she'd calmed down he said, "Do you feel like checking out who's at the soccer club?"

"Okay."

Inside the clubhouse, music pounded. They stood outside for a while, smoked a couple of cigarettes, had a beer each, then went in to dance. Strobe lights flashed in time to the drumbeat. They immersed themselves in the rhythm.

Half an hour later, sweating and laughing, they went outside again. A sliver of moon hung over the sea.

"Do you mind living alone with your Dad?" Danny asked. "I mean, do you ever get lonely?"

"Not really. It was always just the three of us - Mama, Papa and me," she said. "I miss my mother, but it's not the same as being lonely. We're still a family, me and Dad." She paused. "And there's Bella. She's like my second mother. She tries to fill the emptiness in the house - she cooks lavish meals and she's always available for a chat and a hug."

Danny said nothing. She turned to look at him.

"Hey, don't you dare feel sorry for me. I'm one of the happiest people I know."

She pushed him on the chest with both hands.

"Come, I'll race you to the tree house. Last one there's a rotten egg."

They scrambled up into the tree house, panting, then fell into each other's arms. Rachel held Danny tight, pressed her head into his chest. It was dark and quiet and private. The words tumbled out before she could stop herself.

"Danny... umm... do you, I mean, are you... circumcised?"

She couldn't believe she'd just said that. She wanted to die. If only she could disappear. Her heart pounded.

"No," Danny's voice sounded puzzled.

"It's.... um, Jews are circumcised and I was just wondering ... you know ... " her voice faltered.

"Does it matter?"

"Yes ... no ... I don't know ... maybe," Rachel moved away from him.

"It's okay, Rachel, I understand." He put his arm around her shoulder. "Come, I'll walk you home."

He jumped out of the tree and helped her down. When they got to her house, Danny smiled at her.

"See you tomorrow, alright?"

"Alright. Thanks." She couldn't look at him. "Bye."

Before going to sleep, Rachel wrote in her journal - she realised, that although she had denounced her God, she could not deny her history. She still *felt* like a Jew, even though she no longer *believed* like one.

22.

Rachel and Danny ran down to the beach. Their final school exams were finished and there was an entire summer holiday of long, hot days and cool, bright nights ahead of them.

There were perfect waves at Glen Beach, what Danny called 'peeling lefts and rights.' He surfed, while she read a book, baking on the sand. Next year, she would go to Art school and he to the army, but on this day there was only *now*.

Danny emerged from the ocean looking like a sea-god. He turned on the shower next to the concrete steps, closed his eyes, put his face up to the sun and let the fresh water wash the salt from his long hair. Then he sprayed his surfboard and placed it with his dripping wetsuit. He sat down next to Rachel.

"It's going to be one of those sunsets - angel wing clouds." He looked at her, eyes sparkling.

They walked barefoot on the sand, hand in hand. They invented names for each other. They stopped at the mountain stream that ran into the sea and waited for the sun to sink. She kissed him on the mouth, and felt her breasts against him. It was a perfect summer evening and she felt like a woman.

23.

"Remember Daniel, make the most of it," Danny's mother said. Rachel stood between Mrs. Rademan and Jack on the Cape Town station platform.

Rachel had feared and postponed this moment for months, but now Danny was going for his compulsory military training in the South African army.

Danny kissed his mother then looked at Rachel. "It's only two years - I'll be out before you know it."

Danny held her and tried to look into her eyes, but she looked off to the distance and tried not to cry. She choked back the sobs threatening to overwhelm her. She felt as if her heart were breaking as she struggled to maintain her composure.

Mute, Rachel watched him board the train. His smiling face, leaning against the window and waving at them, receded as the train pulled out of the station, then he was gone. Jack and Mrs. Rademan each put an arm around Rachel and they slowly walked back to the car. They drove home in silence.

Later, she went for a walk in the Glen. It was the end of summer and she noticed the poplar leaves, their green just starting to turn yellow, shimmer in a light breeze; watched as a leaf drifted, aimlessly, in the soft afternoon light. She was like that leaf, alone and separate, cut adrift.

University of Cape Town

C. *Struggle*

24.

It was a late January evening when she wrote him her first letter, sipping wine and smoking a filter-less cigarette.

Dear Danny

It's only been a week since you left, but it feels like years. I moved into the flat in the Gardens this week. I feel awful leaving Papa, but so far he doesn't seem to mind, and I love it that I can walk to Art School. I'm sitting at my desk looking out on Table Mountain, a black cardboard cutout against the bright blue sky. I found a lamp made from a stump of olive wood at the craft market on Saturday. It's really beautiful. I've taken the legs off my bed and sleep on the floor, covered by the red-and-gold Moroccan quilt. There's an old oak in front of the balcony, its leaves a delicate green, the same green as the legs of a praying mantis.

Jack's been amazing, so supportive and helpful. He's like the older brother I never had. Bella worries about me constantly. She thinks I don't eat enough and sends meals with anyone willing to pop in to deliver them. Today it was my father. I worry about him. He hasn't complained about me moving out, but seems withdrawn.

The campus buildings are beautiful, architectural monuments to a colonial yesteryear, where the sound of hundreds of feet ricochets around the great old halls with their high ceilings. I love the library with its yellowwood floor and aisles and aisles of books.

I feel empty without you and miss you terribly, but there is some comfort in knowing we look at the same sky.

All my love,

Rachel

It was past midnight when she finished writing. She had collected a few wildflowers from the side of the road and now inserted them carefully between the fine writing paper folded neatly inside the still-to-be-addressed envelope she didn't yet know where to send. She could remember his smell as she drifted to sleep but couldn't see the details of his face.

25.

She received her first letter from him early on a Wednesday morning before lectures. She didn't want to open it until she could savour each word, so she waited until afternoon when she was alone, then immersed herself in his words.

Wednesday 23rd.

Dear Rachel

I saw you in every cloud and every rock as the train rushed away from Cape Town. Even the pink dawn sky couldn't stop the ache. I watched flowers and tufts of grass flash past the window and wanted to stop the train. Table Mountain grew smaller and smaller and in no time we were in the Hex River Valley. The peach trees in blossom look like the Van Gogh print you have in your room. The next morning I woke to cold sun striking the window: lush farmland had become the Karroo.

There were five other guys in the compartment with me. Let me tell you about them. Richard wears a St Christopher around his neck and draws pictures of Jesus in the clouds. Little George is Richard's friend. He keeps a comb tucked behind his ear and periodically takes it out to comb his gel-styled hair. They're both married and proudly displayed pictures of their families.

Then there's Barend, wanted by the police for stealing a car, Zoellner, who can't wait to begin training, and Hurwitz, a curly-haired, overweight Jewish guy who is always reading.

My heart pounded when I remembered where I was going. My mother's words – 'make the most of it' – filtered through my panic.

We were on the train for three days and nights. When we arrived at Caprivi - a desolate place with denuded hills and scattered thorn trees growing in hard-baked, red earth - I suddenly remembered I'd had a dream about this place before I arrived - this exact situation!

You live in my heart,

Love Danny.

She folded the letter and immediately wrote him another. She wanted to share with him as much of her own life as she could; all the details of her growth and discoveries. She wrote that her taste in painting gravitated towards the beautiful - she liked Cézanne, Van Gogh and Chagall and enjoyed the playfulness of Klee.

She told him that on campus there were many 'causes' and she had already been convinced to sign a petition to stop the building of the Koeberg nuclear power station, subscribe to a newsletter aimed at protecting the indigenous fauna and flora of Table Mountain, and join in a protest march against the needless experimentation on rats for teaching purposes.

But the main cause was political, the struggle against Apartheid, against the suppression of the non-whites, and every day was a political rally, a speech, a protest. She had attended a few, and read the pamphlets calling all students to action, that were handed out at these events.

She ended her letter by telling him that she loved him with all her heart, and thought of him continuously, and she wrote his strange new address with clear black lines on the

parcel containing her scented pages and a batch of home baked oatmeal-and-honey biscuits.

Later, in bed, she took his letter out again and reread it, and fell asleep holding it close to her heart.

26.

Every day she checked the postbox. After a couple of impatient weeks she received two letters, their envelopes crumpled and dusty. She brewed a pot of tea and went outside on the balcony to read them.

Tuesday 11th.

Dear Rachel

I've got 'culture shock.'

On arrival, a Major Schultz welcomed us to 'thirteen sigh' and we drank sweet rooibos tea poured from huge iron canisters, while he paced and circled us like a boxer warming up before a fight.

"Who are you?" he barked at me.

"Rademan," I said.

"No," he said. "You're 75449553, 85th Battalion, 13SAI, Caprivi."

Then Sergeant-major – "Samajoor" - Human stepped forward. "Men," he began, "people say I believe there's a communist behind every bush. But that's not true." He paused for effect. "No, I believe there are two," and he displayed two fingers of his right hand prominently, turning 360-degrees so there could be no misunderstanding, "two communists behind every bush."

Then Corporal Visagie, a short man with eyes like a rodent and a thin black moustache, marched us to a long corrugated iron dwelling. I chose the top bed of the first bunk I saw, and Hurwitz took the bottom one.

"Long hair is for moffies, man," he said as the barber pulled my head roughly, and thick clumps of hair fell to the floor.

"The army will issue you everything you need," Visagie said that night and I put my chain, knife and photos of you away. Then as he left the bungalow, his parting shot was, "Men, I am now your mother and father." Hurwitz whispered 'God forbid!' on the bunk below me.

I carry you in my heart,

Love Danny.

She felt desolate as she opened the second letter. She poured herself another cup of tea, which she left untouched as she read it:

Wednesday 13th.

Dear Rachel,

I don't march very well so 'drill' is a nightmare. The other day, whenever I was out of step, Visagie made us march even harder.

During the smoke break, Nothnagel, a six-foot seven-inch rugby player from the Orange Free State warned me, "Rademan, if you don't stop fucking around, we're going to fuck you up."

He pointed his index finger between my eyes. Then he dropped his hand and looked at me from under half closed eyes. "What kind of Afrikaner are you anyway, Rademan?" He spat on the ground at my feet and walked away. I gritted my teeth, but said nothing.

Then a guy whose shoulders are as wide as a tree trunk asked, "Don't you dance Rademan? I'll show you - marching is easy - one-two-three-four - one-two-three-four -" and he mimed a boeredans with an imaginary partner.

After the smoke break, I deliberately marched out of step and Visagie extended the session by half-an-hour so that we were late for lunch.

That night I was woken from a deep sleep. Before I could even open my eyes, a pillow was over my face and someone's knees were on my chest. My elbows were held down and punches pummeled into me. I tried to fight them off, but the more I struggled the deeper the knees dug into me. At last, I threw off the pillow and the broad face of Nothnagel glared at me contemptuously.

In the morning I had two black eyes and inflamed cheekbones. My face looked like a badly made puppet. No one asked what happened, but everyone knew. At morning drill Visagie said, "Maybe we'll march better today, hey Rademan? Maybe today we'll sakkie-sakkie!" The rest of the squad laughed.

So I can't describe how happy I was this afternoon when they handed me your package with the crunchies and flowers. I could smell you, touch you, could almost taste you. And now I'm going to sleep with your letter under my pillow.

Love Danny.

She put the letters down, happy that her words were of comfort to him, but distressed at the situation he described. She imagined this strange, new world he wrote of and replied with another long, loving letter. She wanted to pray for his welfare, but to whom? She was still angry with God for taking away her mother. Now she was mad at the state for taking Danny away.

Her dark thoughts aroused old shadows - recollections of trains removing loved ones - which she shut out. Instead, she wrote to Danny about her current inspiration. She had just completed Herman Hesse's *Narciss and Goldmund* and was currently reading Dostoyevsky's *The Idiot*.

She added a lock of her hair to the letter, sealed it and went to sleep. She dreamt that Danny and her mother were in a train trying to escape from a storm, but the train - which had no exits - rushed headlong towards a corner of the sky where a thick, black tornado of smoke coalesced. They both turned and looked right through her.

She woke to see a thin black spiral of smoke curl from the candle that had melted down to the wick. She snuffed it with the spit from her fingers, walked outside and let a fresh wind blow on her face. When she returned to bed, she listened to the wind howl like a crying moon around the building.

27.

It was more than a week later when she received Danny's third letter:

Thursday 21st.

Dear Rachel,

On Sunday there was a 'Church Parade' that was to be reported on in the February edition of Paraat, the Army magazine.

At dawn, we were urgently marched to a parade ground in a beautiful valley surrounded by tanks. We then waited for three hours in the sun. At last, a helicopter arrived from Pretoria. A General stepped forward and addressed us in English. He was so intense, his words so exaggerated, I couldn't believe he was for real.

'Jesus gave us all these weapons, men' he said. 'The Devil works through the communists.' He urged us to obey our superior officer because then 'you serve God.'

I blinked, then heard, 'Let us pray!' and 'Left right!'. We moved from attention to at-ease. This choreography of prayer was so bizarre, that only when I saw everyone close their eyes in earnest prayer did I realise that this was not a parody.

We marched past the General to the sound of a brass band playing Wagner and Sousa, broadcast over a loudspeaker that sent echoes ricocheting off the walls of the valley. Left right left right left right ...the enemy is close... is ever watchful... must be destroyed... in the name of Jesus and the Voortrekkers, in the name of Apartheid and Afrikaans... behind every bush is a kaffir, and behind every kaffir is a communist. The words beat within me, like a drum, and seemed to have a life of their own.

As we filed past, I got a close-up of Samajoor, crumbs in his moustache and his drunkard's eyes out of focus. I looked sideways – disallowed unless there's an 'eyes right' command – and locked eyes momentarily with Visagie. The image of his thin smile lingered and I didn't know if it meant approval at my improved marching, or was a warning.

Now I am tired and must rest.

Love Danny.

28.

Rachel visited her father every Friday. Though her mother had died four years ago, he was still saying Kaddish, though it's customary to say it for one year. When she asked why, he said, "You are a girl; who will say Kaddish for me when I am gone?" He had received a special ruling from the Beth Din to keep saying it and had converted her old room at the back of the house into his own private shul - with a real torah and an ark and lights. She guessed that he spent most of his time in there, which Bella confirmed later, when they washed up in the kitchen.

29.

When she heard about a group dedicated to ending the military call-up - the ECC - she decided to attend their next meeting and arranged to meet Jack there. The room was crowded and she sat in the row second from the back, close to the door through which she had entered. The excited conversation amongst the students created quite a commotion, giving the feel of a rally. The two girls sitting next to her wore no bras, nor did they shave their armpits. They exuded sexuality and independence. As one o'clock approached, the seats filled up. A boy with a white NUSAS T-shirt closed the doors. Every seat in the lecture hall was occupied and many students stood or sat in the aisles.

A girl with shaved hair, dressed in a tank vest, got up on the podium and called the meeting to order. She introduced the speaker. "...Gary Williams, a true son of the struggle." A tall man, dressed in blue jeans and a white T-shirt, stepped up to the microphone.

A hush fell over the audience. "The government's policy of *Total Onslaught* condones oppression of the black masses." His voice was clear and strong. "All opposition is seen as anti-Christian and communist-inspired," he paused, "the so-called *rooigevaar* and *swartgevaar*. The Dutch Reformed Church on the one hand, and the State Education System on the other, justify the demonisation of our true leaders in the state-run, puppet press..."

A few voices in the front row chanted: "Viva Mandela! Viva Biko! Viva Tambo! Viva Sobukwe!" The energy in the room was electric. Rachel felt out of her depth in this clearly subversive atmosphere but was impressed by the assurance of the speaker and the passion with which the audience responded.

Williams continued: "The struggle against Apartheid has gained momentum and even school children have joined the fight. The police and army are killing innocent civilians, and jailing and torturing our leaders. The rule of law has been blacked out by the State of Emergency..." His voice rose. "We can no longer sit on the fence! We must join the struggle to free *all* of the people in this country!" The audience cheered. "We must choose! White students must refuse to go to the army and become tools of this racist evil. I call on all of you to join the End Conscription Campaign."

He raised his hand in a fist and chanted: "Viva! Viva! Viva!"

The front row responded with "Amandla Ngwethu!" Rachel felt confused and excited. Something in their manner resonated with her newfound anger at the state.

Suddenly the girl with the shaved hair ran up to Williams and whispered urgently. He glanced over his shoulder, then disappeared through a back exit. The two girls sitting next to Rachel looked at each other conspiratorially. The young woman on the podium closed

the meeting by asking the audience to share a minute's silence, in memory of an activist who had recently been murdered.

When Rachel turned around, she saw Jack. He'd arrived late and stood at the back, leaning against the wall. He raised his eyebrows and rolled his eyes, clearly unimpressed. She smiled, belying the fact that she'd felt moved – to her the talk had been convincing and thrilling.

Later, on the bus, when she shared her thoughts with Jack, his only comment was, "I didn't like the cold atmosphere. Where's the heart in all of this?" Then he changed the subject and talked excitedly about his new project - carving in balsa and polyurethane foam. Rachel's attention drifted. The scenery flowed past in a blur. She thought of the pale revolutionary and wondered where he'd gone. He reminded her of Uncle Hymie.

She scanned her seventeen years growing up in the clean, white suburb of Camps Bay, with its trimmed hedges and swept promenades. Bella was part of an underclass, allowed into the suburbs to work there during the day, but with a home elsewhere. Bella was always afraid when the policemen drove around with dogs in the back of their vans, demanding ID from any black on the street, and locking them up if they had none.

She had benefited from the system and was thus an accomplice to the crime. This was not a choice that she had made – it had been made for her by the circumstances of her birth – nonetheless, she'd been nourished by forbidden fruit, and she felt guilty and ashamed that she hadn't seen this before.

Her life had been confined to the world of her parents and school, and she had seen little of the real world. Although raised in the shadow of the Nazis, the ultimate symbol of evil, she only knew that horror through the memories of her mother and father. But she had not seen the evil right in front of her. The speaker was right: you have to choose which side you're on, you can't sit on the fence - like the silent majority in Nazi Germany, the comparison rose unhappily in her mind.

30.

The next time she visited her father, she decided to share her new political awareness with Bella. "I am sorry that I have been so insensitive to your oppression," she said.

"This is all God's will, and we should not try to change it," said Bella, and told her the story of Nonquase, the Xhosa girl who convinced her tribe to kill all their cattle. The tale ended in tragedy: without cattle, the tribe starved.

Maybe I should stay away from black and white, remain in my garden of nasturtiums and bougainvillea, she thought, as she wondered at Bella's unexpected response.

31.

The sight of his cursive writing on another fat, dusty envelope filled her with anticipation. She ran inside the flat, threw her satchel down, tore the envelope open, lay back on her bed and began to read, her heart knocking in her breast:

Saturday 7th.

Dear Rachel,

They try and break you. 'See-the-leaf-on-that-tree?' Visagie points in the distance, 'Go fetch!' When we return, he says it's the wrong tree, and the next time, it's the wrong leaf, and so on. We dig sand holes and fill them. We carry heavy rocks from one location to another, and back again.

Yesterday, in front of my bunk, Visagie 'inspected' me, standing so close I could see that his pupils give out no light. "Rademan, why don't your boots shine? They look like a kaffir's who's been working in the dust all day long." He aimed his right hand into my neck. "You're a useless fucking piece of shit, aren't you Rademan?"

I had no idea what the correct response to such a weird confrontation should be, so I looked him in the eyes and said, "Yes, Corporal," meaning that 'I agree, yes-I-am-indeed-a-useless-fucking-piece-of-shit-if-that's-what-I'm-supposed-to-say. Wrong response. Visagie screamed: "Stand at fucking attention and don't fucking look at me and don't fucking answer me back!"

I was completely confused. He ripped the sheets up from the bed I'd remade several times during the night. "A whore wouldn't sleep in this bed." Then he wiped his little finger across my bed frame. He stuck his finger, dirty with thick, black dust, directly under my nose. "So, Rademan, as I was saying, you're a useless fucking piece of shit, aren't you?"

I didn't answer and continued staring straight ahead. Lieutenant Tate stood at the entrance of the bungalow, looking bored, smoking a cigarette. I saw the sunrise splay frost on the window and concentrated on standing very straight and still.

Eventually, satisfied that I had learnt my lesson, Visagie ordered me to do fifty pushups. After about thirty-five, I collapsed. Visagie put his boot on my head. I moaned, "Corporal, I can't." He said, "You can!" It's amazing what fear can do...suddenly I could!

Later, under the shower – open cubicles in full view of everyone else - Visagie approached. He stopped in front of me and looked me up and down. "It's lekker in the army, hey Rademan."

I often wonder if people outside know this place exists. But I won't let them get me down. They won't break my spirit.

I carry you with me, my darling.

Love Danny

She paced on the balcony, cursing, frustrated that she could do nothing to help him.

32.

Rachel and Jack walked along a corridor, up some stairs, past a Students' Union sign, to reach the large hallway where Gary Williams, the speaker from the ECC meeting, was putting up an 'END CONSCRIPTION – NOW!' poster.

"We want to join," Rachel said. Williams looked up. "We want to do something. We believe in this."

"My best friend - her boyfriend - is on the border," said Jack, "and he's shitting off."

Williams scrutinized them for a moment, then said, "Come in," and led them to a small, cramped office, strewn with papers. On the wall was a large poster with the words ALUTA CONTINUA written in bold red above a profile of Che Guevara and a black fist punching the sky.

Jack and Rachel sat on plastic chairs facing Williams perched on the desk. "What's with all the Portuguese?" said Rachel, looking at the poster and recalling the angry feminists chanting Viva, Viva.

"It's the common lingua franca of the Liberation Armies in Angola and Mozambique," he said. "It's used a lot in the camps." He then stepped around them to the door and checked the hallway, before adding, "the MK camps."

"Have you ever been to any?" Rachel asked.

"Some things it's better not to talk about," he said, and smiled mysteriously. He looked at her intensely. From close up, his green eyes seemed to glow like a cat's and she remembered the passion with which he had expressed his ideas at the meeting. "But what I can talk about, are the SADF camps. I spent two years there. And it's not just a case of not wanting to shit off –" he looked pointedly at Jack, "– it's not so bad really – it's more a case of not wanting to be a tool of the government."

He gave them *Application For Membership* forms to fill in. "We have connections overseas - in Holland and Sweden - we're connected with Amnesty International and can get refugee status for conscientious objectors." He looked at her. "It's better than jail," he added knowingly.

Jack was angry when they left. "What's with this guy? First he puts down Danny's struggle, and next thing he's hitting on you."

"He wasn't ... he's just very intense," she said, "and these people seem very committed to the struggle ... and need members ... it's part of their job to try and attract us." But Jack was right: Williams *had* given her the eye and he was very handsome, but she didn't want to acknowledge to Jack that she had noticed.

"The only thing he wants to attract is your body, not your first-year political concepts."

She laughed and put her arm around Jack. "Maybe you're right. But we all want the same thing - to help Danny. That's why we've joined - so we can *do* something about it." This was true even though she was flattered by Williams' attentions, and she changed the subject.

That night she dreamt of a black fire blazing above a pit in the ground and it had her by the ankle.

33.

At last his first pass had come! It was three months since she had seen him. She wore her long denim dress and braided her hair. She and Jack waited at the Military Depot for the airplane to arrive. Danny's mother had lent Jack her car. They saw five or six soldiers walking down the gangway before they saw him - it was *him* waiting behind the line and she ran to greet him. She noticed immediately how reserved he was and that he had put on weight.

She tried to make him happy by talking about her new world on campus. She discussed Jung, her workshops, her and Jack's inspired natural excursions: picnics on the beach, walks through the rainforests, climbs over the mountain. He tried to sound interested but she could see he was in his own world.

He surfed only once. He fell off his surfboard, being unfit and unused to the water, but didn't seem to care. On Saturday night they went to a party. He didn't want to dance and stood to one side. Later, in bed, she couldn't make love to him. She held him close, whispering to his limp body, "it's alright," wanting to assuage his pain. He kept on saying "sorry", embarrassed.

At Sunday lunch with his family, he ate as if he had no sense of taste. Later they were by the waterfall on the mountain when he told her he couldn't stop being anxious about going back. She tried to help him relax but he couldn't snap him out of being morose.

When he left Sunday evening, she was relieved, because she preferred the heartache of missing him to watching him so sad and depressed and feeling guilty about it.

D. Twasa

34.

Distressed by the failed pass and the rotten anti-climax of it, she buried herself in work. Her satchel was heavy with recommended reading books - books about cubism, surrealism, impressionism, minimalism and post-modernism. She preferred to read what the artists themselves wrote - Van Gogh's account of his Japanese influence, Klee's discovery of colour in Tunisia and Monet's descriptions of water lilies.

She felt her mother's presence when she painted and remembered her saying, "paint the emotion you feel." Her own work was full of macabre scenes and faces which, when she dwelt on them, felt like her mother's darker memories, those that had never been satisfactorily explained.

She showed Jack her latest painting of a flower trying to emerge from a tumor, and he showed her his dolphin designs made from polyester resin.

But despite her absorption in her work, she realised she was both disappointed and angry with Danny for being negative and miserable on his pass. After all, he wasn't the only one; she had also made sacrifices and was alone much of the time. He should have tried harder for her sake! She pitied herself and wondered whether she should date other boys on campus, like the dynamic Gary Williams?

She felt shallow and guilty for thinking such thoughts, but resolved that at least she should play it cool and that she wouldn't write to him for several weeks.

35.

A few nights later, Gary Williams came to visit her. She was deeply involved in painting and reluctantly invited him in, although she was struck by the coincidence just days after she had thought of him. He glanced at her large canvas, then wandered out of the open door onto the small balcony. She watched him look through the leafy oak at the mountain.

"I was just about to boil the kettle. Do you want some tea?" she offered.

He turned and nodded, then came back into the room and sat down on the futon lying on the floor. He ran his hand along the bookshelf made from driftwood and picked up *The Idiot* that lay next to the charcoal pencils she used for her sketches.

"Nice place," he said. Rachel sat down on the chair next to her desk. She rested her hand on the pile of Danny's letters that lay next to her unfinished essay on Kandinsky's early work. Gary stared at her and his emerald eyes seemed to see right through her. She was painfully aware of the ladders in her stockings. Then he leaned forward and rested his hand on her breast, which she allowed for a moment, before she pulled away.

Flustered, she got up. "I'll get the tea, " she said, and went to the kitchen. She put two cups and a pot of rooibos tea on a tray. She picked up the tin full of Danny's homemade biscuits. As she opened it she felt a pang of guilt. Faintly she heard Jack's words - 'do you think he's interested in your mind or your body?' - echo in the back of her mind, but she was vaguely toying with the idea of – of *something!* – and pushed them away.

As she walked back into the room she saw Gary was reading one of Danny's letters. His face flushed deep red as he put the letter down. To cover his embarrassment he asked, "How is your reading of *The Communist Manifesto*?"

"I found it dry, cold and heartless," she said, suddenly repulsed by him.

An uncomfortable silence settled over them. The tea was forgotten.

Instantly she saw how much she loved Danny and how dull and lacklustre this stranger was in comparison: she would break her silence and write to him. Tonight.

"I've really got to finish this painting," she said, "please go now." He left without saying a word. She stood at the door and watched him walk down the stairs.

Immediately, she wrote to him, how she missed him and would wait any length of time for him and tolerate any of his mood swings. She went to bed exhilarated by the renewal of emotion within her and was thankful for the revelation that Williams' visit had provided. She fell asleep with an aching feeling of heat in her stomach and thighs, longing for his touch.

36.

She was concerned that Danny himself hadn't written for weeks, as she sent off her letter. The very next day she received two letters. She opened the first letter and immediately understood why he hadn't written.

Saturday, 3rd.

Dear Rachel,

Where do I start? When I got back from pass I volunteered to become a Driver - I thought it would be an easy job. At least I could spend time on my own. Also, we were told we had a good chance of being transferred out of here as a Driver.

Part of the course is intensive weapon-handling, so for the last few weeks, I've been shooting guns, taking them apart, cleaning them, putting them back together, taking them apart, cleaning them, even dreaming about them.

The other day a weapons instructor from Pretoria, Colonel Cox, landed on the shooting range in his chopper to observe our training. I was waiting my turn to shoot when I got

distracted by a clump of beautiful little orange and purple flowers - they looked just like the sunrise I'd watched earlier.

"Rademan, what the fuck are you staring at!" shocked me out of my reverie. Visagie's small eyes were glaring at me.

"Sorry Corporal," I said.

"You'll be more fucking sorry when that thing goes off in your fucking hand!" said Visagie.

I heard the whoosh of a mortar bomb leaving Richard's R1. We watched it land on the far side of the hill where it started a veld fire.

"Go fetch it," Visagie said.

"Don't go, Danny ... it's fucking live," said Richard, then he turned to Visagie:

"Corporal, it's much too dangerous."

I waited. Visagie said, "That's a fucking lawful order, troop!" The platoon watched as I inched my way across the veld towards the undetonated bomb. A strange sensation shivered up my spine. I thought: 'I could die now.' Suddenly there was no time - I felt as if I was moving in slow motion, swimming through space. I remembered I'd dreamt this all before - this very scene - I knew, whatever the outcome, this was my destiny; whatever happened was supposed to happen.

My whole being was filled with a calm confidence. I retrieved the unexploded grenade and strode back to Visagie. I saluted and said, "Order complete!" then placed the live grenade in his hand and marched off to join the others. The platoon cheered.

Colonel Cox turned angrily towards Visagie.

"Who is he?" he shouted, pointing at me, meaning, 'What is his mustering?'

Before Visagie could answer I yelled, "A man, Colonel. A man."

"Is this how you train your troops, Corporal! I've never seen such bad attitude! I want to see you in the Major's quarters immediately!"

Visagie glared at me as he marched off behind the Colonel to see the Major. I knew I was in deep shit but didn't care. After all, I'd escaped death, so what were the words of a mere Colonel in comparison.

I haven't seen Visagie since then. I wonder what will happen? I'm going back into the bush on Monday.

Listen, I'm sorry I was such a misery on my last pass. I'm going to get above this, you'll see. I'll be down again in a few months and I'll make it up to you.

PS I haven't received any of your letters. Hope everything's alright.

I kiss your eyes,

Danny.

She felt a pang at the part about him not receiving any letters. She recognised his voice in the letter but not the tone and decided to go out, to digest and reflect on his words, before reading the next letter. She headed for the field at the end of the road and walked through the long grass, entranced by the strange shadows cast by the full moon. She noticed the pungent smell of cat pee at regular intervals.

Moving left to avoid a rock in her path, she realised the mound was not a rock at all, but a human being, a tramp, lying in a sack. An old woman lifted her head, held out her hands and said in a quivery voice, "nothing for me, madam?"

"I've only got tobacco."

The old woman was delighted and showed a toothless grin. She smelt terrible. Rachel tried not to breathe the decay in her breath as she bent down to share her tobacco.

Trembling slightly, the old woman rolled a smoke. Rachel rolled one too.

"I bet miss's got a lot of boyfriends, hey miss?" said the old woman. Rachel smiled.

"Bye," she said and turned to walk home.

When she returned to her flat, she boiled a pot of tea, and sat down to read the second letter:

Wed 12th.

Dear Rachel,

I can't believe I've finished the Driver's Course! This month felt like a lifetime.

On the weekend we went to Windhoek to celebrate. I got blind drunk. There was a moment, sitting in the bar at the royal hotel, when the barmaid asked me if I wanted a beer and I couldn't find my voice. I just sat and stared at her. I'd forgotten what it feels like to be spoken to kindly. The gentleness in her voice reminded me of you and a wave of longing swept over me. I had a beer. Then another. And another.

When we got back to camp on Sunday night, we awaited news of our transfers. I thought I had a pretty good chance of being transferred because I'd completed both the Basic and Grade II Drivers' Courses. The mere thought that I'd be able to hitch home at weekends made my heart beat faster.

We had to wait until Tuesday. Visagie read out the transfers: "Odendaal – Bredasdorp; Konradie – Kroonstad... Being so far down the list, I had to wait longer than almost anyone before I heard my name ... Visagie narrowed his eyes "Caprivi," then he looked at me. "And you're on guard duty the next few weekends, so forget about pass for awhile." His expression spoke, loud and clear - 'This is what you get when you fuck with me.'

After the squad was dismissed, he called me over. "Hey shitface, go fetch me and the Lieutenant some tea and rusks." Although I was completely deflated I walked briskly to the canteen. "It's lekker in the army, hey Rademan?" said Visagie when I returned. He and the Lieutenant exchanged smiles.

"Yes, Corporal. Yes," I said, and as I walked away I reaffirmed my resolve: "I will survive. I can do this. They won't break me, they won't! I won't let them, the fucking bastards!"

I carry you as always, in my heart.

Danny.

She put the letter down and felt restless. How she missed him! Dark clouds, heavy with rain, hid the mountain and cast a gloomy light in her flat. She switched the kettle on and lit a cigarette. A gust of wind rattled the window. She made a cup of coffee and went to sit on the balcony. She lit another cigarette and gazed at the pre-storm sky. 'I'll visit Danny on the border,' she thought. The clarity she felt surprised her. 'If he can't come see me, I'll go see him.' With that she stubbed out her cigarette and drained the last of her coffee.

Then she picked up her paintbrush and started adding detail to the face she had outlined. After several hours the demon was transformed into a menstruating figure, bleeding into the gutter.

Later, when she lay in bed an image of the bright moon sailing over long grass floated behind her eyelids and as she fell asleep, the toothless old woman, laughing to herself, wore the face of her mother.

37.

She placed the train ticket to Windhoek on the kitchen table and crossed off the days before she would see him. Then the day before she left a letter came from him that uplifted her spirits even before seeing him.

Friday 14th.

Dear Rachel

Eight long months I've been here, in this 'theatre of the absurd'. I hardly get any sleep, four hours a night, if I'm lucky. I've got a radical cough, dry and rasping, that seems to

be getting worse. My throat burns every time I swallow. Sometimes I wonder if I've got whooping cough.

If I didn't have a sense of humour I don't think I'd have made it this far. The names I've been called – drol, hond, perd, voel, vark, piel, hol - you have to laugh.

Sometimes my fear overcomes me and I ask – what if they keep me here forever? What if they kill me? It seems there's no limit to their authority, they're answerable to no one – where's my assurance that I'll only be here for two years – why not ten or twenty? And then I vasbyt; I haven't broken when I thought I could, and somehow I've carried on.

The trick is to feel free in this prison, to see light in the darkness. The other night I stood guard duty, alone under the sky between two in the morning and dawn, and I suddenly understood that freedom is something inside me – even here. After all, there are still birds that fly over the parade ground, clouds float overhead. In the first few months, I had the feeling that everything – even nature – is in prison. But then slowly I learned, that even though they are mad with God and the Volk and The Devil, and though they took everything away - my clothes, my time, my words, my hair, my walk - I've heard songs of freedom while boning my boots, and dreamt of rifles turning into violins.

Sa – lute! Unfurl the orange-white-and-blue while Die Stem plays...

I love you more than ever.

Danny

She put the letter down with a smile on her face. As she stepped outside, rain fell on the mountain and the sun came out. A double rainbow encircled Cape Town as the sun shone through a light rain.

She signed in at the Windhoek Royal Hotel. The receptionist handed her a large, old-fashioned key. She took the key and climbed the stairs, letting her hand slide along the wide wooden banister. She stopped in front of room 103. 'This is it' she thought and unlocked the door. The bed was huge, with double size pillows, Egyptian cotton sheets and a white embroidered bedspread. Early morning sunlight streamed through the door leading out onto a wide stoep. She put her bag down next to a round table in the centre of the room and breathed in the fragrance from cut roses in a wooden bowl. She smiled and sat down on the bed to wait.

The door opened, slowly. She stood up as Danny, dressed in brown overalls, came in. 'The haircut suits him,' she thought as their eyes locked. Her heart pounded and blood rushed to her face. She'd forgotten the intensity of his eyes, how they looked like the Atlantic after a South Easter. Her legs trembled. He put his balsak down and gripped her shoulder with his left hand. His jaw clenched. She reached for his other hand, interlocking her fingers with his. She could feel their hands exchanging energy.

"Danny ..."

"Shhhh ..." he put his finger to his lips.

"But I need to talk. I want to explain why I didn't write. I want to tell you what's been happening to me." Her words tumbled out in a rush, her voice too loud in the small room. She looked out of the window and cleared her throat, then said softly, "I was angry with you – I know it doesn't make much sense; you're the one having a hard time – but your last pass was such a disaster. But then I had this insight, and I realised how much I loved you -"

"I understand; there's nothing to explain," he said, his voice calm and steady, but his right eye twitched involuntarily.

She slid her hand under his shirt till it rested over his heart and he put his arms around her. They stood like that, with eyes closed, for a long time. He pulled away but she held him with her eyes, then she led him to the bed. They undressed and embraced under the cool sheets.

She opened herself, wide, like a river, and she gave herself to him. They moved like water, like flames dancing.

They lay in each other's arms in silence, at peace in the stillness. Her mouth tasted of fruit. Her belly felt on fire with the dry heat of the desert.

"Let's eat," he said.

They both burst out laughing. The laughter released bubbles of joy that washed over them in a euphoric cascade.

They were the first customers in the dining room. She doodled patterns on Danny's chest with her fingers, then rested her hand on his leg under the table as they waited for breakfast to be served. They ate freshly baked bread with jam and drank strong coffee. She felt light and free.

Hand in hand they walked down the main street in Windhoek, visited the botanical gardens and the old museum.

Danny wanted to show her his special place in the desert. In the afternoon they drove a few hours away from the town until they came to the edge of an ancient dry riverbed. There they watched the sunset and the dusk deepen at the edge of some koppies.

Under the open sky, they made love again. She lay on her back and pulled him into her, giving herself to him totally, wanting to heal him with her eyes and her touch. Their bodies became one again, and they saw their moon shadows mingling on the ground.

"It might not be safe," she said, almost to herself, as he moved inside her.

She looked up at the vast blackness and a light like a shooting star seemed to flash across her. The stars shone as if the sky was a vortex of crystal; a crystal night.

"If anything had to happen, it would be a child of love," he said, looking into her eyes, with an expression that was at once whole, kind, sincere and affectionate.

When they later lay in the quiet his voice was very distant. "This is the perfect place to be born." He was looking straight up at the sky. "And the perfect place to die."

39.

Back home, she painted manically, caught in a euphoria that kept her up all night, where hours seemed like minutes and she forgot to eat. Empty bottles of paint accumulated around her easel. She worked on five or six canvases at a time and her flat reeked of oil paint and turpentine. The same image surfaced again and again: destroyed villages in a burning landscape with distraught, distorted faces peering out at her through broken glass.

Her elation was undiminished, despite the horror she depicted on her canvases: the more she painted, the lighter she felt.

She stopped reading theories of art and instead of completing the mid-year projects, she continued with her own paintings. Her professor warned her, “if you don’t complete assigned projects, no matter how good your technique or how many paintings you produce, I can’t give you a pass.”

‘I don’t care,’ she thought, ‘I’m an artist. Artists don’t study in libraries, they *work*.’ She painted feverishly, ate erratically and hardly slept at all.

She felt nauseous but had strange cravings. She was tired all the time, yet couldn’t sleep.

She wrote to Danny:

Dear Danny,

Everything feels weird. I don’t know what’s going on. I’ve got no one to talk to and feel so alone. I don’t understand my feelings anymore. I’m painting like mad. I wish you were here, to be the roots to my wings.

Rachel.

Not 'love Rachel', just 'Rachel'. She re-read the note, then tore it up and tossed it in the wastepaper basket. She enclosed a small black and white sketch in an envelope, and sent that instead.

40.

Sunday 3rd.

Dear Rachel,

It's Sunday night and I'm lying on my bunk with an aching head. I've got an overview of the bungalow from up here. Waves of nausea come and go. I drank too much. Again.

Mac is listening to Radio Five and a New Orleans-style blues song fills the bungalow.

"Hey Mac, switch off that kaffir music!" says Whitey.

Mac laughs. "Most pop music comes from the American Negroes, Whitey."

"I don't care. Kaffirs don't have souls."

"Where'd you hear that shit?"

"It's written in the bible."

"I won't switch it off. I'm not listening to your shit!" says Mac.

Whitey stands in front of Mac, fist raised. "Mac, put that off – now!"

"Jesus! I didn't know you so were crazy about this." Mac turns it off.

"Can't you guys say something intelligent for a change! For God's sake, the drivel you talk!" says Hurwitz, looking up from his book.

"Like what?" says Mac.

"Like the fact that there is a world out there where if you're black you're chained to the dawn trains and if you're white you end up in this place," says Hurwitz.

"What the fuck you're talking about, Horvitch! I thought I liked you," says Whitey now.

"I'm with you, Hurwitz," says Richard. "I'm Catholic and I'm also tired of all this Protestant crap!"

"Listen to you. Why don't you guys just go and join the ANC?" says Whitey in disgust.

"Ah, shut up all of you," says Mac. "Otherwise I'm turning on my radio."

Richard hunches over his sketchbook, and finishes his drawing which he shows to little George. "Hey my brother, I feel so bad, man, how I've treated my wife. I've been bad, my brother. I feel guilty before God and my wife and my child. I've broken my holy vows. I must go talk with the dominee - hey, I must go home."

Zoellner is frenetically polishing his boots. "Hey, Zoellner, you're not having an orgasm, relax," Little George laughs, then turns back to Richard. "Let's see your drawing?"

Richard closes his sketchbook. "Uh-uh. Let's rather play cards. Hey Willem, stop playing that guitar. We're going to play poker."

"My chick is forty-two, but I'm not going back, I swear," says Zoellner while Richard shuffles the deck. "She's had this hysterectomy and her sons give me a hard time."

Zoellner cuts the deck then Richard deals the cards. He blows on the cards, touches each one for luck, and whispers, "Ok baby."

Zoellner looks at his cards and shouts, "I'll sommer play R200 a game – right now."

George bites his moustache. Richard and Willem don't give anything away.

They've been playing for about half an hour. Zoellner has made a bit of money. We're all drunk, but Zoellner is off his head. He's got this idea stuck in his head that he's going to kidnap a Samil.

"I'll kidnap a Samil," he shouts, "I'll take a fucking Samil right out of here, park it outside a whorehouse, and fuck some whore's brains out."

So there you have it, a snippet of random ramblings of B-section, Bungalow 19, 13 SAI, Caprivi on Sunday night the 20th June 1985. It's much later now. Everyone is sleeping, well almost everyone. Zoellner is still rambling, "I'll take a fucking Samil – right now – I'll kidnap a fucking Samil." He's been trying to get into Richard's sleeping bag for the last ten minutes, even though Richard's in it.

What a madhouse!

I can't forget that night in the desert, the sky black, the stars like diamonds. I feel like I traveled up the Nile.

I love you,

Danny.

41.

Danny's stories of camp life opened a window into a strange, desolate world where, despite the environment, he kept the memory of their love alive. She painted *her* world through a haze of too many cigarettes and cups of coffee.

When her friend, Lulu, invited her to come and live in Observatory for a few weeks – 'we can paint, dance, explore' – she accepted immediately, hoping for a distraction. She looked around her flat when she'd finished packing and realised she'd miss the oak tree and her mountain view. In Observatory she'd have a view of plastic on barbed wire and be surrounded by the dust of an industrial location - 'it's more fitting to the way I look,'

she thought, as she caught sight of her reflection in the balcony door, saw her unkempt hair and pale skin.

She bumped into Cynthia Kaimowitz at the cafe in Lulu's street. The same Cynthia Kaimowitz who used to sit upstairs in shul during their high school years.

"Are you still, you know, so religious?" Cynthia asked.

"I suppose I am – it's just that God has changed, or my concept of God, if you know what I mean."

Cynthia looked at her blankly and an awkward silence hung between them. The question evoked memories of a time when she and her mother had been close, a time when she'd felt a profound sense of belonging and somewhere deep inside she became aware of how far she had strayed.

"I'm sorry. I have to go," she said and ran out.

She sat with her head in her hands, totally confused. 'Have I betrayed my mother? Danny? God?' she wondered. 'No, not my mother, she wanted me to live a full life. And I am. I haven't betrayed her. Nor Danny. It's not my fault we're apart. And God? Surely not, if anything *He's* betrayed me!' she felt a flash of anger and lifted her head. She started the car and drove furiously down the road. But the feeling wouldn't go away, the feeling of betrayal.

42.

She went to visit her father. Bella let her in and clucked disapprovingly, "You always wear stockings with ladders! Come, take them off, I'll darn them. And your hair" She shook her head, "Here, let me brush it for you." She sat her down and went to fetch a brush. "Your hair's so beautiful, long and thick, just like your mama's," she started brushing vigorously, "your Papa is in the garden Ah here he is."

Her father's face fell when he saw her.

"You look unwell my child. Are you alright?"

"I don't know ... I *have* been feeling a bit strange lately."

"I think Doctor Kay should have a look at you. I'll go and phone him right now."

Doctor Kay came to the house and asked Rachel a few questions. He gently probed her belly and listened to her heartbeat, then he said:

"You're pregnant, Rachel."

Bella's eyes widened as her hand flew to her mouth. A shiver passed through Rachel and she gasped. An image of sky flashed through her mind, a vast night sky in the desert.

Isaac, his voice hardly audible in the heavy silence, asked, "Do you remember the story about the four rabbis?"

Rachel looked at her father with tears in her eyes. Why had he asked that? 'Is it because I have lost my faith?' she wondered.

43.

Danny's next letter shocked her.

Monday, 12th.

Dear Rachel,

Last night Richard came back to camp from a bush operation to find a 'Dear Johnny' letter waiting for him - his wife wrote that she had been seeing another man and was pregnant with his baby. Later, while the rest of us were asleep, he stuck an R1 under his chin and pulled the trigger. Part of an eyeball and bits of his brain were splattered on the upper bunk.

The army has charged him, post-humously, with damaging government property and won't give him a military burial. Can you believe it? Richard left a note on Little George's bed asking him to please send his daughter his sketchbook.

This place ... like hell, I swear.

Danny.

44.

"Danny!" Rachel said, pressing the phone to her ear, "Oh Danny, I can't wait to see you again." She wanted to hold him, comfort him somehow.

"Me too," he said. His voice sounded strong and clear. "It's not too long now." In her mind's eye she saw him as he'd been when they were together in Windhoek – tanned and fit. She remembered the feel of his skin, the smell of him, saw again the domed, sparkling sky, felt the warm wind wash over their naked bodies as they lay on the ground. A rush of desire swept through her.

"Jack says to tell you he's shaped you a new board. He says there's going to be a full moon, possibly a big swell."

"Listen, I've got to go. I'll be in Cape Town by the 18th, I'll phone just before I leave." And he was gone. She listened to the dial tone for a moment, then put the phone down. She looked at the painting she had just completed - a perfectly rendered, sparkling, crystal glass on a velvety, indigo background - and smiled.

'I'll tell him when I see him,' she thought, 'It's only one more week. I'll tell him about our child then.'

45.

She and Jack waited impatiently for Danny. He was already three days late. Not sure what to do, they went to the Castle to try trace him. A clerk gave them a lecture on troop movements and security. The already interminable wait intensified. There had been no word from Danny for a week, a tumultuous, exhausting seven days for both of them. After yet another series of fruitless, circular conversations, they fell into a restless sleep around midnight on Saturday.

She woke at sunrise, her mouth thick with the taste of stale smoke. She drifted on the edge of a dream as a silver radiance blurred the border between sleep and waking. She sighed and plunged down, down ... down ...to dream of volcanoes erupting in plumes of fire at the beginning of the world.

"Rachel! Wake up!" Jack was shaking her wildly. "You've got to wake up!"

"Uh, unnhuunh" She pushed his hand away and turned over, "Go away."

"Fuck man, oh fuckRachel!" He was crying. She struggled to sit up from amongst her tangled sheets. She saw Jack straighten up, gracefully, in slow motion, she saw him take a step away from the bed, watched his mouth move, saw the air ripple as words formed and made their way to her ear ... *Danny is dead* ...she turned, tried to avoid the words. She put her hands over her ears and shook her head, "Nooooooooooooo"

"Danny's dead, Rachel. He's dead! Never fucking coming back."

"O my God – my God – my God." Rachel screamed.

The man in the flat downstairs banged against the ceiling, "Quiet! What's going on up there? People are trying to sleep around here."

Jack bellowed out of the window, "My friend just died. My best friend Danny is dead."

Rachel felt an intense burning sensation on her forehead as a sheet of white pain blinded her. She fell back onto her pillow, moaning.

46.

The brass band slow-marched in time to Handel's *Death March*, as two soldiers draped a South African flag over the coffin, then stood at attention and saluted. The coffin was empty - because his body had been in such a bad state of decomposition they had left him in the desert. Heavily sedated, Rachel stood between Jack and Mrs. Rademan. Jack slipped his arm in hers as she struggled to keep her balance.

Mr. and Mrs. Rademan, dressed in their Sunday best, stood stiffly erect, watching the proceedings with restrained dignity. Danny's brothers and sister stood quietly next to their parents. Mrs. Rademan hid her sorrow under her hat, her head bowed as she mouthed the Lord's Prayer.

Then the assembly sang the National Anthem - '*Ons sal lewe / Ons sal sterwe / Ons vir jou Suid Afrika*' - the flag was lowered to half-mast and the ceremony ended. The abrupt silence expanded into a gaping hole. 'Is this how it all ends,' Rachel wondered, 'in an irrevocably final, cavernous silence?' She looked up and saw a soldier, a small man with a thin black moustache, staring at her. He looked away when she caught his eye. Rachel went up to him.

"Did you know Danny?"

"I was his superior officer." The man paused, swallowed. "He died a hero's death," he continued, nodding his head, "You can be proud of him."

Visagie! Her legs trembled and gave way but Jack leapt forward to catch her. She clung to him, gulping air. Visagie looked at the ground, then walked away. A moment later Rachel pulled away from Jack, "Oh no, I forgot to ask him if he's got any of Danny's stuff. I've got to speak to him again." She ran after Visagie through a small arched

doorway, then descended a staircase, which led into a musty room. Members of the brass band were scattered around the room, packing away their instruments or drinking coffee from Styrofoam cups.

“I wonder,” she began as she entered, “if there was a letter or ...”

Visagie spun around, his unfinished sentence - “... a fucking commy Cape Town soutpiel...” - hung in the air. He stared at her in surprise, but the soldier he was talking to hadn’t yet seen her and said, “I wouldn’t mind fucking his goose, though. She’s a sexy fucking thing, hey.”

She turned away and stumbled back up the stairs. He ran after her and grabbed her sleeve, “I’m sorry,” he said, “I didn’t mean you to hear ...”

“Don’t touch me!” she jerked her arm away from him, “I don’t care what you meant. One thousand of you aren’t worth one of him. You – all of you – disgust me.” She ran out into the blinding glare, past a dazed Mrs. Rademan, into Jack’s arms.

“Take me away from here Jack. Please, just take me away. Take me somewhere far, far away from this place.”

47.

Jack took Rachel up Lion’s Head, to a place where sweet-smelling reeds grew next to a slow stream. It was here - where she had often lain with Danny - that she collapsed internally and surrendered to the anguish that engulfed her. She whispered to Jack, “I’m pregnant,” and saw him smile as if from a hundred feet away. Later she remembered that she fell off the mountain and Jack brought her home and Doctor Kay had given her an injection...

She tumbles... round and down the turning, twisting stairway, tripping and slipping and stumbling, down, down, spiraling through sweet-smelling fleshy fynbos. Below, remote

and vast, the sapphire ocean breathes ... in ... revealing sculpted sandstone ...out ... surging towards the shore. Whale-like swells heave under gossamer mist ... in ... exposing a dark waterline ... out ... swirling, marbled blue and white, around cormorant speckled rocks. She hears Danny's voice whispering secrets, then watches as the wind carries his words away into the setting sun, golden and mysterious, shimmering in the needled water. She sees his clear blue eyes, senses his soft hair flowing across her face, experiences the mountain become his body, rugged and fragrant and her heart aches with longing...

Rachel drifted into consciousness where Bella sat on the bed, stroking her limp hand, letting tears run uncontrolled down her cheeks. Outside the wind blew.

"I prayed for you in church tonight, Rachel," Bella said. "The spirit! We were singing *iyesu zangalale wayethanda - Jesus never slept last night, He prayed with me.*" She sang and clapped the hymn. "Woah! God's spirit is strong. I prayed for you – for your father, for your mother, for your child, for all of us!"

She leaned over to pick up a bowl on the bedside table. "Come my child, this soup is hot. Come eat with me," and she lifted the spoon to her mouth.

Rachel had a spoonful of soup, then said, "Bella, I had a dream of him on the mountain. He said he wanted to sleep in the position of those who are going to die, and I thought, 'He's going to die,' until I remembered, he's already dead."

"Woah, Rachel - you've really got the *twasa kancinci!*" Bella stroked her head.

"We were by the sea, walking on the shore," Rachel continued. "He was closest to the waves, they were huge but we swam anyway, and it was warm and painless and beautiful. 'I cannot speak a civilised tongue any more,' he said, and then, 'I love you, Rachel.'" Her eyes closed.

"Hey sisi, if you were Xhosa, we would say you've been chosen by the ancestors and everyone would listen to your dreams. But white people, they don't understand these things."

Bella stroked her for a long time, then Rachel remembered her covering the bowl of soup with a plate, kissing her hands and leaving the room.

Without him, everything was meaningless. 'Alone, alone, alone ... I'm alone,' echoed relentlessly in her head. Then, even though she thought she had no tears left, she cried some more. Outside the window, it was cold and wet.

48.

Her father, inappropriately dressed in a woollen suit, paced up and down the labour ward, shielding his eyes from the blades of sunlight cutting across the shadows on the floor. Then he sat down in the corner of the room and picked up a newspaper. He turned to the racing pages but couldn't keep his eyes on the page. She screamed as another contraction gripped her, tightening, tearing, relentless.

"Take a deep breath," said the midwife. "Deeper ... good, now push, push as hard as you can, go with the contraction. Come on, push ... that's it. I can see the head. Almost there, a little more. Well done. You're doing really well. It's not long now."

"Be careful with my daughter, nurse - she is young - she is very thin - it is dangerous!"

"You worry too much, Mr. Kornfeld," the midwife said when the contraction had passed. "Girls much younger than her give birth all the time. She is already eighteen! Why don't you go and have a nice cup of tea in the canteen downstairs."

"I don't need tea. Where must I go? How can I leave her? I must stay here!"

"Ok, suit yourself Mr. Kornfeld, but there's nothing to worry about. Babies are born every day. Everything will be just fine. You'll see."

Doctor Kay came in. He smiled reassuringly at Isaac. "I'm not worried about her. She'll be alright," he said, then he spoke briefly with the midwife, then went to Rachel.

Her father said to the midwife: "Why should he be worried? After all it's not his pain."

Her face contorted as another contraction hit. And another. And another.

"Push ... push ... here it comes ... you can do it ... good ... just one more ..." a piercing scream split her open and the head slid out. Doctor Kay grinned.

"Rachel look, here's your baby. Give me your hands ... ok ... now put them under the arms ... that's it ... ok ... now, lift your baby out."

Rachel's fingers tightened on the slippery, soft flesh and tugged. A luminous silence descended as she lifted her baby onto her belly. She looked over at Isaac, timidly standing near the doorway, and smiled. "Papa, come see, it's a boy. Oh, Papa, he's so beautiful. Everything will be alright now. I just know it will."

"I have a grandson?" Isaac stood transfixed. "I have a grandson?" Tears ran down his face unashamedly. 'He's crying just like when Mama died,' Rachel thought, 'Death and birth, they're not so different.' He came over to the bed and put one hand on Rachel's forehead, the other on the baby's head. Rachel took his hand from her forehead and squeezed.

"Papa, I know what his name is, his name is Dane. I'll call him Dane. After his father."

A smile spread across Isaac's face as he nodded, "Yes, that is a good name." He closed his eyes and rocked gently, mumbling a prayer of gratitude.

Rachel stroked Dane's body, ran her hand across the tufts of wet hair, "He looks just like a puppy with his wrinkled skin. And he's all pink. Oh Papa, he is beautiful, isn't he?"

"A boy, a little boy, a kleine yidel - oy oy oy," he said.

"Congratulations, Mr. Kornfeld. Mazeltov!" said Doctor Kay.

"Did you see? A boy, a little boy," Isaac said, breaking the good news to the doctor and the midwife. They all laughed.

"Rochela," Isaac said, "your mother would be so proud. We will give him a brit." Then he grabbed hold of Doctor Kay's arm and together they danced in a circle, singing '...mazeltov simchatov, mazeltov simchatov...'

49.

Eight days later, Rabbi Gold arrived at the house to conduct the circumcision. He greeted Rachel with a perfunctory nod, then spoke to her father as if she wasn't in the room.

"She should have a mikvah, Isaac. After all, she wasn't married, and *he* wasn't one of us."

"Why do you want to make it difficult? You know what she's been through." Rachel moved a step closer to her father, but Rabbi Gold continued to ignore her. Her father put his arm around her, "Where does it say she must have a mikvah?"

"I don't know, Isaac," the Rabbi's mouth turned down as he shrugged, "First, you don't want a minyan. Then you want the brit at home. Now you don't want a mikvah. What kind of a Jewish house *is* this?" He shook his head, "I'm ashamed to be involved with this ... this ... travesty!"

Rachel, unable to hold her tongue any longer, said, "Well I'll tell you what you can do, you can just leave."

"Rachel please! Abie!" Isaac stepped between them. "Stop it, stop it!"

Looking directly at Isaac, Rabbi Gold said, "Do you want me to perform the ceremony or not?"

Before her father could respond, Rachel said, "I - want - you - to - get - out - of - this - house." She glared at the Rabbi. "Right now!" She turned to her father, "And Papa, don't try to stop me. I want nothing more to do with his kind of Judaism." She turned back to the Rabbi, "Go! Yes, go! He's *my* son and *I* will determine his future. Not you!"

"Can this be?" Rabbi Gold looked at Isaac, who covered his ears with his hands but said nothing. "Very well, then." He stood for a moment still looking at Isaac, then muttered to himself as he headed for the door, "You will be sorry, my girl. That's all I can say. You will be sorry."

Rachel and her father sat down next to each other on the couch. They sat like this, not speaking, not looking at each other, for half an hour. The sound of the baby's gentle snuffles soothed them as he slept on, oblivious.

"Papa, I'm not going to raise him as a Jew." She grabbed his wrist. "Promise you won't force me! Promise me! It's enough; we've suffered enough. It must stop now. I don't want him to have a brit."

Her father gazed at the sleeping baby and gently rocked the crib. "Little Dane, little Dane."

"Papa, promise me."

"Okay. I promise." He sighed. "What can I say? I'm a simple man. I'm just a simple man. I don't want to fight anymore."

50.

Rachel walked along the promontory at Glen Beach and sat down on the furthest edge. She gazed, unseeing, at the ocean. Shivers coursed through her body in spite of the warmth from the setting sun. Abruptly she got up. She turned and jogged back to her car. Then she drove to Jack's apartment.

Jack, shoulders drooping, sat curled up on his bed reading a paperback.

"The most important thing in my life now," she announced, "is to take care of my son and my father." Jack looked up. His eyes were red and swollen.

“The most important thing in mine,” said Jack, “is to find out what happened to Danny.”

She nodded, and they sat in silence, absorbed in their own thoughts.

“Whether nature is my ally in this, or not,” he added.

Rachel watched clouds in the high mountain crags swirl into dragons and demons, then fade.

University of Cape Town

Part Two: 1998, thirteen years later.

University of Cape Town

E. Dane

51.

She unlocked the front door, stepped inside and slipped off her shoes. The house was quiet, bathed in evening light.

“Dad?”

She walked down the passage towards her father’s bedroom, stopping at the mirror to smooth the frown from her forehead before entering. She tiptoed to the edge of his bed and kissed him on the cheek, then sat down and took his hand, enfolding it in her small, warm ones.

“How are you, Dad? How was your day?”

He squeezed her hand and smiled. Her eyes scanned his face. His cheeks were hollow and rough with two-day stubble.

“You’re getting too thin,” she said, running the back of her hand down the side of his face and looking intently into his eyes. He said nothing, just looked back at her. They sat together in silence, watching the light fade as the sun sank into the sea.

In the last few weeks she’d noticed him clutch his side and wince when he thought she wasn’t looking. He often stumbled, seemed to lose his balance for no reason. She wanted to ask what was wrong, but deep down she knew, without words. He ate little, even when she made his favorite dishes.

“I’m going to try something new for supper tonight,” she said, “stir-fried vegetables with toasted sesame seeds and sea salt on rice. I saw the recipe in a Japanese cook book the other day.”

“Mmmm, that sounds wonderful, Rachel.”

She knew he loved the fragrant cooking smells even if he didn't seem able to eat much and she enjoyed surprising him and Dane with her culinary discoveries. She bent down and picked up the newspaper that had fallen to the floor.

“Have you finished with this, Dad?”

He nodded. She folded it as she walked to the kitchen. On the counter she found a note from Dane.

Hi Mom - I've taken out the garbage, hung the clothes on the line and washed last night's dishes. I'll be home before dark. Love D

She smiled to herself and unpacked the groceries he'd left in a box on the floor. Usually, he liked to help her peel and slice the onions when she made supper, a ritual she and her mother had enjoyed. She wondered how much longer he'd want to carry on - he was growing up so fast. Already his body was changing: hair had started to grow in his armpits, his voice was breaking - when he sang, he could no longer reach the higher notes - and he closed the door when changing.

She put the rice on to cook, cut up some vegetables and heated oil in the wok. Soon, garlic and onion aromas wafted through the house.

The front door slammed. Dane wandered into the kitchen.

“Hi... supper's almost ready,” she looked up and smiled at him, “where were you, darling?”

“At the beach,” he mumbled without looking at her.

Her father appeared at the kitchen door. Dane went over to him and helped him to the table. Rachel brought the wok and started serving. Dane gulped his food down in huge mouthfuls, was almost finished before she sat down.

“Mmmmm, this is fantastic Mom,” said Dane, “is there more?”

“Yes there’s more, but you could slow down a little. I haven’t even started yet,” she laughed.

Her father, eyes twinkling asked, “Dane, what does a cat think about?”

“I dunno... sleeping? stretching? hunting?”

“No, no, no... a mouse!” proclaimed her father and laughed gleefully.

Dane grinned. “What’s happening in the races, Grampa?”

“Bahadur is seven-to-four for Saturday’s race. I fancy him, his mother was Gypsy Queen.”

“I saw a rider on a white horse on the sand dune today,” Dane said.

“When I was a girl,” Rachel said, dishing up his second helping, “there were still a few white horses living in stables by the beach.” She looked up at the ceiling, squinting.

“That was almost thirty years ago... I was so happy to grow up here in Camps Bay, in a wooded valley next to the sea.”

A barrage of words and images flooded into her mind. There’s so much to tell him, she thought, overwhelmed. To hide her confusion she started clearing the table. In the kitchen she stood at the sink gazing out into the dark for a few minutes, regaining her composure.

After supper, Dane and her father played chess.

“You have your mother’s brains,” her father said.

“And your father’s feet!” Rachel said. “He was a big man but his feet still seemed too big for his body, like a puppy’s.”

It was a quick game. Her father seemed unable to concentrate and Dane won easily.

Dane went to his room. Rachel washed the dishes, then went to sit with him. She read quietly and sipped a cup of cocoa while he did his homework.

Dane had a photo of Danny, taken at Glen Beach, on his headboard. Danny was smiling, eyes laughing, the gap between his front teeth prominent. His hair was wet and around his neck he wore a chain with a dolphin. Rachel glanced at the photo as she turned the page. Involuntarily, her hand closed around the same dolphin now suspended between her breasts. She imagined Danny and Dane paddling out to surf together, Dane riding like a figure of light, and Danny cheering him on; imagined the two of them walking hand in hand along the sand. Her heart ached with longing.

Later, when Dane was tucked up in bed, she sat on the edge of his bed, listening to the sound of the ocean, enjoying the musky smell of the Glen, and watching the stars pulsate outside the window. She imagined Danny up there somewhere.

“Mom, will you tell me the story again? Please?”

“We were in the desert, miles from the nearest town. Your dad was in the army and I knew I wasn’t going to see him again for a few months. The stars were so close I felt I could touch them... sparkling... like diamonds, sapphires, rubies and emeralds. The night was alive with desert smells and sounds... crickets and night insects... a whole orchestra. We lay in each other’s arms all night, awake, hardly speaking in the deep silence. We were absolutely in tune with each other, like the strings of a violin, vibrating together in the stillness. Our souls touched, and I knew I would be with child.”

She tilted her face to one side, lips slightly apart, and gazed dreamily at nothing.

“Which was you!”

They both laughed as she tickled him. When their laughter had died down, they were quiet for a while.

“And then?”

“That was the last time I saw him.”

She kissed him on the forehead and stood up.

“Do you have to go out again tonight, Mum? Can’t you stay at home for once?”

"I'm sorry, darling, I have to go. Good night, sweetheart."

She walked out of his room with a heavy heart. She felt awful about seeing men that Dane would never know, that weren't his father. She'd creep in at three or four in the morning, bring in the paper and make breakfast without even having lain on her bed.

She knew it was creating a rift between them, a rift that was getting wider as Dane got older. She wished she could tell him that the reason she went out was to try and fill the emptiness in her heart, she was only trying to ease the pain.

Suddenly it struck her, that what he was asking was, 'Why am I not enough to fill your empty spaces and comfort your heart?'

She stuck her head back around the door.

"You know what, I'm not going out tonight after all. I'm going to stay here with you."

It was time to face her demons.

52.

"No, he's not hurt," said the school secretary, "he's in trouble. The principal would like to have a chat with you."

'Damn,' she thought, as she broke the speed limit driving across town to Dane's school.

She walked down the long corridor towards the principal's office, heart pounding. Dane sat hunched over next to an older, red-haired boy on a bench outside the office. Dane looked up at the sound of her footsteps and she waved. Fear and shame distorted his expression. The other boy looked at her defiantly.

The office door opened.

“Ah, Miss Kornfeld,” said Mr. Reilly, “come in.” He pointed to a thin man with spectacles already seated at a small round table in the center of the room. “This is Mr. Seymour, the school psychologist. Please, sit down.” He indicated a chair.

The principal’s eyes bulged. No wonder he’s called ‘Goggles,’ she thought.

“Dane has been bunking classes,” he said, “and has been caned.”

She had a vivid image of a cane swinging across her son’s bottom, could almost feel the sharp sting.

“I am concerned,” he said, “at the disregard Dane has for our rules. It seems to me he has little respect for authority.” He paused. “We also need to look to the boy’s spiritual requirements.” He pronounced the ‘T’ in ‘spiritual’ with a hard, clipped sound.

“It must be hard for you, being a single mother,” said the psychologist, “we have a very good social work program if you need any help.”

“My father is at home every day,” she said, trying to keep her voice even, “there’s always someone at home when Dane gets back from school.”

“I’m sorry Miss Kornfeld, I meant no offence,” said Mr. Seymour. “We’re aware your father is at home, but he is getting on and his health is waning. Dane seems very independent and we just want to ensure that he’s looked after when you’re at work.”

“I can assure you he is very well looked after,” she said sharply.

“I wonder if it is a lack of certainty that is troubling him?” The psychologist leaned forward. “I believe it is important for his development that he identifies with a faith, that he has something bigger than himself to believe in.”

“We’re lucky here at Glen High,” said the principal, “we can offer a choice of religious instruction. I understand Brother Brian taught Dane’s father for the catechism and that you are associated with Rabbi Gold.”

Rachel clenched her fists.

“Aren’t you jumping to conclusions?” Her voice was tight. “I’m sure there’s a good reason... I’ll find out what’s troubling him, I’ll... bunking one class, surely... how much trouble has he actually caused? Who has he harmed?”

‘How dare they suggest I’m not a good mother,’ she thought, feeling panic-stricken.

“He wasn’t just bunking class, Miss Kornfeld,” said Mr. Reilly, “he was also caught smoking with James, a new boy at our school. Influencing others, especially a new boy, puts this on a more serious footing.”

“Smoking?”

“And I’m afraid that’s not all,” the principal went on, “there was a girl with them.” Rachel slumped in her chair, totally overwhelmed. “We’ve notified the girl’s school. Frankly, Miss Kornfeld, your boy is lucky we don’t expel him on the spot.”

Mr. Reilly pushed his chair back and got up. “I’m really sorry Miss Kornfeld. I’ll leave you with Mr. Seymour and ask Dane to join you. I’m sure the situation can be resolved.”

He opened the door. “Dane, you can come in now.”

Dane shuffled in, head down, hands in pockets. The door closed. Rachel listened to Mr. Reilly’s footsteps walk away down the passage.

“Sit down, Dane,” Mr. Seymour said. Dane sat and fumbled with his hands. “This discussion is confidential. Nothing you say to me will be repeated. Do you understand? I want you to feel that you can be completely honest.”

“Mmmm.”

“Do you like school?”

Rachel watched Dane fidget, watched as he struggled to answer. She felt she’d failed him. “He enjoys Biology and Geography,” she said, “and loves swimming.” She remembered how Dane had beamed when she’d told him he was a natural swimmer like his Dad. “Every year he wins the gala awards for crawl, butterfly and breast-stroke.”

“Thank you, Miss Kornfeld. I would prefer Dane to answer the questions.”

“Sorry,” she said, embarrassed, “of course.”

“Dane, was this the first time you’ve missed class?”

“No.”

“How often have you missed class?”

“I don’t go to Religious Instruction.”

Mr. Seymour glanced at Rachel and raised his eyebrows.

“How long has this been going on?”

Dane shrugged. “The whole year.”

“Why didn’t you tell me, darling?” Rachel said.

“Miss Kornfeld, please. Have you missed any other classes?”

“No.”

“Why did you go into the Glen?”

“I feel safe there.”

“What did you do while everyone else was having RI?”

Dane shrugged.

“Tell me about the first time you went into the Glen,” the psychologist coaxed.

“I was walking towards the classroom as the second bell rang, when I noticed the gate was open. I didn’t think about it, I just walked out of the gate, crossed the road and was in the Glen. It only took a minute. Then I went to a clearing that I’d found.” His voice got more animated. “It’s the perfect hideaway. It has soft river grass to sit on and the branches hang down...” He demonstrated with his arms, showing how the branches were

like a tent. "There's a little stream that gurgles," he looked at his mother, "no one can even hear that you're there."

"And is this where you go to smoke?"

"I don't smoke. I've never smoked." He looked at his mother. "James smokes. I wouldn't have been caught if it wasn't for him."

"Is that the new boy?" Rachel asked.

"Yes. He lives with Mr. Young around the corner from the school."

"Tell me what happened today. You were in your perfect hideaway and... what were you doing?" the psychologist asked.

"I was just lying there, in the sun. I knew I had at least an hour-and-a-half. RI is the last period before lunch break, and so I could come back after break."

"And then?"

"Then James appeared... he crashed through the reeds making a hell of a noise. He sat down and lit a cigarette. *He's* the one who was smoking. He spoiled the peace, so I left. I wandered around for half an hour and when I came back, he was still there. With the girl."

"Do you know her?"

"Her name's Natasha."

"Why didn't you tell Mr. Reilly all this?"

"I didn't want to rat on James. He's already in a lot of trouble and if I told on him he might get expelled."

"And why are you telling me now? How do I know you're not lying?"

"Because you said that what I say here will be private... and..."

"Yes?"

"I want my mother to know that I don't smoke." He looked directly at Mr. Seymour.

"And I'm not a liar."

A tear rolled down Rachel's cheek. The psychologist finished writing on his pad and drew a line across the bottom of the page.

"Just one more thing: why don't you go to RI?"

Dane looked at his feet, then mumbled, "I don't want to listen to all that Jesus stuff, with blood and wine and tsalems."

"Tsalems?"

"Crosses," said Rachel.

Dane looked at Rachel and said fiercely, "I'm a Jew. I want to go to shul and be a Jew."

She was stunned and went into a place inside her where it was absolutely still.

Mr. Seymour said, "Miss Kornfeld, I'll leave you two alone now, but, if you ever feel you'd like someone to talk with, please, feel free to call me." He wrote his phone number down and handed it to her. "You too Dane, you can come and speak with me anytime."

He got up and left the room.

"But it's not true Dane, you're not a Jew," Rachel said softly, putting her hand on his knee.

"I am a Jew. You're my mother and you're a Jew."

"But I'm not a Jew anymore, Dane, and wasn't one when you were born."

She was amazed she was having this argument with him. She also knew she was wrong: she didn't become *unJewish* when she stopped believing. She saw that her words had stung him more than the caning. He gasped for air, as if she'd winded him.

Then she said, "and you're not going to become one!"

Dane turned away and she watched him walk nonchalantly across the courtyard..

53.

A few hours later, coming in from the bright outdoors, she could hardly see when she entered the house. She jumped when her father, who was waiting for her in the lounge, spoke.

“Rachel, we need to talk.”

She didn't feel like talking but could hear the urgency in the tone of his voice. She sat down next to him and waited.

“I've never tried to break our vow before, but now I feel my end is close. There is very little time left.” Rachel held her breath. “My last wish is that I might just touch the boy with the light of his ancestors' way.”

Shaking her head she said, “You promised.”

“He wants to have a Bar Mitzvah.” She looked away. “We must also think about him.” The silence drummed. In her mind's eye she saw a building crumbling. “The promise we had has served its time. We must move on.”

Angrily she got up. “They rejected me, they insulted you. Even if I didn't care, there's the chance they won't accept him, that they'll regard him as trayf.” She stamped her foot.

“Does he really need this humiliation? What for? What will he gain? You've been davening your whole life and still don't believe-”

“Please, Rachel, let's not speak of my faith. I am an old man. He's just a boy, with no father, no religion, no place he belongs. It's also *his* wish, not only mine.” His body was tensed and she saw how he wanted this with every fibre of his being. “For thirteen years I have kept my side of the bargain... haven't said a word.” He sighed. “It would give me so much pleasure.”

The last time she'd seen him this passionate was when he'd persuaded the Beth Din to allow him to say Kaddish for himself. It was true, he *had* kept quiet all these years. She was aware of a tightening in her belly even though she was no longer sure of her reasons for wanting to hold him to the vow.

"It's hard to change my view," she whispered.

"It's important, Rachel. I feel that it is very important that I teach him the tradition," he said. He shifted in his chair.

"I also have a story to tell," she said. "I- I- must speak with him-" Her voice broke. "I'm worried Dad - I'm scared of the damage they might do."

"I won't let them." Her father's voice was clear and firm. "We need this, Rachel. He needs it, I do – even you do."

"We don't need it. We've been fine all these years without it." She knew she was being unreasonable, but couldn't stop; sensed there was something else behind her resistance, something irrational she was afraid to face. "We don't need it. He will not have a Bar Mitzvah. I won't allow it."

She stormed out of the room and headed for the kitchen. The house echoed with banging pots and cutlery as she prepared supper. They ate in grim silence. Dane was excessively polite and went to bed without playing his usual Friday night game of chess with his grandfather.

Rachel went to bed early and lay awake, thinking about her father's seventy years of life. All he did these days was look back, and now she was denying him the one thing he could look forward to. He wanted to express that tender part of his soul - he longed to daven with his grandson; he wanted to nurture him, help him blossom; wanted to assist in the transformation of boy to man.

She remembered the despair she'd felt on the eve of her Bat Mitzvah ceremony, the unfulfilled promise of happiness. An image hovered just out of reach. 'Mama,' she whispered into the darkness.

Her anger at God had not abated one jot. If she let Dane have a Bar Mitzvah... would God, this God who had taken her mother and Danny away, who had turned His back while the ovens of Auschwitz burned, take someone away again? How did all her father's suffering fit in, a man who had followed and observed his whole life? It was clear to her again why, when Dane was born, she had not wanted him raised as a Jew.

She remembered contradiction after contradiction, violation after violation. Why did her father still blindly follow the custom? He talked like a Jew, thought like a Jew, ate, slept and prayed like a Jew. He didn't know how to eat or sleep or pray, if not as a Jew. What else could he do? What else did he know? She hadn't wanted her son to take up the cudgels and embrace the faith. Isaac had done enough. Why must his grandson join the parade? It had been easy up till now to bring Dane up without a specific faith; to guide him with common sense and basic humanity.

'How strange that *he* now wants a Bar Mitzvah!' she thought, 'without ever having been to shul. He wants to identify with his grandfather rather than a dead father he's never known.'

She fell asleep with a tight pain in her gut, feeling more miserable than she had in a very long time.

54.

On Saturday afternoon, the next day, Rachel noticed the rose bush in front of the house was resplendent with red buds. She went into the garden to cut some to put in her father's room. He loved to watch the buds unfurl and display their full glory.

She was leaning over the bush, three long stems held carefully in her left hand, cutting another with her right, when a yellow station wagon pulled up in front of the gate. She glanced at the car and watched the driver climb out. He had long hair and wore reflective sunglasses. To her surprise, he opened the gate and walked across the lawn.

“Hello Rachel,” he said, raising a hand in greeting, “it’s been awhile.” He took his glasses off and smiled.

“Jack?” She squinted into the sun. “Is that you Jack?” She dropped the roses and ran to him. He picked her up and swung her round and round, laughing.

She wriggled free and stepped back so she could look at him properly.

“I can’t believe it’s really you... after so many years.” They stood awkwardly, staring at each other. Rachel bent to pick up the roses. “I missed you Jack.”

“Rachel.” He grimaced. “I was so scared and confused - I just left...” He brushed her wrist. “I’m sorry I didn’t keep in touch.”

She nodded.

“Tell me about yourself - tell me about the kid.”

“He’s... let’s go inside. I’ll show you some pictures. Do you want something to drink? Tea? Coffee?”

They went inside. Rachel switched the kettle on and fetched the photo album. Jack paged through the album while she made tea.

“It’s unbelievable... looking at these photos... it’s almost as if Danny’s alive again. I can’t wait to meet him.”

“He’ll be home by seven. Do you want to stay for supper?”

“I can’t, not tonight. Sorry.”

“So, where have you been all these years?”

“There was no way I was going to wait to be called up. I didn’t know who to go to for help, how to talk about what I was feeling. All I knew was, I had to get out, I had to leave,” he frowned.

“I started in the Americas... traveled from the Amazon to British Columbia... told myself I was a refugee. It felt better than admitting I was a fugitive.” He grinned sheepishly. “I had a scraggly beard and very little money. I did odd jobs to keep going – washed dishes, picked fruit, drove a rental car from Portland to Vancouver- stuff like that. When I’d saved enough to buy a ticket, I flew to London. Then I hitch hiked through Europe and spent a few years in Asia - India, Burma and Thailand. I don’t really know what I was searching for... another way of looking at and making sense of the world. Now I’m thirty-three and I still haven’t found it.” He laughed wryly. “What about you?”

“I’m... when Dane was born, I decided I wouldn’t bring him up as a Jew. And now-he’s almost thirteen-he wants to have a Bar Mitzvah.” She looked at Jack, tears welling. “I don’t know what to do.”

“Well, what’s... is that a problem?” he asked.

“I don’t know.”

She poured the tea and they sat down at the kitchen table. Neither of them said anything for a few minutes.

“Do you still shape boards, Jack?”

“It’s how I make my living. I was apprenticed to one of the best shapers in Hawaii for a while. He told me to forget everything I knew... best advice anyone’s ever given me. I got a contract with a Japanese company - every Christmas I work in Japan for three months - then I’m free to travel around for the rest of the year.”

He took a deep breath, and leaned over. “There’s going to be a Truth Commission hearing next month, on the fourteenth, about Danny’s death. That’s why I’m back.” He leaned back.

She gasped, felt like she’d been punched in the stomach.

“I filled in an application for a hearing overseas, tracked Hurwitz down and he led me to Visagie. It’s taken two years, but now there’s a firm date. Everyone’s been subpoenaed and we have a fixed hearing.”

Her spine tingled at the mention of Hurwitz and Visagie.

"It's funny," Jack said. "I can see all the threads finally coming together."

"Synchronicity," she said.

"Yes, that's what it feels like."

He leaned back in his chair and pointed at a painting of a tree on the wall behind her - the leaves on the tree glistened under a quarter moon, floating like a shell, in a mauve sky.

"Do you still paint?"

"No."

He drank the last of his tea and got up. "I have to go." He took a pen out of his pocket and scribbled a number on the corner of the newspaper. "Here's my phone number." He leaned over and kissed her on the top of her head. "It's really good to see you again."

Rachel walked him to the door and watched him drive away. The sound of the ocean filled her ears. The swell must be huge, she thought and turned to look. Two sets rolled in, smashing against the rocks in a fountain of spray. Then a third set, much bigger than the previous two, gathered and rushed towards the shore. She shivered with a sudden sense of foreboding.

55.

"Dane is late tonight," Isaac said. He struggled out of his chair and went to the window. "It's not like him to stay out after dark."

Rachel felt lightheaded and suppressed a shudder. She glanced at the waning moon visible through the window, and felt suddenly weightless, as if she was not limited by space.

"I'm going to look for him," she said.

Before her father could protest, she was gone. It was dark in the Glen, but she ran confidently down the side of the ravine. She knew this place intimately, this eroded spill of loamy clay that formed a crack through which the mountain stream flowed, all the way to Glen Beach.

"Dane..." Her voice sounded small in the darkness. "Dane..."

The frogs fell silent as she ran along the stream. When her eyes adjusted to the dark, she investigated every shadow, probed each rustle in the undergrowth. Nothing. She stood still and listened. Only crickets, and then the frogs started their chorus again. Maybe he's home already, she thought, and sprinted home with a renewed burst of energy.

"Did you find him?" her father asked the minute she walked in. Her heart sank. She shook her head and his face sagged. To hide her dismay, she bent over, resting her hands on her knees, ostensibly to catch her breath.

"It's beautiful outside tonight," she said, surprised at how calm her voice sounded, "He's got a lot to think about... the Bar Mitzvah and stuff... he's probably just forgotten the time, got absorbed in his thoughts..." An involuntary shiver shot up her spine. She glanced at the clock. Nine o'clock. She stared at the front door, as if her willing it would make him appear.

She paced restlessly. After another half an hour, she couldn't stand it any longer. She called the police and reported Dane missing.

"...it's a cul-de-sac, the last house on the left, next to the Glen... No, there's no number, only a name, 'The Wild Dolphin'... yes... thank you."

She called Mr. Young and asked James if he'd seen Dane. She called Jack and asked him to come over, then sat down next to her father. It was quiet, except for intermittent crickets and distant frogs. Suddenly, the sound of a car. Rachel jumped up, ran to the window... the headlights swung into the driveway two houses down. She sat down again.

An image of Danny, faint and ghostly, rose in her mind's eye... then another image tried to surface and she struggled to push it down but couldn't ... no, no... he can't be dead! Not Dane. The jewel of her life! Then a memory of her mother floated up from the depths, seeped into her consciousness. The two images merged like a watercolour.

She shook her head vigorously. 'O God,' she prayed, 'please let it not be! Don't take him, my innocent, pure child.' She saw the irony of praying to a Being she didn't acknowledge.

A car screeched to a halt outside, and a moment later, Jack ran in.

"Dane's at Groote Schuur..."

The colour drained from Rachel's face.

"He's going to be alright... come on, let's go. I'll tell you what I know in the car."

Rachel tumbled into the back of the station wagon and Jack helped Isaac into the front seat.

"I phoned the hospitals, asked if a thirteen year old white boy - I described Dane... thank goodness you showed me those pictures - had been admitted for any reason. Groote Schuur said yes, a young boy fitting my description had been brought into emergency. They don't know his name and wouldn't tell me any more details, except to say he was really lucky someone had brought him in."

They got to the hospital in fifteen minutes. Rachel jumped out of the car before it had fully stopped in front of the Emergency Department. She ran past a uniformed guard, through the doors and up to the desk.

"My son... where is he?"

The nurse behind the desk was filling in a form. She looked up and smiled.

"There are a lot of people here tonight... you'll have to give me a little more information."

“He’s twelve, blonde... someone brought him in about an hour ago. My friend phoned...”

“Ah, yes. I’ll take you to the boy. We don’t know his name... he may not be your son.”

“It is my son. I’m quite sure. His name is Dane Kornfeld... what happened?”

The nurse picked up the form, attached it to a folder and started walking down the corridor. “I can’t tell you that until you’ve identified him properly.” She stroked Rachel’s shoulder. “Don’t worry, he’s going to be fine.”

The nurse turned into a ward at the end of the corridor. The first bed on the left had curtains drawn around it. She drew the curtain aside so Rachel could see the patient. Dane lay, eyes closed, deathly pale, under a white blanket. A crimson drip was attached to his left arm.

“Is this your son?”

Rachel nodded. She heard footsteps outside in the corridor, then Jack and Isaac came in.

“I’ll call the doctor.” The nurse turned to leave. “After you’ve spoken with the doctor, please come and fill in the admission forms at the desk... and don’t worry, he really will be alright.” She smiled reassuringly.

They stood in silence watching the blood drip, drip, drip into Dane’s arm. A siren wailed outside, someone screamed, a trolley rattled past down the corridor. Footsteps scurried up and down constantly. Dane’s breathing was shallow and rapid. Tears rolled down Isaac’s cheeks. Rachel stood up as a man in a white coat came into the ward.

“I’m Doctor Harris. Are you this boy’s mother?” When Rachel nodded, he said, “He was brought in by a man who said he’d found him at the beach, said he heard him sobbing behind a boulder and when he went to investigate, saw that he was bleeding terribly. The boy tried to circumcise himself... he’s lucky someone found him... he could have bled to death.” He lifted the blanket. Dane’s penis was wrapped in blood stained gauze.

Petroleum jelly oozed around the edges. “I’ve cut the foreskin off and cauterized the

wound.” He pointed to the drip. “He’s lost a lot of blood and needs to stay here tonight for observation, but should be able to go home tomorrow.”

Dane’s eyes fluttered, opened. “Mom, I’m a man now,” he whispered, then his breathing deepened, his eyes closed again and he lost consciousness.

Doctor Harris said, “Please make an appointment to see me in the morning before you take him home.” He nodded at Isaac and Jack, then said as turned to leave, “And don’t worry, he’ll be fine.”

Isaac looked thoughtful. He hadn’t said a word since they’d left home. He started rocking on his feet, then took his yarmulke out of his coat pocket.

“Rachel, this is his brit milah.” He davened for about five minutes. “There, it is done, just like the old days.” He put his hand on Dane’s chest. “Dane, you now are part of the covenant that began in the time of Abraham.”

He clasped Rachel’s shoulders, and together, they slowly danced the Hasidic whirl, singing, ‘...mazeltov, simchatov, mazeltov, simchatov.’

56.

Dane refused to sit in the wheelchair. “I can walk. I don’t need that stupid thing.”

Doctor Harris shrugged. “I’ll see you next week then. It’s important that you change the dressing every day, that you clean the wound very, very well. Do you understand?” Dane refused to look at him but nodded.

Rachel put the envelope Doctor Harris had given her into her bag and got up to leave.

“Thank you.” She reached across the desk and shook his hand.

It took them ten minutes to walk the short distance to the car. Dane got in and sat hunched up on the front seat. She glanced at him, opened her mouth, then shut it again. They drove home in silence.

Her father was waiting at the gate. Wordlessly he took Dane's hand and helped him into the house. Dane rubbed his eyes, but said nothing.

Rachel went into the kitchen and switched the kettle on. Tears ran uncontrolled down her cheeks. When Isaac came in a few minutes later, she said, "He can have a Bar Mitzvah."

Her father's eyes lit up. "You'll see, it will be good for you too," he smiled radiantly, "You also need it."

"Sure," she grinned through her tears, "I need it like a hole in the head!" She laughed in spite of herself. "But... this means he's going to be a man, right?" Her father looked puzzled. "A Bar Mitzvah – that's what it is, isn't it, a coming of age?"

"Yes, that's what it is." He wrapped his arms around her. "Rochela, it was not so long ago that you were his age, were denied; you've been angry for so long... with God, with me, with everything. Do not be angry with us anymore. Let's see what can be done now, what will be."

"Okay," she said, wiping away her tears. "Go and tell him, Dad."

57.

Rachel made an appointment to see Mr. Reilly, the school principal.

"So you have chosen to go to cheddar with Rabbi Gold?" Mr. Reilly said. Dane suppressed a smile at the mispronunciation.

"Yes."

"Well, I wish you luck with your Jewish studies."

“Thank you,” Dane’s voice bubbled with laughter, “My grandfather’s a big cheese in the shul too, and he’s the choirmaster.”

There was a knock at the office door. “Ah, here’s Rabbi Gold now.” Mr. Reilly stood up and added, “I hope this means there’ll be no more bad behaviour!”

Rabbi Gold strode into the office and beamed at Dane. “I am overjoyed that you are joining my class.” Then he noticed Rachel and opened his arms wide, “Rachel...”

Her heart was thumping and her mouth went dry. She had not seen him since the day she had asked him to leave her father’s house. When she didn’t move, the Rabbi lowered his arms, but continued to beam at everyone in the room. “Rachel, I can’t tell you how happy this makes me.”

Dane glanced at his mother, then said in a rush, “My grandfather said you might like to visit us because I’ll only be back at school next week.”

“Ah, yes, I can’t wait to discuss this with your grandfather.” He put his arm around Dane’s shoulders. “I will come and see Isaac.”

58.

After school, James arrived with Dane’s homework and offered to help him with his maths. Rachel sent them into the lounge, and when she brought them oatmeal biscuits and tea, she overheard James say, “...and Natasha is going to be there.” She hid a smile as Dane’s expression juggled between embarrassment and nonchalance.

There was a knock at the front door. She put the tray down next to the boys and called out, “Coming.”

It was Jack. “I thought I’d just drop off these TRC documents, so you can have a look at them before the hearing.”

"Thanks. Do you want to come in?"

"How's Dane? I'd like to say hello to him, but I can't stay. Let's do something together on Saturday night... do you have a place that we could make a fire?"

"Not really. You won't believe this; I haven't sat around a fire since Danny died. But I'll think of something. By the time you come on Saturday, there'll be a fire place."

She led him to the lounge. "Dane, this is Jack, an old friend. He's the one who found out where you were and drove Grampa and me to the hospital. I met him long ago, at the same time I met your father."

Dane sat gingerly on the floor to minimise contact of any sort with his tender genitals. He looked up from his maths. "Hi."

"Hi." Jack stared at Dane. "Spitting image! Amazing." He laughed and knelt down to see what Dane was doing. "I was an ace in maths. If you ever get stuck, I'd be glad to help."

"Thanks."

"I'll see you Saturday. Bye."

Rachel saw him to the door.

"Have you told him?" Jack asked.

"Not yet."

59.

On Tuesday afternoon, Dane was restless. "I'm going down to the beach to watch the waves for a while. I won't be long." Rachel pulled a face. "Really. I just need to get out of the house for a bit."

She followed half an hour later, and found him at a rock pool at Glen Beach. The waves were huge. She sat down next to him and threw a pebble into the pool. Ripples radiated outward in concentric circles.

“There’s going to be a TRC hearing about your father’s death. Jack filed an application while he was overseas.”

Dane’s mouth twitched, but he said nothing. They watched the white water rush and tumble in over the edge of the pool. “Your father used to paddle out from there,” she said and pointed to just beyond the edge of the pool.

On the walk home, she told him the story of the four rabbis: “Once there were four rabbis who gathered together to hear the truth. They heard the truth. Then one died, one lost his faith, one went mad, but one survived. I’ve always liked that story but don’t really know what it means. Dane, always question what they teach you at cheder. Listen from deep within your heart. Find out whether it rings true for you, or not. And, if you discover a truth, I also want to know it.”

He said nothing but she knew he had heard every word.

60.

A few days later, Rachel and Isaac were in the garden. Isaac looked up from reading his newspaper when the front door bell rang.

“What do they want now?” he joked. He levered himself out of his chair and shouted in the direction of the door, “I can give you a good horse for a race, but I can’t give you any money.” Rachel carried on pruning the hedge while he shuffled to the front door.

When she heard him exclaim, “Abie!” she leaned sideways and peered down the dark corridor. In the light of the open front door, she saw Rabbi Gold. He looked like a wolf, dressed in his gray coat and hat, framed in the doorway. His long beard seemed to float

above his chest. He bent forward and removed his hat, revealing a yarmulke pinned to his hair. Isaac led him down the passage to the room overlooking the back garden.

She crept towards the wall under the window to listen to their conversation.

"I don't know if Rachel is ready for that," she heard her father say. His voice sounded weary.

"Maybe she will agree, Isaac – perhaps she will forgive me."

There was a long silence.

"Do you know he circumcised himself?" her father said, "He almost died. Alone. With no blessings or celebration from the congregation."

Rachel choked. The bare facts were so sad.

"Aah," said Rabbi Gold, "I'm so ashamed that it took a representative from the school - a social worker - to unite us."

"I'm not ashamed. My shame was destroyed long ago, when we ate thin soup and worked in factories sorting gold from the teeth of corpses. No, I am not ashamed. Rather, I am sad."

"Yes, Isaac, I used the wrong word. But it is not good to still be so bitter."

"I am not bitter. I am that I am."

"The Holocaust was also God's Will. It says in the Torah that -"

"I've got my own interpretation, Abie," her father cut him off. "When Rabbi Durbach tore his tallit in Auschwitz, he wasn't mourning only the loss of any man; he was mourning the death of something much bigger, of God Himself."

Rachel gasped. Her father was arguing her case!

"Isaac, this is your daughter's argument. Could it be that you are just trying to reconcile yourself with her?" The Rabbi's voice was surprisingly gentle.

“Maybe. But I haven’t yet lost my daughter. Do you know what it would be like to lose her as well? I have lost a mother, a father, brothers and sisters; I have lost my Leah - but to lose my Rachel? I’m not Abraham, I am Isaac. If God had to ask me to sacrifice her, I would refuse, test or no test. I would rather lose God than my daughter.”

There was another extended silence.

“It is not for me to say, Isaac. Let me know what you decide. Shabbat Shalom.” The chair scraped on the wooden floorboards as he got up. “Will I see you in shul for the Evening Service?”

“Yes, I’ll be there. Shabbat Shalom, Abie. Thank you for coming around.”

Rachel ran around to the front of the garden. The Rabbi didn’t seem so arrogant anymore. She realized he was just an interpreter of Jewish Law and stopped blaming him for things he too had no control over. He had also suffered. Her anger towards him drained away. As he came out of the front door, he saw her and stopped.

“I am sorry about Aunt Bessie. I wish you a long life,” she gave the traditional greeting.

“Thank you.” His eyes softened. “Your son is a fine boy. I have told your father, if it is your wish, then it would be my pleasure and honour to teach him his Haftorah and Maftir.”

“It is my wish,” she said.

He bit his lip and nodded, then tipped his hat. “Shabbat Shalom.”

“Shabbat Shalom,” she said.

Tears ran down her father’s cheeks. He linked arms with Abie and walked with him to the gate. Dane was coming in through the gate as they got there. Rabbi Gold stopped, took a sweet from his pocket and gave it to him, pinching his cheek.

“Goodbye my boy. I will see you next week at cheder.” Then he turned to Isaac, “He’s a fine boy, Isaac.”

“Goodbye Rabbi Gold,” Dane said, in that singsong rhythm the children learned as the proper tone with which to address authority at school. Rachel hated it, but realised that soon he would be a man, and then he would talk like a man. In her mind’s eye she saw a white dove flying against a blue sky, like the dove in the story of Noah’s Ark, setting out to search for land.

61.

On Saturday morning, Rachel lay in bed listening to the birds sing and delighting in the abundant red and lemon nasturtiums that grew outside her window. Dane peered around the door. When he saw she was awake, he came in and jumped into bed with her. He pulled the quilt, the one she had made when she was his age, up under his chin.

“You’re very bright today,” she said, “and up so early.”

Dane grinned. “I’m going to shul with Grampa today!”

They heard footsteps shuffling in the passage.

“Can we play cards, Grampa?” Dane shouted. Isaac stopped at the door and looked in. He winked at Rachel, then came in and sat down on the bed.

She smiled. “What are you going to play?”

“German Wist.” He took a pack of cards out of his dressing gown pocket and shuffled them.

“I’ll make some breakfast while you play.” She got up and stretched. “It’s a beautiful day today, isn’t it?”

In the kitchen, she took a box of Jungle Oats off the shelf. While she stirred the porridge, she heard her son and her father laughing in the bedroom and a feeling of profound

gratitude filled her. Twenty minutes later, they all sat down around the kitchen table to eat.

Her father, eyes twinkling, said, "The rabbi will teach you to read the Torah but I will teach you the Song of Life and Death: The Kaddish."

He's at it again, Rachel thought, this is another one of his schemes. She rolled her eyes, but started humming under her breath.

Dane jumped up, ran around the table and gave Isaac a hug. Isaac clasped Dane's hands and brought them up to his face, pressed the smooth young palms against his aged cheeks. Rachel watched the familiar gesture and remembered him doing exactly the same thing with her when she was a young girl.

"The Kaddish," he went on, "the Prayer of the Dead, is a most important prayer. Not because we are a morbid people, but because Death is really Life, and Darkness is really Light. The Kaddish is holy in God's eyes. Sometimes it is recited five or six times in a normal service."

"You know, you're not supposed to play cards on Shabbat, Dane," Rachel said, smiling.

"Aah, but there is a difference between being observant and being religious," Isaac said, and winked at Rachel again, "and since I only care about being religious and not about being observant, we play cards!" He laughed heartily and reached across the table for the sharp knife. He pared an apple, cutting a wedge for each of them, while Dane shuffled the deck.

62.

That night Jack arrived early. Rachel took him into the garden to show him the stone circle she and Dane had laid out in the garden. A bundle of twigs and some newspaper lay next to a pile of logs, ready to build a fire.

“Come here Dane, I’ll show you how to prepare a really good fire,” Jack said. “Me and your old man, we made many fires together.” He crouched down and picked up some newspaper. “First, you crumple the newspaper loosely and put it in the centre of the circle, then you carefully pile twigs onto the paper, and finally, you balance some of the logs on top.” He stood up to look at his handiwork. “What do you think Rachel?”

“It looks good.”

Jack handed a box of matches to Dane. “Here, you light it. Strike the match close to the paper... let the paper catch on either side... that’s it, now in front of you.” The flame caught and leapt from twig to twig, crackling. The sun had set, but the sky was still blue, with only a couple of stars visible, twinkling overhead.

Jack sat down near the fire and rolled a smoke. He gestured to Dane to sit next to him. “Do you know how your Dad came to be called ‘The Wild Dolphin’?”

Dane shook his head.

“I’ll tell you the story. Danny was my best friend. We did everything together: surfed, climbed mountains, played music, went to parties... we even bunked class together.” He chuckled. “We had no secrets from each other. I can say now what I didn’t know then: I loved him.” His face, glowing in front of the flames, looked like driftwood. “Your Dad was a natural in the water; it was his element. Once, I took a photo of him surfing the outer reef at Glen Beach, which Surfer magazine published.”

“He surfed the outer reef?” Dane asked, awed.

“He did. He could surf almost anything. One day - the waves were twelve to fifteen foot that day - I paddled out alone. I was confident in those days. Now I shit myself just thinking about it. Anyway, that day I had a bad wipeout. The massive turbulence spun me around and under. It was like being in a washing machine. My chest was bursting, but I forced myself to relax so I wouldn’t use up my energy struggling. Somehow, I worked out which way was up and managed to surface, only to be immediately forced under again by the next wave. I felt the leash tugging at my foot. When I next surfaced, I saw my board had snapped. The two halves, joined only by a thin layer of fibreglass, were

now a dead weight, dragging me down again. Plus, the rip was sucking me onto the reef. The beach looked tiny in the distance. All around, the ocean was tugging, pulling, surging. And then, my leash caught in the seaweed.”

Dane listened intently. Jack picked up a stick, poked the logs into position and continued.

“Clouds covered the sun, casting a silver-grey light on the sea. I was exhausted and helpless. I struggled to untie the leash from my ankle as another set loomed. I was terrified. The light was fading fast and I was alone, without a board. I thought I was going to die.” He paused and gazed into the fire.

Dane tugged at his sleeve. “And then?”

Rachel, sitting on the other side of the fire, observed them, the man and the boy. She saw that Dane was at ease in Jack’s company and felt a weight lift from her heart.

“I heard a sound. At first, I thought it was seagulls shrieking. Then I heard it again, nearer this time, and then, like a mirage, I saw a paddling figure between the swells. It was Danny, without a wetsuit, on a long board. He shouted, ‘I’ll be with you in a minute. Just hang in there.’ Two more sets broke, but Danny came surging through on that long board. He grabbed my hand, pulled me onto his back and started paddling back to shore. We made it into the channel and took off on a massive shore break, which flung us onto the sand like matchsticks.” He hit his thighs with open palms to emphasize the impact. “That’s when I called him ‘Wild Dolphin’ for the first time, and the name stuck.”

They sat in silence, watching the flames flicker. After a while, Rachel said, “We re-named this house ‘The Wild Dolphin’ when you were born.” She stood up. “I’ll get some potatoes to put on the fire.”

“Tell me some more about my father,” Dane said.

“He looked exactly like you. Did anyone ever tell you that?” He tousled Dane’s hair and laughed. “He didn’t talk much, but when he did, it was always worth listening to. Every day after school we’d rush down to the beach. If there were no waves, or the sea was too rough, we’d just hang out - in one of the caves under the rocks, if the weather was bad -

and watch the ocean for hours.” He leaned forward and rearranged the logs with his stick, then blew on the coals to fan the flames. He took a potato out of the bag Rachel had put next to him. “We can put the potatoes on in ten minutes or so, there’ll be enough coals by then.”

Rachel balanced a pot of water on the fire, and then sat down facing Jack and Dane.

“We also used to watch your mother walk to the end of the rocks. She always sat right on the edge and seemed so self-contained and unapproachable, it took Danny ages to gather enough courage to talk to her.” He laughed. “Anyway, after we met her, our music duo – Danny on guitar and me playing bongos - became a trio. Your mother’s rich, lyrical voice completed our band. We called ourselves Sea Rise and sometimes played at local parties. We were even invited to play at a couple of folk festivals.” He lay down on the grass and looked up at the stars. “Danny was a poet, a wizard with words. He wrote all our songs. While he scribbled, I scraped and chipped drift wood with my knife.”

“What did you carve?”

“Faces, dolphins, surfers riding waves, mountains ... all sorts of stuff.” He sat up, selected a piece of wood from the pile and took out his knife. “I’ll show you.”

He turned the piece of wood around in his hands, ran his fingers up and down the grain, searching for its hidden form. After a few minutes, he began whittling fragments from the centre. Rachel took the boiling water off the fire and started burying potatoes under the coals. Dane made tea.

“Tell me some more,” Dane said.

“When we finished school, I decided to delay my call-up and went to Art School, but Danny, he wanted to get the army thing out of the way, so he went. The government had just declared a State of Emergency because the country was in chaos. All white males over eighteen had to serve two years in the army in those days. Danny wrote often in the first few months, his letters full of anguish. He couldn’t believe what was happening. He got angry with everyone - the state, religion, his family, with me, even with Rachel. We, Rachel and I, sent parcels to try to cheer him up, packed with the latest surfer magazines,

music tapes, sometimes a small carving, homemade biscuits and long letters. When he came home for his first pass, after three months of basic training, he had changed. He was inaccessible somehow." Jack got up and started pacing. "I hated the army for what they'd done to him."

Rachel shivered. Jack rolled another cigarette. "A week before his next pass, there were riots in the Townships. Flash floods hit the Karroo and gale force winds were forecast for the Cape coast. We were surfing ten foot at Thermopylae, and Off-the-wall was closing out. I shaped him a special board so he could ride any wave, no matter how big or small. It was going to be a surprise." He sighed. "I've still got it. It's never been used."

Rachel interjected, "We planned to go to a multiracial music festival with him. That was also going to be a surprise. We waited, almost bursting with excitement. Waited and waited and waited. There was going to be a full moon that night. It would have been perfect. After a few hours, our excitement changed to anxiety, then anger, then despair." She started to cry. "He never came."

Jack speared the potatoes out of the fire and dropped them onto a tray. They were black and crisp on the outside, soft and steamy inside. They ate them in silence. When they had finished eating, Rachel went inside to get blankets. She and Dane lay down under the stars; Jack carved and continued the story.

"No one knows what really happened. A colonel came to visit Danny's parents, told them that he was 'killed in action' somewhere south of Caprivi. He wouldn't say what Danny was doing there, only that the operation was classified. Danny was decorated posthumously for his 'contribution' and given a military funeral at the Castle. Eventually, the army returned some of his clothing. It was such a shock, his death. There was no time to say good-bye or anything. We tried for months to get more information from the army, but it was no use. The army was like God at that time. They could do anything. They *were* the Law. I know in my heart that they killed him, but so far, I can't prove it. It's a fucking tragedy."

He built up the fire again, poking and pushing the logs around until the flames leapt high, casting strange shadows everywhere. "It's taken all these years to finally feel that I'm ready to confront the past."

He put the unfinished carving into his pocket and lay down next to Dane under the blanket. They stayed there, under the stars, until the fire had burnt itself down and there were only coals left. It was way past midnight when they finally went to bed.

63.

Doctor Harris had been impressed by how well Dane's wound had healed when they saw him for the follow up appointment that morning. Now, Rachel sat in the chair by the window watching Dane, who sat, expectant and alert, on the wooden dining room floor. Sunlight streamed into the room.

Isaac's face relaxed, his dark eyes glinted, as he lifted his violin and nestled it under his chin. "First, I am going to explain the melody used in the prayer..." His face, as if lit from within, glowed. He suddenly looked very young. "...the melody is like a river, it goes on and on, from generation to generation. The whole history of our people is in the melody." A range of expressions - reverence, joy and sorrow - swept across his face, like cloud-shadows moving over the mountain. "The first task is to feel, to understand with your heart the simple, long notes, this is the essence of it. Listen." He closed his eyes and drew the bow across the strings, letting his body sway with the movement. The sound filled the room, drifting up into the high ceiling.

She watched her father's old, yet delicate fingers vibrate the strings on the violin, listened to the notes echo in the stillness. He's like a real rabbi, she thought. She looked around the room - at the candlesticks, the bench, the books - everything shone in the polished air.

"You must taste the note," Isaac said, as he opened his eyes and looked at Dane. "Now, you sing."

Dane, his voice shaky, began to sing, now soprano, now alto.

“You will notice that the melody is in a minor key. You remember what a minor chord is? Ta-de-dum-DA-ta-de-dum-DA... always go back to the root note. Just two notes are changed, but they make the difference. Minor chords have a melancholy sound, a sad sort of beauty. They lend themselves to devotion. After all, the soul when it prays is baring itself to the Higher Power. It is opening itself up, and letting That Light see all. And when we bare ourselves, whether we experience dark or light, it can be expressed best as a cry. Have you ever wondered why we cry whether we are very happy or very sad?” He paused; let silence fill the room with a soundless roar. “So! Let us start with our long notes, and then we will join them together, like so.” He played a few notes on his violin. “Now, you.”

Dane repeated the notes. His voice got clearer and stronger as he gained confidence. Isaac played, Dane sang. The melody unfolded, and suddenly, it came together and made sense. Rachel *really* felt it.

“We are going so well, that I am going to go a little further,” her father said. “Now, we will look at the meaning of some of the words.” He pronounced each word reverently. “*Yitgadal* - you are grand. *Yitkadash* - you are holy. *Shimae rabah* - that living energy of your name. When you sing these words, you are praising the creator- who is not dead – who is *alive!* Now, sing these words.”

Again, Isaac played and Dane sang. They repeated the words, over and over again. Rachel felt light-headed listening to them. Abruptly, they stopped and burst out laughing. She joined in and they laughed, the three of them, until their bellies ached, and when the laughter finally subsided, they couldn't remember what it was that was so funny; all they knew was that it felt good.

F. The Hearing

64.

Rachel, Dane and Jack walked towards the municipal gym that had been set up as a makeshift courtroom for the hearing. A middle aged man, glancing furtively over his shoulder, bumped into Rachel. Startled, she looked up.

“Hey!” She took a step back. “Aren’t you Gary Williams? I haven’t seen you for years.”

He just grimaced and hurried away.

Jack turned to watch him, disgust contorting his face. “D’you know he was a police informer?”

“What do you mean?” She glared at Jack. “How do you know?”

“I’ve read some transcripts of other hearings. I recognised his name.” He kicked a tin into the gutter. “I always knew he was a sleaze.”

A truck rumbled past, spewing fumes. Dane tugged at her arm, “Mom, you’re hurting my hand.”

“Sorry.” She loosened her grip. “Come on, let’s get inside.”

Two men arrived at the entrance at the same time they did. The taller of the two stood aside and gestured that they should enter first. The other man stared at Rachel.

“Rachel?” His pudgy cheeks quivered as he spoke. “My name is Joel Hurwitz. Danny was my friend. In the army... I’m so sorry... I wish we could have met under better circumstances.” He paused, flustered, then remembered he wasn’t alone. “This is Mark Ventress, my psychologist.”

“Hi.” She smiled. “This is Jack De Villiers and my son, Dane.”

They stood in an awkward silence.

“The hearing starts in a few minutes.” Ventress nudged Hurwitz.

“Yes, yes. We must go in. I’ll... I’ll see you later.” Hurwitz scurried through the door.

In the lobby, a matronly woman with a kind face came up to them and introduced herself as Jennie Smith. She told them that she was a counsellor and would be available throughout the proceedings for assistance; also she told them that they would be sitting in the front row, which was reserved for friends and family of victims.

Rachel felt disoriented. Years ago she had tried to bury the pain, but in spite of her efforts, the wheel of the past had carried on turning and she was now its centre.

A sudden hush descended as a lone voice began to sing *Lizalise idinga lakho - The forgiveness of sins makes a person whole*. Other voices joined in immediately, the sound rising and filling the building. Rachel’s spine tingled. She gripped Jack’s arm and followed the group filing into the courtroom.

The large hall was full of people. There were high windows that looked out onto the upper crags of Devil’s Peak. A Truth Commission banner hung suspended between two big South African flags at the front of the hall. Her heart fluttered as she watched journalists adjust TV monitors and microphones and she wondered if it had been the right decision to bring Dane. Unbidden, an image of the Nuremberg trials appeared in her mind, and she lifted her hand as if to brush the memory aside, relieved her father had chosen to stay at home. The Archbishop entered the hall. Jennie Smith pointed Rachel out and she felt everyone’s eyes upon her as the Archbishop put both his hands around hers.

Hurwitz and Ventress sat at a table directly in front of the Commissioners’ desks, to her right. She glanced over her shoulder. A man sitting two rows behind Hurwitz held her attention. He had three earrings in his left ear and sat as if turned to stone. His hairstyle - shaved on top, long and greasy down the back – combined with his bloated, blotchy face made him look like a ghoul. She stared at him for a whole minute before she realised it

was Visagie. The tough soldier of her memory had disappeared. She blinked, could hardly believe it was the same man.

A Commissioner solemnly lit a big white candle emblazoned with a red cross. The audience bowed their heads and the Archbishop prayed: "Lord, as we hear the stories of Joel Hurwitz and Daniel Rademan today, forgive those that trespassed against them. We long to put the pain and division of Apartheid behind us, together with all the violence that ravaged our communities in its name. And so, we ask You to bless this Truth and Reconciliation Commission, which seeks to redress the wounds in the minds and bodies of those who suffered, with Your wisdom and guidance. Amen."

She had a sick feeling in her stomach and squeezed Dane's hand, more to reassure herself, than him.

65.

"Mr. Hurwitz, you may begin when you're ready," the Deputy Chairperson, a well-known politician, said. He looked tired and drawn.

Hurwitz pulled his chair closer to the table and leaned towards the microphone. His hands trembled as he held up his notes.

"Daniel Rademan was my friend. I didn't kill him, but if it wasn't for me, he might still be alive."

Rachel heard the words implode somewhere in the recesses of her mind.

"I did my national service from January 1985 until August 1986. I have spent the last thirteen years in a psychiatric hospital but have still not managed to heal the scars from my experiences in the SADF."

Beads of sweat formed on his forehead.

“Before I went into the army, I had no mental illness. Now I don’t have a normal life. For this I blame the Chief of the Army, the Minister of Defence, the entire Government of the time, and specifically Corporal Piet Visagie for being such a willing instrument of their evil, and I call on this Truth Commission to judge them guilty of war crimes.”

He put his notes away and looked up.

The Deputy Chairperson took off his glasses and polished them with the corner of his jacket. “Mr. Hurwitz, it might be easier to just bear witness to the truth of events, rather than judge them.”

“Well I *do* judge them, Sir, and I judge myself.” Hurwitz shuffled his feet and knocked the table. “I’m deeply ashamed of my cowardice. I feel so guilty, as if I were a criminal, even though logically, I know I’m a victim of the system.”

Rachel began to realise, to her dismay, that her life was inextricably linked with this unhappy stranger.

“Joel,” the Archbishop said softly, “tell us your story.”

Hurwitz coughed and the sound bounced across the hall.

“I was dishonourably discharged from the army because I had a mental breakdown. It all began on the night of the 19th of July, 1986... The nineteenth was a Saturday - the whole platoon was in the bungalow and the men were excited about going on leave...” He glanced at Rachel. “It was all Danny could think about.”

“Then Visagie came in and told us that there was going to be a big operation. Pass was cancelled and we had to be ready to move out at a moment’s notice. Most of the men complained bitterly, but Danny just went silent.”

Street noises drifted in through the open windows.

“That night, there was a braai with plenty of food and drink. Danny sat apart from everyone, writing in his book. I was tired and went to bed. I fell asleep to the sound of raucous laughing and singing. Sometime later, I heard, ‘Hey Jew! Hey Horvich!’ They

always mispronounced my name. I opened my eyes to some very drunk guys standing around my bed. Visagie was one of them. He poked me in the chest with his finger.”

He took a handkerchief out his pocket and blew his nose.

“Then... then Visagie said, ‘Come on Jewboy, let’s see you play with your cock.’ I asked them to please just leave me alone, but they carried on mocking me. Visagie pulled the covers back and dragged me out of the bed, ‘How can you find it in all that fat, hey Horvich? How can you even know where your cock is?’” Hurwitz’s voice shook as he repeated the taunts. “The longer I kept quiet, the more they goaded.”

Hurwitz let out a long sigh. Rachel almost lost her balance as she moved closer to the edge of her chair.

“I didn’t know what to do. I tried to get back into bed but that just made it worse. The others started clapping as Visagie carried on, ‘Now take off your pants, lets have a look at your Jewish cock before I really lose my temper...’ Just when I thought there was no way out, Danny, who was on the bunk above mine, told Visagie to leave me alone. Visagie told Danny to mind his own business. Danny jumped down and told me to walk away, but I couldn’t move. Visagie told Danny he was ‘looking for big shit,’ but Danny stood his ground. Then Visagie turned back to me, and pulled my pants down. The others pointed and laughed. Visagie grabbed my arm with one hand and my penis with the other and said, ‘Now wank yourself, Jew’.”

Hurwitz collapsed in his chair. Ventress put an arm around his shoulder and spoke in his ear. No one moved. After a few minutes, he continued, “Danny punched Visagie in the face, two or three times, very fast, and he fell backwards onto the floor. Blood poured from his nose and ran down his chin. Then, with a look of fierce hatred, he lifted his head and said in a low whisper, ‘Rademan, my friend, now you will really piss blood! And that’s not a threat, that’s a promise. When your buddies are asleep, then we will play!’ It was obvious he felt humiliated as the guys half carried him out of the bungalow.”

Hurwitz squeezed his eyes shut.

“Afterwards Danny sat on my bed holding his head in his hands for a long time, then he said, ‘I have to leave. Tonight. I’ll steal a Samil, drive it to Cape Town.’ He got up and packed some stuff into his balsak. I tried to talk him out of it, but he wouldn’t listen.”

Hurwitz slumped back in his chair, the back of his hand covering his eyes, and cried softly.

“We will adjourn for ten minutes,” the Archbishop said. Mark Ventress nodded gratefully and put an arm around Hurwitz.

She had so many questions that couldn’t wait. She took a step towards Hurwitz, but Ventress shook his head and motioned her away.

“Lets get some air,” Jack said, his voice tight. As they made their way towards the exit, she noticed the journalists looked very far away, as if the hall had suddenly expanded. She clutched Jack’s arm. Traffic sounds engulfed her as they stepped outside. The sky was cloudless and gusty wind blew bits of paper along the gutter.

66.

The Archbishop said, “Please go on, Joel.” He leaned back in his chair rubbing his right hand.

Hurwitz nodded and cleared his throat. “The next morning, when Visagie noticed Danny was gone, he went mad. He said he’d kill me if I didn’t tell him where Danny had gone. I didn’t know where he was... I made something up, said he’d gone to this place in the desert a few hours’ drive from Oranjmond that I knew he loved.” He looked at Rachel. “He told me he was going to Cape Town. Oh God... I was right... we found him there three days later... naked, half buried in sand...”

Rachel felt a tightening in her chest. The musty cream walls of the hall rippled, started closing in. She tugged at her shirt, tried to pull it away from her neck, gasping.

“He was radically dehydrated but still breathing... I grabbed my water bottle... Visagie said, ‘You give him water and I’ll kill you. Look at him! Look at your saviour!’ Then he crouched down next to Danny... forced the pistol into his mouth, and said, ‘Here’s a drink, Rademan,’ and shot him.”

A wave of nausea made Rachel gag. She bent over, spluttering.

“Then he stuck the pistol, covered with Danny’s blood, into my mouth.” Hurwitz’s voice shook and his whole body trembled. “I thought he was going to kill me, but instead he punched me, hard, in the stomach. I don’t remember what happened next - I passed out. When I opened my eyes, I was lying in the sand next to Danny. There was a puddle of dried blood under his head. Ants streamed across his face... in his ears, his nostrils, his eyes - his eyes -” Hurwitz grimaced, shaking his head, “- I’ll never forget the look in his eyes when I closed them... they stared into infinity... looked ecstatic.”

Hurwitz had a sip of water before continuing.

“Visagie sat in the shade of the Samil, smoking and rummaging through Danny’s balsak. He slipped Danny’s journal into his own backpack. We stayed there all day. As the sun went down, Visagie took the Swiss army knife from Danny’s belt and the silver dolphin from around his neck... he flung the rest of Danny’s stuff onto the body, poured petrol on the pile and threw a lit match. There was a loud whoosh.”

There was a long pause. Hurwitz looked down at his hands.

“The smell... the smell... black smoke billowed up into the desert air...” He closed his eyes and moaned.

“When the fire had burnt out... it took all night... Visagie raked through the ashes. He found nothing. Later, when he went for a walk, I scraped some ashes together and put them into a tin. I wanted to pray... wanted to do something for Danny... but I was scared... scared Visagie would come back and see me... I found a crevice amongst some rocks... I hid the tin there.”

Rachel sat motionless as tears ran down her cheeks.

Hurwitz turned to face her. "Please forgive me! If I hadn't guessed where he was, he wouldn't have been violated." His mouth twitched and he blinked uncontrollably.

Rachel heard, *there is nothing to forgive*, but whether she'd spoken aloud, or only in her mind, she couldn't tell. An intense pain burned her insides. *The sun had burnt him... they had burnt him...*

The Archbishop sang *Senzeni na? - What have we done?* When he was finished, he stood for a moment, head bowed, then said, "Joel, those of us who have not undergone this kind of experience, cannot know what you feel. We hope that by telling your story, by being heard, some of the heavy burden you carry has been lifted." He opened his arms to include the audience. "We should all feel deeply humbled by what we've heard. We will reconvene after the tea break, at eleven."

67.

When Rachel reentered the hall, she was not sure where the past ended and the present began. When everyone was seated, the Deputy Chairperson said, "Mr. Visagie's advocate would like to ask some questions. You may begin, Mr. West."

A man in a brown suit stood up. "Mr. Hurwitz, is it not possible, that in the years subsequent to the event – in those troubled years you refer to – that you have embroidered the facts? How is it that you can recall every detail so vividly?"

"Because the images are tattooed in my mind. I wish I could forget that night, but I can't."

"When you were undergoing all those therapies, could you not have imagined some of these events? Is that not possible?"

Hurwitz rose to his feet. "I definitely didn't imagine it. There's proof!" He pointed to Visagie. "Ask him about the journal he found. Everything I've said is written down... it's all there in black-and-white." He turned to Visagie. "Tell them!"

"Mr. Visagie, is there a journal?" asked the Deputy Chairperson.

"Sir, we haven't had an opportunity to put our client's case..." West bent over and whispered to Visagie.

Visagie waved him away, then opened his briefcase and withdrew a maroon notebook. Rachel jumped up. "That's *my* book!" Her voice rang out in the silence. She held out her hand. "Give it to me." Her body trembled as she faced Visagie and his lawyer. "How could you keep this book, *my* book... how could you?" She turned on Hurwitz, her voice cold, "And you, you knew all along and didn't say anything."

"I was scared, I was so scared," Hurwitz cried. "I thought they'd hunt me down and kill me. I still don't really believe their grip has weakened, that they aren't running things. They wore you down until you believed you *were* a piece of shit... but they never got to Danny... never broke him... Even now," he gestured towards Visagie, "I'm scared he will punish me for what I've said today."

The Deputy Chairperson gestured to Jennie Smith to fetch the book from Mr. West. Rachel's heart pounded so loud she was sure everyone could hear it. Jennie Smith handed the journal to her. The colour on the book had faded and the corners were bent. She lifted the cover and saw the handwriting she knew so well. The hall spun and her knees felt like rubber as she sank back down into her chair. Miss Smith handed her a glass of water and stroked her shoulder.

"Ms Kornfeld? Shall we continue?" asked the Archbishop.

Rachel nodded.

Visagie stood up. "It's true." He looked directly at the Archbishop. "Mr. Hurwitz has spoken the truth. I deny nothing."

She heard Jack whisper, "The truth? What is the truth?"

Visagie took a breath. "I believed what we were taught - at school, in church, in the army - that God gave South Africa to the Afrikaner. I was willing to do anything to protect my country. I was willing to die for this land... and to murder." He looked around the hall.

"At that time I thought I had the right... he'd broken the law... he'd been insubordinate... but I was wrong! I was a soldier, not a politician. It was all for nothing!" His jaw muscle quivered as he turned to look at Rachel. "I'm sorry." His voice broke. "I'm sorry for the pain I caused you. Can you ever forgive me?"

'Why must I forgive him?' she thought. 'If it wasn't for him, Danny would be alive. How do I forgive him?'

"You were right, Madam, a thousand men like me are not worth one like him." Visagie's voice faltered. He took a scrap of paper out of his pocket. "I kept the book because of what he wrote about me - and I've read the words over and over: *I don't hate Visagie, or blame him. Rather, I pray for his soul. He too has the light of God within.* Because of those words... it's because of them that I have tried to find the love of God... I pray for Daniel everyday."

Jack jumped up. "Fuck you!" He kicked the desk. "Who are you to talk about love?" Jack lunged towards Visagie, but a security guard grabbed his arm and pulled him back into his seat. "I could kill you, you bastard. I could fucking kill you."

"I'm not afraid of that," Visagie said. "I'm not here to get a pardon, or amnesty, or whatever you call it. I'm here to ask for forgiveness. His ghost follows me everywhere. I am also a broken man. I drink too much, take drugs and still I can't sleep."

Rachel looked at Visagie without blinking and thought, 'This man killed my love.'

"I don't know what else to do." Visagie held up the crumpled page and pointed to words she couldn't make out from where she sat. "Daniel forgave me... see, it's written here."

"You *took* him away," she shouted, "*you* took him away."

Sunlight broke through the clouds and a beam shone on Visagie. In that moment, she saw him, not as a monster, but as a troubled and broken man... a human being... man killed Danny. Not God.

“I...” the hall started spinning, “I...”

She heard a high-pitched whine in her ears, and black swallowed the light.

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G. *The Journal*

68.

Eyes closed, she held the journal to her heart. She ran her fingers over the purple and blue rice paper, imagined Danny holding this book, writing in it, then opened the cover and began to read.

19th July

I hope you get the telegram I sent. They cancelled all pass. I can't believe it. It was so close - only three more days. I keep wondering, how can I be sure they'll let me go after two years? They could do anything - even kill me - and no one would ever hear about it. The horizon, actual and metaphorical, seems so far away. I suppose one day someone will say, 'Ok you can go now.' In the meantime, I'll wait this out. I'll renounce hope, with her false promises, and just wait, because I know you're there waiting for me at the end.

I tried to phone. There was a long queue outside the phone booth, and when I eventually got to the phone, you weren't home. There's a poster next to the phone asking, Does your girlfriend need to know? I felt like tearing it down. I want you to know everything. I was thinking about that night in the desert...I wanted to tell you I dreamt you were pregnant, and in the dream I saw the baby - it bore the face of our love.

Later: A sheep carcass is rotating on a spit over a huge fire. Almost everyone is drunk and rowdy. I'm leaning against a rock, writing and watching. Sex and war, that's all they talk about. Wagenaar pretended to masturbate and asked me if I'd smelt pussy yet.

Lieutenant Tate told the dominee how lekker it was when a R1 bullet explodes through a terrorist's head. I moved away from them, but it's cold away from the fire, so I'm going to bed. The stars remind me of you, of us...

Later: It's three in the morning and I've packed a Samil with supplies for a few weeks. It's funny how your whole world can change in an instant! I was lying on my bed reading The Prophet when a drunken Visagie and friends came in to taunt Hurwitz. Radical taunts, really damaging stuff. I tried to stop them, they wouldn't, so I punched Visagie and knocked him to the ground. Now I'm in such deep shit that if I stay here he's going to kill me. Just twelve hours ago, I longed for freedom, now I'm going to get it, but not in the way I expected. I'm heading for Richtersveld. I don't know what I'll do once I get there. Maybe there'll be a sign, some sort of guide as to what I should do next. I'm scared.

69.

20th July

I left camp ten hours ago. It was bliss when I turned the ignition off after hours of diesel growl. The silence is so intense I can hear it sing and the dry air smells like dust. My back aches from all the driving and my wrists hurt from gripping the steering wheel. When I relax my eyes I can see the stripe of the plains rushing at me, as if I'm still driving and the earth is moving. I forced myself to eat a glucose bar, and the sickly sweet taste fills my mouth. I'm on the old national road between Mariental and Luderitz. I'll try and refuel at an army depot about fifty kilometers down the road at De Brug. I only hope no one questions me. I think it's another five hours to the Oranjemonnd turn off. I try not to think of what is behind, or what is to come. Maybe it's all fate. I'll just have to trust in fate.

70.

I reached De Brug at about three. A troop opened the gate next to the familiar Artillery insignia and I lined up alongside the diesel tanks. I climbed down from the Samil and handed the documents to a lance corporal with Konradie sewed on his browns pocket. He signed off against my forged squiggle of Samajoor's signature. Relieved, I watched as he filled the tank. He told me the weather forecasters predicted another heat wave for the next few days. A young guy came to tell me the Captain wanted to see me. My heart thumped wildly, but I think I managed to look nonchalant. The Captain sat at his desk, writing. He carried on for a while so I read the titles of the law books on the bookshelf. When he looked up, he asked me who I am. Damn! Then he said he's just going to check my papers and shouted to his assistant to phone Major Schultz. My heart leapt into my mouth. He gazed at me strangely, as if he knew something, then called, "Actually, leave it Corporal. These look fine," and handed back my papers.

"Drive carefully, Private," he said, "I hear that it will be very hot tomorrow. The radio has warned of flashfloods in the Karroo and extreme heat north of the Orange River."

I marched slowly down the steps to my Samil, and drove out of the camp. As I sped along the N7, I reflected on how lucky I was with that narrow escape. Maybe it's a sign. My fear was replaced with a deep calm. Suddenly I felt in tune with my destiny and as I took the turnoff, I decided not to stop until I reached my destination.

When I drove past Luderitz I nearly stopped to catch a civvie train so I could get to Cape Town before the moon is full. But I didn't, I stuck to my plan to reach the riverbed. A voice in my head said, go to the source of the Orange-White-and-Blue. Crossing this vast, dry land in a Samil, absent without leave, felt unreal. I'm moving to a different rhythm now, using different parts of myself. Already a ghost, said the voice in my head. I feel like a spirit, pure will, moving like the wind across the plains.

71.

Dusk. I've broken my vow not to stop. I'm probably seven hours away from where I want to be, but I needed to stretch my legs. The sunset is glorious and a few stars are out. I look at the line of hills and see yellow flowers bursting from rocky ground. Their beauty and gentleness soften my heart. I'm like those flowers, delicate and soft, not hard and cold like the rocks.

I've been trying to understand what destiny means, wondering how fate unfolds.

All those months I held on, taking their shit. Somehow the days passed... I survived a whole year and a half. My browns faded, my boots moulded themselves to the shape of my feet, the propaganda didn't freak me out so much anymore and I stopped asking, Does the world outside know this place exists? I waited through those long, dusty, brown months and knew I could stick it out to the end.

But, when Visagie tried to destroy Hurwitz, everything inside me rebelled. I had to act. Jack and Rachel, my brothers, my sister, my father and mother, all of them seemed present in the form of Hurwitz. If I hadn't acted, I would have betrayed my deepest self. It would have been a betrayal of the values which make me human, a betrayal of everything I've learnt about friendship and love.

For the last thousand miles I've tried to convince myself that it could have been different, but I'm just fooling myself. The sun has to follow its course and the moon has to stay within its path. It's clear to me that I followed my own nature. I've reconciled myself to the fact that I couldn't have done anything else. Hurwitz, Visagie and I are caught in a triangle that has sent me out here into the desert. Visagie also has the light of God within him. I don't hate him, nor do I blame him. He's probably never known love. I pray for his soul.

72.

I've set up camp amongst the cacti and thorn trees and have built a small fire. Getting here... it's been the most incredible journey. I was falling asleep at the wheel when suddenly the land opened and the Samil swam deep into the splendour of a vivid sunset. It woke me up, I felt as awake and bright as the thousands of stars now illuminating this ancient landscape.

When you first see Table Mountain, coming into Cape Town, it looks spectacular. But if you know that stone like I know that stone, imbued with the dust of thousands of miles in my eyes; having travelled across this land soaked in the South African flag since 1910 - from the first days of the Union, when they took the land away from the Natives; through Smuts' defeat in 1948 and the rise of the Nationalist Party; across the Sharpeville years and the exile of Mandela and others on Robben Island - if you knew this land like that - with the sound of Die Stem ringing in your ears and your heart locked so deep inside, you hardly hear its stirrings for fear of breaking one of the many laws, from the Unlawful Association Act to the Immorality Act - if you knew the land thus, then you would also know about the shadows lurking in the beauty of my beloved mountain.

Nonetheless, coming over the pass at two in the morning and seeing the amphitheatre open up, the gorgeous hills so blue you can drink them, my heart trembles with the beauty of seeing my home, and I realise, yes, this land is worth fighting for.

For this moment of freedom - of ecstasy - everything has been worth it. The Milky Way is so bright tonight- it's like a conscious presence-the face of God.

73.

21stth July.

There's a hot breeze this morning and the temperature gauge already shows forty-two degrees. The forecast heat has come. I made coffee on last night's resuscitated fire and checked the water. I've got enough for a couple of days.

The bizarre rock shapes seem haphazard and random, but if you look carefully, you see they're arranged in some kind of order, they form a pattern.

It's only eleven o'clock and already the temperature has gone up to fifty degrees. The Samil won't start. I can feel the heat sucking moisture from my body, but the sweat dries instantly. The water in the drum is hot and I'm trying to ration it, so far, without success.

I'm not going to move around at all. I think the riverbed is a two-hour walk away, so this evening when it's cooler, I'll go there to get some more water. At least there's a bit of shade under the Samil.

The sun is now directly overhead. I've never known such heat. Fifty-four degrees. I can feel my beard prickle and I've got hardly any water left, even after I siphoned the water from the radiator – it's going much faster than I anticipated. I'm watching myself, or something...I don't know how to say what I mean, it's as if I'm someone else.

It's hard to swallow. I can hear something flapping... a bird? I must be imagining it, it's too hot for anything to move... last drum of water almost empty. A hot wind blows from the hills, my lips are cracked, my tongue feels like sandpaper, my throat burns.

Canopy of thorn trees... clever trees to have thorns instead of leaves... wish I had some thorns to keep the water in my body... waves on the horizon, shimmering waves... afternoon sun clothes undulating koppies.

Has a minute or an hour passed? The sky looks different... clouds spread... a buck bounces... dust everywhere... in my mouth, my nose... burial in dust ... sleep... a sticky mantis dances across the earth... Bushmen run along the horizon... gourds on their backs... water...maybe someone will find me...

I'm stuck... in the middle of nowhere... biltong... I'll turn into biltong.

What kind of death would you prefer, Sir? Would you like the sun in your eyes, or the moon?

Rain... I'm waiting for rain... for a river... flashfloods... I can hear echoes... echoes ... bouncing off my memory... rumbling through the valley.

Beauty everywhere, but not a drop to drink...only love... Keats was wrong - Love is Truth - that's all you need to know. So much dust ... dust, dust and more dust.

74.

I'm coming home. On a train. On a centipede wandering through Time. There's a rainbow over the mountain. Little flowers and tufts of grass dance delicately in the wind. Birds fly above the parade ground.

I shake layers of dust off my body. My hair feels soft. A child runs in the sand. An antelope sings its desert song.

I see you... recognise your beauty and truth... I worship at your shrine.

You lead me to the ocean.

I see the ocean... its blue lines at dawn, its slats of colour at dusk - mauve and gold - shimmering.

You walk, leaving no footprints on the sand, holding a shell to your ear... I hear the sea... it hums... slides... sings!

*We go to a glade next to a stream that meanders past ferns and lichen-covered rock...
walk till we reach the foot of the Great Mountain. You offer me your abundance.*

We bathe naked under icy waterfalls. I drink. There is no more thirst.

75.

Rachel remembered her mother once saying to her: There is evil in this world, but good triumphs. Live and be happy. That's how we can beat people like Hitler who want to destroy us. She sat for a long time, absorbed in the feeling of coming home, sensing the cracked shell of her psyche start to mend.

H. Restoration

76.

Rachel sat in the dark, watching the light fade outside the window. Her right hand slid up and down a strand of kinked hair. Her father hadn't eaten for three days – he just lay in bed, eyes closed, breathing softly. When she offered to call the doctor, he said the only doctor that could help him now was the one in the sky.

"I have so little time, so much to explain," he said suddenly, "call Dane."

"I'm here Grampa."

"You must honour your mother, Dane," Isaac said as he struggled to sit up.

Dane jumped up and adjusted his pillows so he could see them both.

"Dane, I have worked it out that joy is greater than sorrow. We have so many festivals, but even the happy ones have tragedy at their core - at Purim we celebrate the downfall of Haman the anti-Semite, at Pesach we celebrate the end of exile. But on Shabbat all mourning and grief gives way. God comes like a bride into your heart, and only happiness is welcome..."

Rachel smiled to herself, remembering her father teaching her this tradition, in this same room, twenty years ago.

"You know who taught me this, Dane? Your grandmother Leah. Before I met her, my life was barren. I felt like a bare tree under a stark sky. I used to ask myself, to what end have I survived exile in the forest like Rabbi Akiva? Then Leah came like a bird to my empty branches. She filled the air with song, brought colour to my life. She was a gift from God! With her in my life, I understood the difference between survival and life."

“When we came to this valley fifty years ago, Camps Bay was just a few fishermen’s shacks and some cottages. The houses have changed, but the stream, the leaves changing colour with the seasons, are as unchanged now as the day we arrived.”

The talking had exhausted Isaac. He placed a pill under his tongue, the first of the day, and asked for water. He smiled at them, hands outstretched. They each took one of his hands and sat with him until he had fallen asleep. Rachel understood now why her father had taught Dane The Kaddish - Dane would say it for Isaac - even though he’d been saying it for himself - he would say it for Danny, and like Isaac, he would start saying it for himself... and one day, he would say it for her.

77.

Immediately after the hearing, Dane had tightened his jaw with resolve and said, “I want to get Dad’s ashes.” ‘He is making decisions like a man,’ Rachel thought. One week later they flew in a ten-seater up to Caprivi. Hurwitz had shown them the way. They drove a rented 4x4 past the now unused army depot, down the old, potholed national road, to Mariental, then Luderitz, until they arrived in the Richtersveld.

An old man watched as they signed in at the Fish River National Park. He said he remembered a soldier getting lost and dying in the heat wave of ’86 and offered to be their guide. After much searching, Hurwitz and the old man managed to find the spot where Danny had been burned and they camped there for the night. The stars were so bright they cast shadows. They lay around the fire with their heads on warm stones. Rachel told them about her last night with Danny - how they’d lain under a sky just like this, and that she’d known, when their souls touched, a new life had begun. Then they fell asleep with the sky in their minds.

The next day Dane woke at dawn and searched for the tin that held Danny’s ashes. As the sun rose, he pulled the tin, rusty and bent, from its hiding place in the crevice. He then wrapped the tin in a velvet bag and clutched it the whole way back without saying a word.

78.

Rachel, Dane and Jack sat on the edge of the sandstone promontory at Glen Beach with their eyes closed. The tin of Danny's ashes was encircled by four small candles Jack had lit, symbolising their souls.

"Tell me how you met Dad, here on this rock," said Dane. His voice broke her meditation. She opened her eyes, and slowly told her story.

"I was fifteen the first time I saw Danny and Jack on the beach. I was sitting on this rock, reading. I came here almost every Friday evening."

"We watched her a lot," Jack interrupted. "All we knew about her was her name, that she lived in the house at the edge of the woods, and that her parents had foreign accents. She was a mystery."

"I remember it was a glorious evening," said Rachel.

"And the waves were perfect: green lefts and rights. It was the end of exams and the start of summer holidays. Freedom."

Rachel felt like she was playing music with Jack as they crisscrossed their stories.

"It was one of those sunsets," said Rachel, "when the sky is streaked with broad, bold sweeps of cloud, turning gold and rose."

"We were surfed out," Jack continued, "and I had built a fire. We were going to cook some food, watch the night come on. Danny was showering and we were fooling around. I couldn't believe his luck - I swear, wherever he was in the water, waves would just seem to pop up. It's like he had some kind of magnet or something. 'It's not luck,' he said, 'it's *experience*.' Then we looked toward the sandstone edge and saw her outline. He said, 'I've got to talk to her.' I laughed and remember joking that with the way his luck was running, he'd be in love by nightfall."

“And we were.” Rachel laughed. “I was facing the sea when I heard something. I spun round and soft blue eyes looked up at me. ‘Hi. I’m Danny. Can I sit down?’” She turned her body towards Dane. “We talked easily until it was dark. Then we returned to the embers of Jack’s fire and he introduced me.”

“I remember,” said Jack. “The food was cooked and cold.”

“Dane, your father was so handsome.” She took Dane’s hand. “He had this gap between his teeth – you know when a jewel has a slight flaw and it enhances its beauty? That’s what that gap was like – the defect in the crown. I was entranced. He was mysterious, poetic, beautiful... And he became my deepest friend.”

Rachel was mesmerised by her own recollections. Her words hung in the evening air like pearls, a necklace of words linking this moment to the past.

“It was a pleasure watching him build and kindle a fire, then stare silently into it for hours. I sometimes spent whole days in a forest with him and he just stared up at the clouds, saying nothing. Life was round, and I felt complete. ‘If I have to die now,’ I remember thinking in my happiness, ‘all would have been accomplished.’”

The sun sank, fat and orange, towards the horizon.

“When we weren’t surfing,” Jack said, “we were reading the poetry in leaves fallen on rocks within streams; studying the patterns in the rocks of Table Mountain, like hieroglyphics that told an esoteric tale to the initiated; listening to the melodies in the wind. Waves were a way of getting back into Mother Nature’s womb.”

They watched the sun slip below the sea in silence. Dane lifted the tin of ashes from between the candles and Jack took the flowers. They walked down to the shore.

Rachel watched them paddle towards the outer reef. She kept a handful of the ashes to nourish an orange tree she planned to plant in spring.

Slats of mauve and gold barred their bodies as they scattered the ashes and wildflowers in the outgoing tide.

79.

Rachel sat in the same seat her Mama used to sit in, upstairs, in the women's section of the shul. To her left, were Mrs. Ginsberg, Danny's sister, Linda and Mrs. Kaimowitz; to her right, Bella, Natasha and Bibi Borochowitz.

Downstairs, Dane sat between her father and Jack. Uncle Hymie, who hadn't set foot in a shul since his own Bar Mitzvah, looked up and winked at her. Danny's brother, Jay, Hurwitz and Dane's friend, James, sat next to Mr. Ginsberg.

The choir, who usually only performed on Friday Nights and High festivals, sang enthusiastically.

After Rabbi Gold opened the Ark, he called the men, one by one, up onto the bimah - Isaac, Mr. Ginsberg, Uncle Hymie and finally, *Dane, son of Daniel*.

Dane walked confidently up onto the bimah. The Rabbi helped him lift the Torah, which was wrapped in an embroidered cloth, studded with shiny semi-precious stones. Dane bent over, kissed the scroll with his tallit and said the blessing - "...*blessed is the true Torah...*"

When Dane said Kaddish, his voice soared, and as *Yitgadal viyitkadash shimay rabah* echoed through the valley, she experienced a transcendent ecstasy that gave purpose and meaning to the moment, which stretched forever. She recognised this feeling from her childhood, that there really is order in the world.

As the ceremony that officially bestowed manhood drew to a close, Dane glanced at his mother and smiled. Rachel swallowed and her eyes moistened. A profound stillness spread throughout her body. Her father shook hands with Dane, then wrapped his arms around him and looked up at her, laughing. He looked young and strong, without any sign of ill health – it was that image, where her father seemed ageless and joyous, that she remembered for the rest of her life.

She looked at her son and her father - one a fledgling man, the other almost an angel – and whispered “Le Chaim – *To Life!*”

University of Cape Town