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THE SHAPE OF SHADOWS

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ctschr002

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degree of

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COMPULSORY DECLARATION

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

Signature: Signed by candidate Date: 05/09/05

Abstract: *Shapes and Shadows: A Novel Memoir* by Christina Coates Muller.

This is a woman's journey backwards to her people and her place, taking her into deep memory and reconstruction of memory; and yielding moments of darkness she knows she must face, though she is hardly able. It is focused on her need to know her grandmother, and to understand her father's suicide and be reconciled to it.

The narrator/protagonist, Catrina, artist and poet, writes a poem raising questions about her family: her grandfather who 'wears his face like blank feathers, night in his throat', her khaki father, her grandmother silently kneading bread. Sensing the presence of her grandmother, Nella, Catrina, keeps receiving small prompts which, because she is open to suggestion, draw her always towards family and home. She is encouraged in this task by Flame, erstwhile TRC Councillor and psychologist practising in London – where Catrina is on a year's sabbatical – to respond to these calls from 'the ancestors', the import of which Flame is fully aware. 'Stories may not be literally or historically true but they could be emotionally true,' Flame tells her. Catrina resists going back, but Flame says that the struggle is now, the past continues in the present and what you do with it, how you use your history, is really about today, not yesterday.

Once she has begun her story, Catrina 'follows it' home to South Africa, and Klerksdorp, accompanied by Flame whose family has, for three generations, been intertwined with hers. This and a subsequent visit inspire memories of a family life increasingly fragmented by alcohol and violence and ruptured ultimately by a father who holds a gun to his own head.

Catrina's third companion on her journey, also female, is her sister, Lucy – another witness to the tragedy, but one who by contrast is unable to co-operate in either remembering or telling. Their growth had been cut short by the suicide. They were left frozen in time, two adolescents wanting the prince to ask them to dance. Catrina unearths her story, and exhumes the bones of family fables as Ouma whispers. Ouma tells her through their shared genes. But how does one tell another's life? She imagines Ouma's story as well as she can since she needs a story to live by.

The narrative is criss-crossed unexpectedly by an earlier family account, that of Catrina's father's 'oupa', for whom he was named. His Boer War diary, recording in Afrikaans his three years' in the field, demands her attention and, in translating it, she comes to re-embrace her father-tongue.

The Shape of Shadows

a novel memoir

Christine Coates-Muller

University of Cape Town

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... be patient toward all that is unresolved in your heart and try to love the questions themselves like locked rooms and like books that are written in a very foreign tongue. Do not now seek the answers, which cannot be given to you because you would not be able to live them. And the point is, to live everything. Live the questions now. Perhaps you will then gradually, without noticing it, live along some distant day into the answer.

Rilke
Letters to a Young Poet

University of Cape Town

hometalk

She heard the blowing of their breath long before the sound of hooves. It was early spring, the grass new. A heron lifted off the water – then she heard them. The soft snorting. She turned. The cove of Port Jackson, the tall bluegums like soundless spectators. Before she could turn again, the blowing. Through the trees they appeared, phantoms in the early mist. They curved down the side of the hill, running noiselessly in a line between the fynbos and the new wheat. Then they spread out and galloped through the wild grass and towards the reeds and into the mud shallows. Abandoned a hundred years ago after the Boer War, they've gone feral. They hide in the long kloofs of Houwhoek and Kogelberg. There's enough grazing and water along the Bot River and the lagoon. People in the Overberg say the horses' feet have become webbed to cope with the mud flats of the lagoon.

She watched them, her morning walk over. They drank softly, steam rising from their nostrils. Ten brown feral horses, one was almost pure white. Their tails were unusually long and their hair shaggy as if still in winter-coat. The white horse seemed taller than the others but it might be her imagination. Taller and more handsome. She stood in hushed silence. Then a reed warbler cried. In the distance she could hear the washing of the waves on the shore. A whisper in her ear: 'Follow the white horse'.

Joe and Catrina had been coming to the Walker Bay area for over twenty years. This was where they had spent their first weekend together. They had met and had begun a love affair. She was a student in Johannesburg, he working at his first job in Cape Town. She came down for the July vacation and stayed with him. He was playing in a hockey match at the sports fields of Groot Drakenstein. They decided to spend the night at a hotel amongst the apple orchards of Elgin. Catrina woke early and opened the wooden shutters of the old room. A low mist

shrouded the orchards, the peaks of the Boland mountains were like candles lit for mass. They made new love with the window open. A little bird flew in. She thought it was a sparrow. It alighted on the curtain rail and twittered. When it saw its mistake, it flew right out again.

They ate a shy breakfast and drove to Hermanus. On the way they stopped along the Bot River and she got out of the car to photograph the lagoon swollen with the rain of winter. It was a cold and windy day so they drove into the town. It was not even a town then, just a sleepy fishing village. The Princess Café had a tearoom and they ordered toasted sandwiches and tea. An old juke box in the corner was playing *Die Tantes van Nantes*.

One evening in the newspaper Catrina read about a big catch. The fisherman, it said, had a lucky corner. The photograph showed an old man, a hundred or more. He said we can all begin again. She liked that; she wanted to begin again. She looked at the photograph of the old man in the newspaper. His hands were large. His fat fingers held a flabby carp. He reminded her of her grandfather. Oupa told stories, stories of long ago. Catrina grew up on stories, stories of the past and of the present. His and Ouma's. She saw him once, mending his gun by moonlight. In summer he went fishing almost every afternoon. He told her stories of war and of concentration camps. She never could remember which war he was talking about. Sometimes he talked about the Englishman's war, other times it was his war.

Ouma believed in kneading bread. She talked while her hands squashed and folded the dough. She did not tell many stories, not willingly. Catrina had to catch her at the right moment. Mostly she gave advice.

'Waste not, want not', she said at every mealtime. 'You never know when you will be hungry.'

Catrina wanted to remember all the stories, the stories of her childhood. Especially the ones Ouma told her.

Later she wrote a poem. She gave it to Joe to read, 'Here. It's not quite done yet.'

I grew up on kitchen stories,
grandmother kneading dough
grandfather mending, by moonlight, his gun.
he wears his face like blank feathers
night is in his throat

breakfast fables and tea
stories of children told how to be mothers,
of hinterland and concentration camp.
my khaki father, his desert glance,
tells me of an Englishman's war

I hear the kitchen ghosts.
looking inside my gloves and shoes,
I see someone composed of my pieces
allowing the day to act

the voices of my children
call in the distance.
my son is a rooster foot,
behind the moon my
daughter, a fish ...

'The story tugs at me,' she told Joe. She wanted to hear more.
Why did her grandfather wear his face as white feathers? Was her
father's glance one of desolation? And her grandmother who kneaded
bread so silently, why did she have no words?
Each person a question, a shadow.

They walked the dogs along the beach at Hermanus. A long beach of white sand, it stretches from Voëlklip to Gansbaai. The whales had returned, more arriving each day. They could see pods mating just beyond the breakers. The tell-tale blow is v-shaped from the twin blow holes.

'I'm going to London,' she told Joe. 'I've been offered a place at an art college, a studio, and few a teaching duties. I'm taking a sabbatical.'

'How long will you go for?'

'I don't know. Maybe most of next year.'

His eyes were large and dark like the rock pools at Mussel Cove. She'd come to love his eyes. They held all the words he could not express. But she seldom looked into them nowadays.

'I'm sorry, Joe. I don't know how to explain this. I just need to go.'

'I hope you find what you are looking for, Catrina.' He shrugged and took her hand.

'I don't know what to say anymore. '

They walked for a long time in silence. Three black oyster-catchers flew overhead, screaming. The beach had been closed to vehicles for a year now and the bird numbers had recovered. Catrina hoped she and Joe would be as lucky.

After Katrina left, Joe found her poem on her desk. She had completed it, titled it *Kitchen Stories* and she had added the last two stanzas;

I tell my husband
I'm not your wife anymore
the distributor of happiness.
like Cain, nomad collecting stones,
I'm making irredeemable
plans for my flesh

always ignorant or
knowing, I'm a senseless
wheel
a fate passing through
to some other place

University of Cape Town

When Catrina first arrived in London she loved the buzz. The new millennium had dawned, the London Eye, the Millennium Dome. She took a small flat where from the top window she could just get a glimpse of Kensington Palace. The art college nearby gave her a small studio to use. She had to be available as a consultant to students. It was a free rein. She spent the first few weeks visiting the art galleries.

At the Tate Modern, Anish Kapoor's giant red sculpture filled the length of the gallery, the triple volume with its telephone-like shape. The PVC skin stretched across its frame like the skin of a drum. It was hooped at each end. She stood and looked up into a monstrous ear drum. The vibrations of the building and the visitors were caught up and reverberated through the crimson tunnel. The colour was visceral. She could be looking down along an artery or into a vagina, a birth canal. Mostly it was an ear. A gigantic ear. What was she listening for?

London swarmed with young South Africans. Catrina could not escape reminders of what she'd left behind. London taxi cabs emblazoned with the new South African flag, buses rumbled by with lions and elephants painted on the side; ads for game parks. The Dutch Reformed Church in Shepherd's Bush droned on Sundays with Afrikaans. The blood of the past and the ashes of memory. As she walked along Whitehall a group of mounted sentries trotted past her. As the last two drew level, the large white horse snorted and reared. A hoof dangled above her head as she moved back. The brass on its leather straps chimed as the Horse Guard took control again. He left to catch up without an apology. Catrina took a moment to catch her breath, her heart beat with fright. She thought of the horses of Bot River and of Joe. He wrote emails keeping in touch though he knew her need for distance. On Piccadilly, as she walked along Green Park, she noticed a banner strung up. It advertised an exhibition at the Imperial War Museum, *Blood and Ashes – 200 years of the military in South Africa*. It was also the centenary of the Anglo-Boer War.

The art college offered Catrina an invitation to an exhibition at South Africa House on Trafalgar Square. She took two students along with her. The exhibition was housed in the rooms behind the main reception hall. Catrina entered and saw the large black sign posted up on the wall under the title of the exhibition –

PICTURING RACE

A HUNDRED YEARS OF SOUTH AFRICAN ART

Apartheid was a politics of space more than anything ...
much of the Apartheid legislation was denying people
the right to move. It's all about space, restricting space ...
Claiming art is also reclaiming space.

David Koloane, 1995

Catrina thought of the paintings her parents bought in the 1960s to decorate their newly renovated home, all the landscapes depicting *ons mooiland* and the empty spaces of her mind. Would she ever find what she was searching for?

'Have you ever encountered the beating of African drums in a confined space?' she asked the students. 'You'll feel the vibrations thud through your chest.'

Few places can match the friendly hum of a South African gathering especially when they show off their land. Ten djembe drummers beat a rhythm in the hall. Catrina felt her body tremble to each beat. She stood against the wall behind her and could feel the vibrations through the building and the thumping of her heart. 'I can never get away from it, from that place. It's part of my blood,' she thought.

The beating of the drums slowed and then stopped. She could feel the vibration continue in the wall, and then the audience leapt into applause.

The ambassador stood up to the microphone, thanked the drummers and welcomed the guests. A tall beautiful woman in a traditional headscarf moved towards the mike as the ambassador welcomed the guest speaker, 'Dr Flame Mangope, psychologist and TRC counsellor'.

Flame walked up to the podium. Poised, she was tall as a tree. She stood and looked directly at her audience. She paused, flicked her head once and began to speak. Her voice had a deep resonance and projected easily to the back. Her face was an almond, her headdress in reds, greens and golds reflected the colours of her flag. When she spoke her voice was like chocolate, warm and strong. She made her points with quiet confidence

'My taxi driver, when he heard I was from South Africa said, "Ah, South Africa, the nation of story tellers." Stories help us confront the trauma. Something in us has been broken but stories help us find the words to heal. Art, like literature, is a litany of voices, a never-ending story. Dialogue, framed by forgiveness, opens doors.'

My journey has just begun, thought Catrina, yet I can't leave South Africa. It won't go away. On the wall across from where she was standing she recognised the style of the artists from her childhood. The blood-red kloofs of Pietermeef's *Rustenberg*, its fractured facets, and the glow on Tinus de Jongh's mountains of the Western Cape. Annie, one of her students, broke into her thoughts, 'All the landscapes are empty.' Then it dawned on her as she looked at the familiar paintings, remembered the galleries her father had taken her to visit.

'Yes,' agreed Dan, the other student. 'You look and then you look again and you're not so sure.' She thought she knew them so well but now all she could see was the emptiness, not the mountains or the veld she had so loved, just emptiness. The kloofs of Rustenberg soared

above the trees. Here darkness was broken by stylized acacias but they reached out of the earth like questions.

'Where are the people who lived in the spaces?' Dan asked. They went from one hall to another; Adolph Jentsch's abandoned deserts, the Coetzers bare of people, Maude Sumner's vacant sunrise, Voischenk, Enslin, Naude'.

'I had had not noticed it before,' said Annie. Catrina thought of the Coetzees that she loved. For fifty years they had lain hidden in Spain and in France. An Anderson, not unlike the one her father had owned.



The next hall held more landscapes. 'Look here!' said Dan. 'These are peopled.' They drew closer. Domsaats's three figures in the Karoo, Sumner's *Genadendal*, Van Heerden's *Packing Grapes*, had people but they had no identity. They were part of the landscape too. She had left South Africa. It was an act of anger. For perhaps the first time, she realised how her life had been depleted and emptied.

With an increasing pace, Catrina walked to the next hall. Portraits. Irma Stern's *Still life with statue*, Naude's *Washerwoman*, a Prowse portrait of a black woman titled simply, *A portrait*. Then Neville Lewis's *Blind Malay*, Claerhout's *Mother and child*. When she reached the end of the room, she saw the Kottler, *General de Wet*. She had just passed his wooden sculpture, *Nude*, a black woman. It hit her. Maggie Laubser's *Portrait of a Shepherd*. Constance Greaves confirmed it; *Xhosa Woman*. The white people were named but the black people were seen in terms of the work they did.



'Their voices, their stories are lost,' said Annie. It seemed that wherever she looked, Catrina saw it. The room spun around her. Her whole life, the lives of many people, their stories were emptied of colour and richness – a tapestry that should have been textured and magnificent was a fabric moth-eaten and poor.

As she turned the corner she almost bumped into the last Anton van Wouw sculpture. She'd seen the *Paul Kruger* but this was a bronze titled simply *Bushman*. She stumbled back. The sharp arrow scraped her arm, leaving a red welt.

'When did you last see details so fine? Look at the veins on his hand, how they stand up.' Dr Mangope was standing next to her. A fresh breeze entered the hall from the west and Catrina looked up at the tall black woman.

'Flame Mangope.'

Catrina took the firm hand. 'Catrina Muller. I liked your talk. Thank you.' Flame's eyes held the warm tones and textures of home.

'You Tswana?' Catrina asked.

'Yes,' said Flame. 'How did you know?'

'I grew up in the old Western Transvaal and recognised your accent.'

'That's my place too. I should say *Dumela*.'

'*Injani*,' Catrina replied.

Flame and Catrina had exchanged phone numbers when they had met at the exhibition. Catrina called to meet for coffee. They met the next week at the *Marrón*, a coffee shop in Notting Hill. Flame wore a royal blue dress with a green shawl, the fringe of which danced as she moved her hand towards Catrina.

'Dumela. How are you today?'

'Injani. Good.'

'I'm sorry I am late. Have you been here long?'

She squashed into the corner where Catrina had found a table. Catrina watched her, her confidence and poise. Flame occupied her space with charisma; people noticed her, she had drawn glances as she had entered. It was so different when they were children. Catrina's blonde crown drew all the attention. Flame, invisible in the shadows. But here it was different. She stood and waved to a waiter.

Flame's foot tapped to the rhythm of music coming from the jukebox, a waltz. Three beats; Elton John and Kiki Dee sang *True Love*. Their chatting became animated. Flame threw her hands about, her bangles her own percussion.

'I was held up in the traffic.'

'It's fine, I only just got here.'

'I wondered what you'd think – that I was on African time?'

'Of course not! Everyone's come into the coffee shop for shelter.'

'God, I'm freezing and I need a caffeine fix. Where's that waiter?' She jumped up and waved her hand. 'Yes! Two coffees.' She looked down at Catrina, 'You want a coffee?'

'A cappuccino, please.'

'Good idea! Two cappuccinos please!' She sat down again.

'It was a wonderful exhibition the other night. Quite a collection.'

'Yes, a good representation. People love South Africa; it's the flavour of the moment.'

'Such a change from before.'

'Yes.' She seemed uncomfortable. 'Whenever I am with a South African my confidence dwindles,' Flame confessed. 'I immediately expect some sort of judgement, that I'm seen for my race not for myself. I can be so strong but be undone by an idea – my idea of someone else's idea.' They spoke about their backgrounds, how they had been shaped by their country.

'It's the kind of trick our minds play on us, isn't it?' Flame continued. 'For instance, I have no real or factual evidence for what you are thinking. I've only just met you, but I have a belief that I'll be seen in a certain way by a white South African. My mind goes into creating a scenario where I feel self conscious.'

'Yes, I know we both are affected by this kind of thing,' Catrina said. 'It's going to be a long time before we trust completely.'

They met a few times again in the following weeks. Flame lived in a basement flat in Hampstead, around the corner from Keats's house. She had a room that led out to a garden and she loved to keep the door open, even when it was cold. She sometimes saw clients privately at home. She had brought with her a sand tray; a large wooden box she used as a tool, a projective technique. She had had narrow shelves fitted where all the little objects used to place in the sand were kept. Her clients used the items – figures, drift wood, stones – things to put into the sand, to tell stories.

Flame hummed to herself as she made tea. Singing spoke to her anguish, to the moments and memories of the work she did before going to London. She sang in the shower, sang while making tea. Her soups were spiced with song. From the lullabies of childhood that her grandmother sang as she rocked her on her back to U2 and Verve, the music on TV. She brought her lullabies to London; *tula tu, tula baba, tula wena*. She mixed it with Joshua Tree and the rocking sounds of London bands. Sometimes she could hear strains of Mozart and Bizet from the flat above and she'd sing lines from *The Magic Flute* or *Carmen*, the song about love, *l'amour est*. Love – could she trust it? It seemed far – far across the sea and all the wrecks of human lives she'd witnessed.

As they talked Flame reflected on how life had kept them apart in South Africa, here they could be two ordinary people meeting.

'Your name is unusual,' Catrina began but Flame interrupted her.

'Well, it was Francesca.'

'Francesca? I knew a Francesca in childhood. What was your mother's name?'

'It was Sarah.'

'Sarah? We had a Sarah working for my mother. Her mother was Freda who was with my grandmother in Parys.'

'Then, Sarah was my mother. Sarah Mangope. This is a surprise.'

Catrina's head was spinning. Was *Flame* Francesca? What was she doing here in London? How had she come so far? Flame asked Catrina the same questions.

'My Sarah, Sarah who took care of me was your mother? Freda, your grandmother?'

Their questions twined around like a hedge of thorns grown for a hundred years. She had no idea that she was the Francesca of her youth. She had not seen her since they were twelve or so.

'I call myself Flame now.'

'Why?' Catrina asked.

Flame took a deep breath.

'I have many names. I was named for the political beliefs of my father. *Okhela*, it means fire. He was with MK when I was born. Do you know what MK is?'

Catrina nodded; the armed side of the resistance.

'My mother liked *Mapula*, it means rain. When I was born the first rains began to fall, so I got both names. Then my grandmother called me *Francesca*. I didn't mind taking a white name. *Francesca* was Italian, my mother told me. She liked it too.'

Flame liked her name. She had chosen it herself. Fire – its connotations of passion and danger. She knew she was passionate, that it burned her at times, it was both dangerous and creative. She thought of the veld fires in Africa, the mountain fires in summer. She knew that some plants needed fire, that seeds lay dormant for years. Only a very hot fire could release them. She knew her mother disapproved of her choice for herself. 'Francesca is such a nice name. I chose it with care for you.'

Francesca – from the Germanic *frank* to mean *free*. Francesca, the Italian form. Her mother had romantic notions. Besides fire and passion, Flame was the name for flowers of Africa. She thought of the flame lily of Zimbabwe. The petals were red curls, like flames. *The Flame Trees of Thika*; Elspeth Huxley also associated flames with her love of Africa. A fire in a hearth – how the flames were little spears leaping. It reminded her of Poland and his dedication to *Umkhonto we Sizwe*, the spear of the nation and the fire that brought freedom. Besides, she thought, fire is the working order of the cosmos. Fire melts solids so that they can be blended. Like her and Poland. Her fire, his iciness. He was the shielded warrior. Fire transformed him in their union.

Some days they met at Piccadilly, to see a film or go to theatre. Often they walked on the heath or in Kensington Gardens or just stayed in for tea and to chat.

'What do you do with the sand in this tray and all these little objects?' Catrina asked one evening. She sat cross-legged on a cushion on the carpet, ran her hand through the tray of sand Flame kept on the floor. 'It's a technique I use to allow people to find their stories,' Flame said. Catrina wanted to play like she had as a child in her sandpit. She noticed the jar of red sand on the shelf. 'Is this Namibian desert?' Flame nodded. She opened the jar and offered it. Catrina poured it into the tray. The red trickled onto the white river sand. 'Africa in London, like me, like you.' She pushed a heap of the red into the

centre and reached over to take the ostrich egg from the third shelf. She placed it on top of the red sand. Then she found a small *tickie* bead: a rounded chip of ostrich shell with a hole drilled into the centre. Flame kept a string of the shells and some loose ones too, in a wooden bowl. Catrina placed the bead next to the egg. Then she crawled over to the shelves and studied them. She took a little bee of Baltic amber and placed it to the left of the ostrich egg. She found the basket of woollen balls. She took a red ball and cut a length as long as her arm from elbow to wrist. She dangled it over the sand and let it fall loosely onto the sand in a crimson squiggle. In a patterned Botswana basket she found a grey pod from a kameeldoring tree. She placed it in the front of the tray.

'Ah!' she said and leaned forward and smiled. She was finished with her arrangement.

'Will you tell me about it?' Flame asked. She sat for a while.

'The egg is like the moon, the full moon. A little bee flies over it. This,' she pointed to the thorn tree pod, 'is an ear to listen. And this,' her finger on the bead, 'this is the currency I need to cross over the red sands.'

shadows on the Seine

In April Catrina and Flame decided to go to Paris for the weekend, to take advantage of the special Chunnel-and-hotel return and Catrina's mid-term break.

'Life is like riding on a train,' Flame said. 'You board and head for your destination. Like life, you never know exactly what you will see or what is going to happen, who you are going to meet. People get on and off, strangers enter your compartment and travel for a while. Some stay for a short period, others for a long time.' Catrina felt she was simplifying things but Flame insisted on using the metaphor. She looked through the window.

'Look,' she said. 'You see life in flashes, each one a snapshot.' Lying under a tree was a couple having a picnic, a white horse in a field, now maize in rows, a village. Clothes hung over balconies to dry. Each a frame of life. 'Are our experiences not like that? Life happens in pieces, we string them together to make meaning.'

They stayed in the Marais district in a pension just behind the Hôtel de Ville. The evening was fine and they walked down past the church of St-Gervais-St-Prottais with its monstrous gargoyles, across the Ile de la Cité, past the Notre Dame cathedral with its arches of saints and along the left bank of the Seine. The plane trees were in bud; luminous green like fairy lights glowing in the branches. They decided on *le petit ombre*, a restaurant with a view of the river and ordered white wine. Flame wore a jacket of soft indigo velvet. Catrina would not forget it. It was embroidered with thin silver rickrack, emerald and scarlet thread. Tiny pearls were sewn on like stars in the night. Her hair formed locks around her face. They talked about their time in Europe. Catrina said she wanted to see all the great paintings of Europe in her lifetime.

'Have you been to the Sistine Chapel?' Flame asked.

When she was a child, Catrina told her, she loved the Time-Life books her father owned. She'd fold out the double page of Michelangelo's God reaching his finger to touch Adam's. Her father showed her how Adam's foreleg contained the shape of Eve. 'Where the knee is, one can see the bust, then going down, the torso and the legs. It's quite clear.'



At the Louvre the next day, Flame went straight to the Mona Lisa. When she looked for Catrina, she found her standing in front of Tintoretto's *Susannah at her Bath*. She walked towards the painting but Catrina stood staring at it. Flame moved on but Catrina remained fixed. Eventually she moved on into the next gallery. When she came out, Catrina was seated on the central bench, looking at the Tintoretto. Flame sat next to her.

'The painting's sister is in the gallery in Vienna,' Flame said. 'Have you seen it?'

'It is like waking from a dream and forgetting it only to remember flashes later during the day. 'This painting,' Catrina said, 'is like one of those flashes.'



On Sunday Flame called Catrina in her room. 'It's a lovely day. Let's go to the Musée d'Orsay. We can have lunch afterwards.'

They took the Metro up to *Boulevard* and then walked across the Seine to the Musée. Catrina showed Flame her favourite impressionists in the gallery; Flame showed her the delicate pastels by Redon, *le Budha* with its effervescent yellow sprinkled through the drawing. They found a restaurant on the other side of the Seine for a late lunch.

'I am still preoccupied by the Tintoretto from the other day. I do not understand it.'

sombre shade

Catrina woke early the days after Paris. She lay at dawn watching the sky change. The sun rose pale. It seemed to suck colour from the earth, blood for the day. Between transfusions she lay, looking towards the east and wondered where does a story begin? Does it begin like a day, at a moment when there is light? Or does it begin in darkness? Her questions had left her with a pile of threads. Each thread a story.

She walked through Camden market, by a sidewalk sale. She stopped, as she always did, at the second-hand books. There was something about holding a cloth-bound book, opening it and seeing the previous owner's name, sensing the history. An inscription or a plaque announcing the book as a prize for Sunday school attendance or for good behaviour in grade three. She found a leather-bound, gold-edged copy of Keats' poems. But it was the title of another book that first caught her eye. *The Lost Father* by Marina Warner. She opened the cover. It was inscribed;

To Catrina, on her 23rd birthday, with love from Harry Williams.

The Lost Father. It could be a title for her own life. She bought the book feeling increasingly sombre.

She arrived late. It had been raining and her shoes were wet. 'Do you mind?' Catrina took off her shoes. The stockings under her blue corduroy skirt were multi-coloured and striped. As Flame made tea, she asked if Catrina had worked out why she was unsettled by seeing the Tintoretto.

'I found a picture in an art book of the other Tintoretto, the one in Vienna called *Susannah and the Elders*. It had the same effect.'

'What do you think bothers you about it?' Flame asked.

She said she felt irrationally angry when she looked at the paintings.

'They are based on an apocryphal Bible story.'

'Yes.' She knew, but it wasn't that. 'There are other paintings by the artist that I like and do not react to.'

Flame wanted her to talk about her father but she talked about a visit to Barcelona.

'Do you like Gaudi?' she asked. Catrina had gone there, to the Picasso museum in the old part of the city. She went there alone one afternoon. There was an early painting. It was of an old lady. She lay in bed, her face wrinkled, and she wore a nightcap. On one side of her a nun held a young child. Behind them was a window. On the other side of the bed, a doctor. He sat in front of a door. Each time she moved, the old woman's eyes followed her. She'd seen that before in paintings but what really astounded her was wherever she stood in the room it was as if the old woman called, as if she was trying to say something. If she stood on the right of the painting, the bed was long. It reached out to her. The dark door and the doctor cast a shadow. The old woman seemed afraid of them. The nun and child were close to her and in the light, but the window behind them was shut. From the left, the darkness covered half the painting and the bed was shorter as if shrunk by her fear. Catrina felt sure the woman was calling to her, trying to tell her something.



Before Catrina went to Spain, she had re-read a book on Spain by James Michener, *Iberia*. In it was a photograph.

'I opened it and found a black and white photograph of a man on a white horse. He looked so much like my father, my khaki father.' She held up the photograph.

'Why do you always refer to him as your khaki father?' Flame asked but Catrina ignored the question.

'Something is happening to me,' she said.

'I think your ancestors are calling,' said Flame.

shapes of dreams

Catrina pondered what Flame had said about ancestors. In *Letters to a Young Poet*, Rilke wrote that we should try and live into our questions, rather than answering them; that our lives should reflect our questions, so that one day we may discover that we ourselves have become the answer.

Catrina was filled with questions. She hardly thought about Joe and Sam although they emailed one another regularly. It was as if she'd searched for answers her whole life. She had truly become a rolling wheel. The questions she had about her father, what happened to her grandmother when she was young, pressed on her. She gathered no moss. She could remember one of her earliest dreams. She was not yet five years old. A dream of the house on fire, and a wolf.

The wolf is chasing me. I run. He runs too. I find my way to the top of the house. He follows. I am afraid so I climb onto the roof. The wolf follows me there too. I stand on the edge looking down. It is too far to fall. I clutch my rag doll. The wolf is coming closer. Suddenly he lurches towards me and I fly through the air. I look up and the roof is on fire. The wolf is laughing. I am on the ground and the wolf is on the roof with my rag doll. He tosses me up into the flames.

She did not remember if her mother came to her. Their lives are their lives, she thought. Mine is now. It is new. Everything has changed. Yet a dream undoes me.

A milk-tooth of a dream and she remembered it even after all these years. Catrina wondered where all the milk teeth go. Teeth last a long time. Archaeologists find teeth that are millions of years old. They can put together an entire species from only one tooth. Once she was on the west coast of the Cape Province. She was sorting through fossil sands dug up and deposited by the steel factory near Saldanha Bay.

Her gauze tray emptied of sand and tiny white icicle-like particles remained. They were prehistoric frog's teeth. Everyone, in youth, loses all her milk teeth. There must be billions of milk teeth lying in the earth.

Catrina brought her Ouma's cameo with her when she next visited Flame. She placed it in the sand. She looked up at Flame, her hair knotted, her eyes moist.

'Tell me,' Flame asked.

'I've asked Ouma to help me. I've called on her to show me what I believe she was trying to tell me. I have begun to write her story. I want those stories but I am also afraid of them. There is so much unsaid. There is a poem, too. I wrote it before I left. It's for me, for Joe, for understanding.'

She handed *Kitchen Stories* to Flame.

'Ouma believed in kneading bread. Her practical hands punched the dough. She hardly ever talked about the past. It was as if she just folded it into that dough.' Katrina told Flame about her grandmother. 'I had to catch her at the right moment but the kitchen was not the place. There she would rather give advice. "Waste not, want not", she said every time we had a meal. "You kids don't know what it is to want. I could tell you stories about wanting."'

'I often wondered about her life,' Katrina continued. 'She was so in control, yet I knew enough to know that she suffered loss. When her first husband died in the 1918 'flu epidemic, she was left with a young child. Then she married Oupa. I wonder if she had a choice. The Afrikaners were Old Testament people. She was probably coerced into marrying him. I don't know if she loved him. My father was born and she adored

him. His death must have been such a loss. He was too young, only 44. Did she ever come to understand it, come to terms with it?

'One day a letter was waiting for me,' Catrina told Flame. The red envelope caught her eye the instant she opened the post box. It was from her grandmother. She recognised the spidery writing, the familiar flourish of the *M*, the looped *C*. She opened it before she reached the front door.

My dearest Catrina

Forgive my short scribble.

*I am sick at the moment. I feel weak some moments
and stronger others.*

That's why I am writing to you now, Catrina.

I am afraid of what may happen.

Will you come and see me? I have something

I want to give you.

*I have so wanted to talk again as we used to
but you got all grown up and I, well, I suppose*

I just thought you would get on with your own life.

But now there are things I must do, must say.

*We can talk again, the way we used to do many
years ago.*

I love you my darling, my Catrina.

Ouma

'Did you go to her?' Flame asked.

'No, I did not. Ouma lived a while longer. It was my mother who died first, suddenly. I went back for her funeral. She left us – her three daughters – to bury her.'

Flame sat quietly gazing at the sand in the tray. Catrina looked at her. She had placed a little black skeleton man next to a bleached bone.

'I am afraid of going back. Something happened and I fear the family skeletons. I'm afraid of what Ouma wants to tell me. Maybe something bad happened to her when she was a child and she could never tell anyone.'

'Write,' said Flame. 'Write it all out of you. Write to save yourself. Write because the ancestors are telling you to.'

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food for thought

Over the next few weeks Catrina saw Flame a few times. They were both busy, Catrina tutoring students for their exams. Flame's workshop on narrative and trauma took her all over England.

In late May Catrina went to Amsterdam for the weekend. She first visited the Van Gogh Museum. After a few hours of gazing at paintings, she sat at one of the many coffee shops. Buckets of new tulips stood in the leaded paned windows of the next door florist. A song, *Tulips from Amsterdam*, wafted on the air with the scent of the flowers and the coffee. It was 30 May, her father's birthday. Catrina remembered how she used to sing the song to her father.

Later she visited Rembrandt House, she saw a portrait of the artist's mother. That night she had another dream

I am in a dark, narrow space. I think I am asleep but aware of it. Dark and deep sleep, almost unconscious, I stir. I am aware of other people lying near me but I am fuzzy, not really awake. Then I am aware of the roof being moved and light enters. I am lifted out into a bright, lighted room. I awake from what seems like an anaesthetic. All is confusion. I look back at the place I have been lifted from and see a large sarcophagus; it is an ancient stone sarcophagus, carved intricately on the sides. I think I am dying and feel very tired and weak. I ask, 'How will I know when I am dead?' A doctor in a white coat takes me over to an examination table. There are two other white-coated doctors. No one talks. I ask my question again. This time I am answered. 'When they don't take you out of the coffin, then you will know.' I remember the others in the coffin. My friend Micky was there with me, as well as other female friends. Underneath us were layers of women. The layers reached down far below us.

I look around the room. My husband is there. He is quiet and very sad. I sit down at a table. On it is all my jewellery. I pick up a Victorian ring. 'This is for Meg, my sister.'

Another ring. I look at it. 'This is for Lucy.' I go through the jewellery indicating which pieces are to be given to whom. I look up at my husband.

'What time is it?'

He consults a wall clock. 'It is twenty to nine,' he says.

It seems much later. I am so tired. Opposite me I notice a young woman sitting on a chair. She is dressed plainly in a blue jersey and a tweed skirt. Around her neck hangs a cross. I look at her and know she cannot help me at all. She has nothing to say.

I ask again, 'When will I know I am dead?'

I wake up sweating, gasping for breath, in a panic. I am going to die.

There is a tiny vegetarian restaurant near Neal's Yard. *Food for Thought* is down a flight of narrow steps. The basement area has a few tables and stools jammed into it and some seats at a counter. Everyday delicious aromas of Asian noodles, stir-fried vegetables, and coconut milk waft up to lure hungry workers or shoppers. Catrina and Flame huddled in a corner eating roasted spiced butternut with black mustard seeds and feta. After lunch they decided to walk down to Victoria Embankment and along the river, past Cleopatra's Needle. There were bluebells in the gardens across the road and they crossed to walk amongst them.

Flame pointed to the bundle of letters Catrina carried. She had brought a box of unopened letters. 'They are letters to my sister Lucy,' she explained. 'I have not posted them. The pain of losing our father, the unresolved grief sits between us like a heavy black stone. He died when he was too young, we were too young. I don't like to go back,' Catrina continued. 'I like to bury the past but bones have a way of clawing themselves back to the surface, so you find them in the dirt. Like Abel's blood, dirt calls from the desert sands, like bones or bodies buried, they don't disappear; they scratch their way back to demand recognition, to be seen.'

'But, maybe the stone is the Rosetta stone,' said Flame, 'and, if you dig deep, you can find clues to interpret the hieroglyphics.'

Near the Hungerford Footbridge, they tired and so caught the bus to the Tate Gallery. Flame went directly to see the Turners. When she found Catrina, she was looking at Blake's paintings, transfixed by one in particular. Flame stood quietly behind her. 'Look at the white horse,'

Catrina said. 'The woman lying below it. She reminds me of a dream. She is being handed all her stories as if they are new children. I must find my stories; give them to Meg and Lucy.'

'Yes,' said Flame. 'Find a way back. The stories will lead you.'



sullen shade

At her mother's funeral, Catrina had read Christina Rossetti:

When I'm gone away/gone far away to another land/and you can no more hold me by the hand ...

She took on responsibility as the eldest, as she had always done. Lucy just sat staring at the carpet. Meggie was there with all her children. The cemetery was hot; the tall pines cast a sullen shade. She heard a cuckoo calling. It was a Klaas's cuckoo. February is cuckoo month. Everyone in her family died in February. The few mourners, who had made the trip down to Parys, threw clods of red earth into the hole. She waited until the diggers had covered it up and then she took a plastic dome of ghastly fake flowers and placed it where the headstone would be. She said sorry to her mother. She knew she'd hate being buried in Parys more than she hated plastic flowers. 'Next time I'll bring you a bunch of cosmos,' she told her. She stood at the grave. Her father's next to it. She had not been there since they buried him twenty years before. On her father's slab of granite lay a bunch of dried proteas.

They shared out their mother's possessions. It brought its own legacy. Her mother had refused to make a list. She'd said they could fight about it when she was dead. So they did. Catrina didn't really care. She wanted to travel. She let her sisters decide. There were some furniture, some rings, a few paintings and a bushman. Lucy wanted to take the bushman and they had an awful row. It was a way, Catrina supposed, to vent their pain but it was destructive. They said things that they would take years to get over.

The bushman, a sculpture by Anton van Wouw, his bow had a string and his arrow a metal tip. Her father bought it when they were

young. The veins in his hands stood up, they ran their hands over his peppercorn hair. It was not long before he hurt someone. Meggie was about five when she stumbled against him as she played one day in the lounge. The arrow gouged her arm. She had to have five stitches.



They divided up the art and furniture, except for the bushman. He was the odd man out, so to speak. When everything else was dealt out equally, he remained. There was nothing else left. Meggie said they should sell him and share the money. But Lucy wanted him. She said that he should be sold when they had all died. Catrina said that Lucy thought that if her children did not get him, no one could have him. She marched off in an awful rage. Catrina kept him in a cupboard under the stairs until they could decide what to do. They should have found a way of sharing him, but they never did.

letters to Lucy

Dear Lucy

Here I am in Ouma's house and I write to you, Lucy.

I write the stories that made me, shape me, make me

keep on making me. I write so that I may live — a

desperate, last attempt at doing something useful.

Sitting here so late, watching her candle dim, I wonder

if I will ever do it. Will I ever be happy? Will you?

I ask these questions in the eternal day.

The curtains hold me warm and sleepy, like they did

when I was a child. Ouma sits. Remember how Ouma

was always busy, and in the afternoon she would lie

on her bed to rest? Sometimes she would call me.

One day Ouma called me into her room and asked

me to go and fetch something from her wardrobe.

I never did find it. Now she is gone and you are

so far away.

Speak to me, Lucy.

Summer days by the river. My sisters and I stay with our grandparents when our parents go away. It is different staying there with them. Oupa works at his antique and auction shop. During the day we are with our Ouma. She is busy cleaning so we find things to do. There is not much to entertain three little girls from the city. Parys is a small town. There is the river and a park, but we have to wait for a grandparent to take us.

I have my first lessons in gardening. In the front, on either side of the path leading to the front door, are two large date palms. Ouma plants flowers in the pockets left by the sawn off branches. In spring there are primulas. Underneath, in beds around the tree, she plants nemesias and stocks. On either side of the pathway that runs from the front gate, straight flowerbeds carve a concrete road to her front door. Ouma plants Iceland poppies in beds along the path. In summer she plants snapdragons and phlox. We press the snapdragons throats and watch their mouths open and shut. *Leeubekkie*s. Little lion mouths.

Outside the front gate a canal runs the length of the road. A concrete bridge crosses to the road. In summer water runs from the river to water the gardens. *Leiwater*. We love to sit there and float twigs and leaves and paper boats down to the end of the street. We have boat races. We make Meg, the youngest, wait at the bottom of the road to watch for the winner. Lucy and I set our boats off and then run down to see who has won. Sometimes we slip on the loose gravel of the sidewalk and graze our knees. Then Ouma comes and takes us inside to patch us up again. Her first-aid box is kept in the bedside cabinet in her bedroom. When she opens it, it releases marvellous smells. A mixture of Vicks, menthol, Dettol and Johnson's baby powder. She has the usual plasters, cotton-wool. Ouma swears by Germolene, Mercurochrome, and Veraculax for any ailments. She also has the tiniest pair of scissors. I beg her to let me try them and sometimes, if she is working in her room, she lets me use them for a while.

In Ouma's lounge hangs a picture that so frightens me that I cannot go into the green lounge. It is a Van Gogh drawing done in charcoal, of dark black lines. To my child's mind it looks like a horrid troll or a demon. I cannot see the woman bending. It will take me years before I see what it is. It leers at me from its hairy face, its short body deformed, the clogged feet too large. I hate the long nose that sticks out, one big eye. The other, hidden by the hair. Why does she have this dreadful picture? All the rest of her home makes me feel so safe. Her soft red bedroom curtains, I love brushing the velvet against my cheek. In the kitchen we eat hot buttered bread thinly spread with Marmite. Sometimes she gives us Nestlé cheese in tubes. We squeeze long orange snakes into our mouths or onto our fingers and let them dangle there. In the dining room is another painting. I can tolerate the man and woman praying over their harvest of potatoes but not the imp in the green lounge.



The Vaal River runs through the town. Middle Street number six, where Ouma and Oupa live, is a block away from where the road turns into Mimosa Road. Then it is just a little way to the river. Some days Oupa takes the afternoon off and we go swimming in the river. The summer days are hot and sweltering. I suppose Ouma had had enough of three busy little girls.

'You little monkeys go and play in the river. Tonight you will be tired and go to bed early.'

Oupa takes us on hot days to swim at the rapids. It is quite safe. The rapids are fast but the water is shallow and runs over the smooth granite. Oupa takes us down in his bakkie. We are allowed to sit in the back as long as we promise not to stand up. We love the place of rushing water where we slip and slide down the smooth pavements of stone. Oupa sits under a tree and watches us. He takes us off Ouma's hands when he comes from work.

We loved the river too but not without some reservation. Our father had told us of the leguans that were over six feet long, not counting the tails that could whip off the leg of a man with one blow. He was Tarzan to me. A wild boy who swam the river each day, a mile in each direction. He was tough. He and his friends challenged other groups of boys to wars of *kleilat*. It was a game they played on the islands of the river. They cut long reed whips, on the end of which they would fix a pellet of clay. They lifted the *lat* back as if casting a fishing rod, then flicked it

quickly in the direction of the others. A nasty wound could ensue. He admitted that they packed the clay on the ends of the rods and then baked them in the sun to harden.

Later, at university, he was the Student Prince.

University of Cape Town

grandfather mends, by moonlight, his gun

Oupa loves fishing. I never see him swim in the river like my father did but he goes there to fish. After work he gathers his fishing gear and heads off to a favourite spot. He can sit there for hours. I don't remember him ever bringing home a fish to eat. He catches only barbel. It is the ugliest fish I ever saw - a whiskered kind of catfish. We squeal at the sight of the water monster. Oupa gives his catch to Johannes, the *house-boy*.

It is very late at night, I cannot sleep. I look out through the window. I watch Oupa. The evening is silver; the moon full and high. I climb out of bed and creep out of the dark house. There he is, mending his gun by moonlight. He looks strange; his face blank feathers. Night is in his face. I wonder why he is up so late. Oupa always sat on the step outside the garage. I had seen him there before. He looks at his gun. He is always in the same place, the frozen look on his face.

An owl hoots, the moon keeps its beam steady. As I sit under the juniper, its sharp needles prick my back. I wish I'd worn my thick dressing gown. Oupa sits, the gun between his legs. The metal clashes as his hand presses the cleaning stick down the rifle's long shoot.

He undoes the barrel. The clash again, gleam of metal, the smell of oil wafting on the night air. His silence, the stillness of his figure. Only his hands move over the gun's parts - cleaning,

oiling, and checking. The owl lands in the tall pines – a whoosh of air. Oupa looks up, sees me.

'Kom, Witkoppie, kom sit by my,' he says quietly. 'Are you wondering what I am doing up so late?'

'Yes.'

'Let me tell you a story.'

There was a man who said one could recognize him by the finger he had lost. The finger of his right hand, the index finger. He lost it fighting the English. Yes, he had fought the English for three years, three long years. Years that were on horseback, riding and fighting on horseback with his fingers through the reins of his horse and his gun held in his left hand. Until he needed it - then he moved it over to his right hand, took aim, and with his finger, his index finger, he shot at the English. He also fired cannons. He was the bombardier who was in charge of the cannon. To fire it, he had to load it with gunpowder and cannon balls. Then he had to stand away and pull a rope with a ring attached to it, a ring through which he put his finger, the index finger of his right hand. Then he pulled, and pulled until it released the hammer, which set off the spark that lit the gunpowder and exploded the load towards the English. At Stormberg, when the English came to take the station and the settlement there, he fired his cannon. He fired it twenty-four times that day. At the last firing something stuck, so he pulled again. The cannon was too hot, but he pulled again and again. Then he moved towards the hammer, lifted it back with his finger – and it was blown off.

'Did you know him?' I asked

'Yes. He was my father. Your great-grandfather.'

'What did he do after he lost his finger?'

'He did everything he had ever done before. Nothing stopped him doing what he wanted to do. And you know what?'

'What?'

He wrote about his adventure fighting the English. He wrote without his finger.'

'What did he write?'

'He wrote a diary, a *veldboek*, about the war.'



crimson lakes

When I was a little girl, Ouma sometimes talked to me. I call it talking though no one else would. The curtains of her bedroom are velvet red, like crimson lakes. On her dressing table is a set of silver-backed hairbrushes and combs made of bone. She has three glass perfume bottles with silver lids.

'There's one for each of you girls when I die,' she says. She sits at her dressing table brushing her hair and smoothing her face with *Oil of Olay*. On the medicine cabinet next to her bed, she keeps blue and white booklets from *The Path of Truth*. She reads from these daily. Two tall dark wardrobes hold her and Oupa's clothes. Ouma's is the one on the right, with two oval mirrors set into each door, beaded with barley twists. When she is at her dressing table or on her bed reading, I sit against the curtains, hold the softness against my cheek. Almost hidden, but Ouma knows I am there. We fly on the curtain, a carpet ride to strange and untold places.

One day she asks me to go to her room, to the wardrobe in the corner. She wants a blue and red shoebox. Her instructions are explicit. It is on top of the pile of boxes on the left side of the wardrobe, she says. I have longed to open the wardrobe and explore. The only glimpse I ever got was when she reached for a coat or shoes. That was enough to fire my imagination. I'd creep close as I saw her move towards the wardrobe. The stacks of shoeboxes on the left, the parcels wrapped in tissue paper, the smells.

The room is different this day. The drapes are barely parted. What little light there is, is the colour of old stone. On the wall above, gazing down the length of Oupa's headboard is an oval portrait of an old man in a suit that is buttoned up to the neck. Above Ouma's bed is a woman in a black dress with a white lace collar. And to the left, across the carpet, is the wardrobe. Reaching up, I turn the handle. The door opens a little. From inside blooms the smell of mothballs, shoe leather and lavender. Ignoring the gowns that hang in the shadows, I plunge my hand in among the boxes and tissue paper at the bottom of the wardrobe, hoping to chance upon a treasure; something marvellous that would enchant a girl's heart. In my haste, I push the door hard and something wild-eyed hurtles out of the darkness towards me.

Mother is in her coffin. I wonder what has become of her skeleton. Ash and dust? I cannot sleep. Flies beat against the wire screen. Ouma is restless on her bed. The heat is held at bay by the red drapes. I play games in my head. I take a word, any word and throw it up into the air. Air to breathe. No air in a coffin. Morning is in the coffin, underground and turning to ash. Mother is in a coffin. I wonder what has become of her skeleton. Ash and dust. The house is dirty. I should clean it but I'm gathered here, under a blanket, my crocheted blanket. My blanket has green and red roses and a black background with gold edges. Who would put gold into a blanket like this? Maybe that old woman down the road - the old bag round the corner at the

end of Middle Street? The house is square: a tin roof and a wire fence surround it. A concrete pathway leads up to the red front stoep and brick pillars. All is tin and cement. Imagine living in a tin house with concrete all the way around? She grows petunias, purple and red. The purple is dark like poo - purple and the green is dark green and the red like blood. They are colours that frighten me. Her black eyes stare out from beneath her hooded face. Hooded lids cover her eyes and a hooded scarf, her head. She has those black marble eyes that are so dark you can't see the pupils. Her hair is oily and curly. I wonder if she ever washes it. Around her shoulders is a red scarf with a silver brooch holding it together. Her nails, long and claw-like, are painted a purple red. Outside her house stands a large palm tree. The long fronds stand watch over her roof, moving wildly in storms and threatening the very sky. One tall lilac tree stands against the house, promising to keep out the summer's light. It infuses everything with its scent. Lilac-lavender scent oozes from her skirts, clings to her jersey and her kitchen curtains. Her lounge furniture, her drapes and sheets exude lilac. A lilac shower hangs over all who approach. Flies and cockroaches buzz and scuttle around the air vents below the kitchen window.

I walk past a small black dog with red eyes. It snaps at me. I whistle, pretending not to hear. Down by the river a willow spreads its hanging tresses and hides me. I sit still, holding my knees, rocking back and forth until that bad feeling goes. I put my head down and tap it lightly until the dizziness abates. Then I lie back, stretched out under the trees and look up. My eyes follow the striated stem till it parts into many boughs that form

the spokes of an umbrella spreading or a wagon wheel. They spread out and away and from each hangs a green scarf made of long green string tassels. They wave and turn in the gentle breeze and soon I am tempted to reach up and hold one. I twist and plait a few until, frustrated by my short arm's reach, I stand. The strings are now fronds of seaweed, fondling my face and bare shoulders. I twist and turn under the umbrella tree and dance in and out of the leafy maypole. I twist and turn, grabbing hold of the branches, letting go, when they pull too far. The smell of leaves soon brings its familiar odour to my hands and stains my fingers with its lovely juice. Lost in my dancing, I don't hear the approach of footsteps. A loud voice bellows above the two black toecaps of leather boots. I drop the branches. My first thought is that she, the witch lady, has sent the police to get me. Again the call. This time I recognize my grandfather's voice. Parting the leaves and branches, I peep out. He standing there.

'Oupa, it is you!' I cry.

spectres

Catrina had been following Flame's advice and was writing down her memories of childhood. The stories did lead her as Flame said they would. Her thoughts and dreams kept taking her back to times at Ouma's house. She began to remember the stories. She was, in actual fact, told very little. But she decided to write them anyway. She would imagine them, make them up as she went along. As she did, strange things began to happen. She began to think she was actually tapping into Ouma's mind – that Ouma was telling her stories. She felt her presence as she wrote about her. Ouma had never told her all the stories of her life. She was too suppressed by her notions of what she could admit to and her ideas of the roles she was required to play. Sometimes, when Catrina wrote, she felt as if she could tap into pre-verbal memories.

She could see the places where she had been as a baby. Were these real memories or the stories her mother had told her? Whatever they were, she wrote them. As she began to write more about Ouma, she wanted to know more about her life. She knew only one snippet of information about her childhood that she had once told her. Ouma was a refugee, although she never used that term. She and her family were living on a farm near Bloemfontein at the outbreak of the Anglo-Boer War.

Ouma told her once, as she stood boiling green beans on the stove, that they had fled, on an ox-wagon, to stay on a family farm. Catrina thought it was near the Lesotho border.

Boereboontjies, Ouma called them. A fat leg of mutton was in the oven, studded with rosemary. She'd reserve a knuckle of mutton and boil it in a pot together with an onion, two potatoes and the beans. When they were soft, she'd remove the knuckle and pour off the water. Then she mashed a large knob of butter into the beans. It was her favourite vegetable – that and the sweet cinnamon pumpkin.

Catrina kept thinking about this and the fact that Oupa was in a concentration camp as a child. What happened to them? She knew that Ouma first married Oupa's elder brother and that he died during the 1918 'flu epidemic. Then she married Oupa. She thought it was because that is what the Bible said – that a man must marry the wife of his brother if he dies. Maybe there were no other men or maybe her parents forced her to. She wanted to know. She was going back there.

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shapes of crosses

Catrina had spent many days and weekends at Ouma's house in Parys as a child. Then her own life; her work and marriage got in the way and she did not manage to get there so often. Ouma had been dead for three years by the time Katrina got back to her house. The drive through the Free State was beautiful. The veld was green and gold – the colours of South Africa. Old or new? She asked herself, what colours would she colour her land? Cosmos all along the verges. Such sweetness, such pain. Cosmos. Just the name reminded her that both her mother and grandmother had died. Ouma was past a hundred. They would also join the cosmos, she hoped, believed.

The day was a glass slipper, befitting the foot of a princess, yet it could shatter so easily. She passed the graveyard. All the ordered granite slabs, upright, unbending like Calvinist soldiers. The Catholic cemetery across the way where angels watched from carved crosses. Maltese, the Coptic crosses, two plain ones piled in a corner. The winter moss green and silent. Her mind searched for a headstone through the jumbled piles.

This road separates two worlds in me, she thought. One where memories and names are preserved in measured spaces, the other in the wind and sand that erased all traces of memory leaving only symbols of a forgotten heritage. She had tried to escape from a life that was poor, depleted of any myth or colour. So constricting she sometimes suffered from breathing difficulties. Her doctor always said it was an allergic reaction to new pollens. He did not know of the pollens fossilized in the genes.

Driving through the Free State – the sweeping beauty, the green hills, the sunflower smiles, she thought of Ouma. The river was full, fast flowing. She remembered conversations with her grandparents. They always talked about the weather. Always a geographical report.

'There's been a lot of rain.'

'The dams are full.'

'The veld is green. The maize golden, stands as high as a man.'

Always green and gold. How would she colour her world?

She would colour it red.

She arrived at Ouma's house, Number 6 Middle Street. It was deserted. The garden was dry and dead. The town had encroached. There was a shop on the next corner, a vet across the road. People had moved to the more fashionable areas in new suburbs.



Parys was hot in summer. She sat on the red stoep. Flies buzzed around her, beat against the flyscreen on the windows. The hum of bees from the orchard, dragonflies from the river were reminders of the childhood where she spent so many Sunday afternoons. Sunday afternoons with nothing to do but wait for Oupa and Ouma to have their after-lunch nap. Hours of heat and flies until Oupa relented and finally took them to the river.

She went for a walk along the river. She found her way easily, even after a thirty year absence. She knew to walk down Middle Street, to turn right at Mimosa Street and then along to the place where they used to ride the rapids. It was further than she thought. Oupa, of course, took them in his bakkie so it had seemed a short distance.

Blue-bottle flies buzzed around her face. She heard the water. She walked around the next corner and there it was. The Vaal River, its muddiness surprised her again. She walked to the edge, stepped into a pool. She crossed the stones to a large dry rock. It was quiet. She dipped her hands into the water.

The return to Ouma's house had shaken her. It was only a day since she walked up to the iron gate of the old house tracing the path of a strong woman. Her past spread before her in grimness and in joy. Thoughts of childhood, memories of her forebears, shapes and shadows. Her stories and unanswered questions. She stepped back into that house, empty as if it held nothing but stale air. It was a liar. The spaces held ghosts, whispers dashed down the passage, into the bathroom, out through the window. She opened the back door. Up the trees they chuckled. She ran to the garage. The door slammed shut. It would not budge. She walked to the other side of the house. The orange trees were still there, fruit wasted, lying rotting on the ground. The vegetable garden had become wild. Only pumpkins survived beyond the fencing, now collapsed. A gatepost stood as if a sentry. A pumpkin had mutated into a giant footstool. She thought of Cinderella.

The trees still bore fruit. She picked an orange; bit it open at one end. The pungent sting on her lips, the sweet juices in contrast. She licked her fingers where the orange nectar dripped.

Catrina spent time in Ouma's room. Unwanted furniture piled in the corner, her dressing table still in its original place. She sees Ouma in the main mirror.

Ouma is about seven years old, has walked up from the dam. It is a hot, cloudless day. She has done her chores and is off to play. She walks towards the dam. The road is a gravel path cleared and smoothed by the wagon that is drawn up each day to fill buckets of water, the feet of children, and the hooves of animals who walk up to graze on the sweet grass that grows in the damp shade. She sees the dam up ahead. The grey cement walls welcome her just as if they were a happy door painted red. The windmill, a tall guard. She likes to sit on the wall and dangle her feet in the cool water. To reach up to the wall, someone, long ago, placed stones against the dam wall, in a pile. She steps up onto the stones and can reach the top of the wall and grab the ladder that goes down into the water. She pulls herself up onto the wall.

Ouma would never admit it. Her life was an endless struggle. First, the struggle was with what was dealt out to all of them. The war coming when she was so young. She really did not remember much before it, but it marked her life beyond. She at first found it hard. She had to put her wants and her dreams behind her, while men struggled for what they called freedom. She never could understand that freedom had to be fought for. That blood had to be shed. Surely freedom was like air – there for taking. She used to hold her breath just to see how long she could. Sometimes when she bathed she would go under and hold it for as long as she could. She felt her lungs struggle, whacking her chest. Once her brother held her head under the water when they were swimming in the dam. Not only did her lungs struggle, but her whole body lashed out trying to force him off.

Oh Lucy!

*She is gone. I have come here and now Ouma
has gone. I came for the stories she told me –
to tell to you. Surely you saw the white roses on the boat?
The silhouettes scattered, the coral so rich,
so red, our heritage green.. On this early morning,
the first white periwinkle of spring, mist the morning
as I write to you. Silent, mute the stone angel,
with blank stone eye, no pupil to allow light
into her dark head. The roses were mixed.
Blood wine seeping. So I separated the white.
Icebergs clinking, threatening to sink the ship,
Nine red roses of wine for our father
Ten white ones for Mother. History is past, but memory!
What do I remember? The guide blind, I follow anyway.
It is almost thirty years since. Yet it lives in me, in us.
It echoes in my mind, whispers incessantly into my ears.*

*Lucy, telling these stories. I'm stepping into the past,
following shadows.*

Will you come?

The wardrobe was still there. She had not seen it at first. A movement caught her eye. It was a large spider, huge – the size of her hand. She watched it climb down the wall and to the doorway. It scuttled across the floorboards to a pile of junk lying on the floor. She did not want it to hide under the things until she had looked at them. Grasping a tablecloth that lay over the pile, she swept the spider across the room to the fireplace. It disappeared into paper and dust. She would have to hunt it down to chase it out or kill it. It took a little time to remove the stack of furniture piled in front of it. The wardrobe had been untouched. Somehow it had managed to conceal itself behind the stack of belongings and had been

overlooked. It was a good piece, early Victorian, so she was sure it would have been sold. Since she last opened it, she had become a grown woman with her own stories, her own life. She had left behind those days when all she longed for was Ouma's stories – until now.

There amongst the clutter of shoeboxes, piles of tissue paper, some of it wrapping foreign objects, lay a book, wrapped in tissue, tied with a silk ribbon.

Her hands began to tremble. She fiddled at the ribbon. The bow untied easily, only to reveal a knot. The knot in the faded ribbon had been pulled tight a long time ago. She struggled, then as suddenly as the bow untied, it came free. Inside it lay, not new, but finely bound in leather.

University of Cape Town

breakfast fables and tea

Catrina carefully opened Ouma's book, her excitement high. Her diary at last, left to her, carefully preserved and hidden from view. The covers fell back easily but the pages were stiff. She placed her thumbs between pages and drew them open. A pile of old photographs fell to the floor. She left them and paged through the book. The pages were blank. In disbelief she paged further but nothing. It was an empty book.

The photographs lay at her feet. She picked them up. They were old; black and white. It was only a collection of family photographs. There was a group portrait of Ouma and Oupa and the three children taken on a farm. Ouma stood next to Oupa with her father in front of her. His brother next to Oupa, the little sister on the ground. Ouma's face was stiff and unhappy. The next photograph was of Ouma and Oupa at a table. Oupa sat on the table. A young boy of about five stood on the outside. Ouma sat, her hand reaching out to hold her younger son. Catrina's father. He was about six months old. She could not help but be moved by the composition of the photograph, the divisions.



The other photographs were of family members. There was a group photographed in front of a rondavel, or a farmhouse. Catrina recognised her father, he was a young man. He must have been home from university. His face shines, his eyes beam like a torch in the night of the other faces. He stood out from the group, contrasting with his scowling brother.



There was no writing – not in the book nor on the back of the photographs. Catrina had drawn a blank. Ouma was not the writer she was hoping her to be. She wondered what happened in this family. Of the two sons, one ended up an addict, the other dead by his own hand. She was so sure that Ouma had stories for her, that somewhere she had hidden them, that she was calling her to them. Experience had taught her much, but these stories could teach different lessons. Lessons that seemed so far off, so longed for. They moved her in a way only true things could. A tear dropped onto the page. Was she weeping for Ouma?

No, what made her weep was being reminded of an inner life she'd been so familiar with that she had chosen to forget when she had taken up the cause of adulthood. The reunion with the tales has given her a mythology, stories to live by, stories to make life possible. She had

found images that night that might help her fathom her present confusion. Whatever the years had taught her about loss and compromise and defeat, she was here, being invited back into a life that was possible, a life that she wanted to make worth living. Somewhere her father had diverted the flow to the river. She was going to dig a channel, open the conduit back to her source.



The velvet curtain still clung to the wall. She sat down on the floor behind the dressing table and held onto the remnant. She took it, held it to her cheek as she did as a child. 'Ouma,' she asked, 'tell me about those days.' She found if she sat very still she could still hear the stories. They came in dribs and drabs – as if she was whispering them. She would write her diary, she thought. She would write what she heard, what she saw. Answers in stories. Threads for her to unravel.

I hide in the curtain, wrap her memory around me, Ouma's red memory. The bed has a dust dolly hanging from the springs. If she could see it she'd say it was dirty. 'Cleanliness is next to Godliness,' she'd say. She must not see or I will not get a story.

'Ouma ...'

Dear Lucy

*I write on paper as if it is stone
in lines of ink to wrap the world, a woollen ball,
spider's web, sacred lines. Writing —
the lay line to my life. Where to,
which way, a witch's way.
Lines of the atlas map out deserts, jungles, a city.
The sun warms ways trodden in old shoes.
All creation travels the same roads, don't you know?
The stars web their way.
A heavy black outline around things
separates them from their names.
Words wrought by men also have a heavy
black outline around them. My alphabet memory —
consonants and vowels — fear and love
intertwined. I write to you in invisible ink,
or in ink that will dry so very light that you
will wonder at these pages.
What makes letters — black marks on a sheet —
mean anything? The hope of a love letter,
the despair of retrenchment.
The alphabet — 26 markings — hieroglyphics to a child.
Sound is strong. Marks are scratches in sand, paper,
stone.
my small note to my husband — 'I am going'.
My letters to you, Ouma's to me.*

Nella's shades – Bloemfontein 1899

Ouma's name is Nella. When she was a child she had to fetch the eggs every morning. She loves this early ritual. The day pink, the air crisp. The coolness before the heat gets up. The grass sweet, waving in the early breeze. Early birds welcome the day. If only they were all as happy as the day and the birds. Tonight the same old arguments.

The candle flickers. Outside the cow under a sickle moon. Nella climbs into the window. The deep sill; a seat for her. Nella watches the moon. She flies across the night yard. The hens sleeping, curled up under the wing. The cow chews silently. Nightjars crouch on the earth.

Her nightgown catches on a thorn bush. It tears, but she pulls it free and soars a little higher. The farm begins to look very small below her. Next door the Muller farm pulls its fear around it like a mantle. Nella flies a little lower. Hendrik is emptying a bucket outside the kitchen. He is tall for his sixteen years; strong shoulders swing the bucket, a silver arc. She wonders about him. Both a feeling of exhilaration and another; is it fear? She turns and sees the younger brother. He is small and silly, she thinks. She is called and looks up as her mother walks into the room. She pulls the window closed.

Her mother says, 'Dreaming again. You will get the moon in your head and then what will happen? Come to bed now. Tomorrow we have a long day.'

The family owned a farm near the border. Her father's family. They were waiting out the war there. The men had left to join the fight against the English. The women and boys, too young for war, remained. At first it was difficult. The only accommodation they had was the ox-wagon. Then they built some simple houses.

Ouma was five and her sister, Susie, was six or seven. Then there was Linkie who was four and Anna was two. Frikkie was only one. Ella was on the way by then. Six children in a wagon.

The ox wagon loaded, the children were called to bring the last of the things to be packed. Fresh food, all they could manage, the family dogs followed.

The children were excited. This was the biggest adventure they had ever had. They knew the family down near the mountains where they were going; they had been there before. They waved excitedly to the *volk* who remained behind to care for the homestead. Nella lingered, held Freda's hand, and told her they would see one another again. Freda's mother pressed a small bundle into Nella's hand.

'Dink aan ons, Missie.'

'Kom, Nella!'

Her mother was nervous. The baby was testy and would not settle, the youngest children irritable. Nella had to control the toddlers. She walked alongside the wagon. It was a beautiful day. Remains of cosmos dotted the fields with colour. She could hardly believe that the peace would be shattered by war. The rumours had been rife for a long time. Then war was declared. All the men armed themselves and set off, leaving the women instructions to run the farm. But now the threat of soldiers occupying the farms to keep the Boers from family and food supplies had become a reality. The Van der Walts and the Steenkamps had left their farms weeks ago. Her father and uncles decided that it would be best if they too left. The men could not control the farms and fight a war.

All day the wagon rolled. The oxen were strong and red against the golden fields. It felt like they were going out for a picnic. They stopped at the river spot where they had often gone before. This time it was not to be a long lingering day under willows, eating Ma's chicken and *vetkoek*. They had a simple lunch of bread and cheese. Water from the river was boiled for coffee. The oxen were untied to drink and wade in the shallows.

Nella played under the willows, like she had so often before. She let the long tresses fall over her head, green hair. She plaited the long strands. Her mother called into her dreaming.

'Are you watching the baby?'

She had this responsibility. The other siblings were younger. Only Susie was older. She did more important things. Nella lay dreaming under the willow tree. What would her cousins be like? Would there be any her own age? She already missed the Muller boys from the farm next door. She wondered when she would see them again, if their farm would survive the soldiers.

At evening, as light fell into bruised shadows and long fingers began to play across the landscape, the wagons stopped. They built a fire near a rocky outcrop and the mothers began the evening chores. Nella slipped away as soon as she could. The stream nearby was cool and clear. She knew she could catch a fish if she had a hook and line. She sat dangling her feet in the water. A dragonfly buzzed blue wings. Near her a frog, startled by her interruption, leaped into the water. She picked a long blade of grass and knotted it. Then she added another and another, until she had a little basket. She floated it on the water. The stream took it away – wobbled it a little at first before it settled to a smooth ride.

That's how Moses was saved. She remembered the stories she heard from her father or on Sundays when they gathered for a service. The old family Bible, the only book the family owned. She loved these stories and the stories she had been told. Moses in the little basket.

Her Moses was a way down the river now. She could still reach him and save him if she had to. But no! It was the basket and the river that saved him. So she let him go – left him to the mercy of the river.

'Who will find you, little Moses?'

She remembered the peddler, the *joodsmous* who came around to the farm. His name was Meneer Moses Latsky. She called him Mr. Moses and always loved his visits. Her mother did, too, although she could not often buy anything. They seemed to need everything that he had. He had a donkey laden with bags and a suitcase. He would come into the house and her mother would make him tea. Then he would unpack all the wares onto the kitchen table. Brushes and baubles, cottons and tins, needles, pins, woollen balls of cerise, turquoise, lapis, and emerald.

'Those we can dye ourselves.' Her mother would disregard them. Nella knew she was dazzled though. She spun her own wool from the sheep they had. The only colours she could make were a dirty pink from beetroot, or an orange-yellow from carrots. But she had to be wise in her choice. The few pennies her Papa earned from milk sold at Bloemfontein's market were needed for the precious seed or spray that he bought. Occasionally he brought home a roll of calico for clothes. Once he brought some poplin in pale blue. They all got new dresses for Christmas.

Mr. Moses had done with his tea and cake. He had sweets for the children. Nella loved his face, especially his eyes. They always twinkled as if he had a funny story for every minute of the day, or another sweet hidden in his pocket. His beard was black and shiny, not those long stiff grey ones of her father's friends. He was the only man she knew who would talk and laugh and tell funny stories. Moses always had news.

'I think that is why my mother loves his coming so,' she thought.

He had travelled the surrounds and brought news of everyone.

'Did you know that Mrs. Steward had another set of twins? Old Mr. De Waal has died?'

Sometimes he brought news from further afield: the English soldiers had entered the Free State and were heading for Bloemfontein. Then they were not happy that the Boers were so easily fed and supported by the farms. Then there were plans underway to stop the support. Lastly camps were being built for the women and children.

That was when they packed their ox wagon.

Nella wondered about her Moses in his little basket; would he float all the way to the Nile? Maybe all the way to Egypt? Would he save the Israelites again if there were any left behind? She once asked her mother if their Mr. Moses was related to the Moses who saved the Israelites?

'No,' she had said. 'He is a *jood* and that Moses was the great liberator of the Israelites.'

'What's a liberator?' Nella asked.

'Someone who will save us from the English.'

Nella could never understand her mother when she tried to explain history.

'Show me,' Catrina said to Ouma and Ouma answered through the red curtain. Ouma was talking – it was as if she could hear her voice.

They were there a long time, much longer than they had thought. Her mother had another baby, Ella. She was so sweet. Nella used to look after her. Lalie, her cousin, was twelve and they became good friends. She liked him because he didn't tease her for being a girl. He showed her how to shoot at pigeons with a *kattie*. After Lalie left for war, Nella was lonely. Mother was so busy trying to grow things, make food to send to the men. Every week another man would come to collect food and supplies. They had so little but it was more than they were getting back home. She did not know what was happening back home. It seemed so far away and so strange that they should come this distance just to be on another farm. They could have produced much more on their own farm. But then reports began to arrive from Bloemfontein. She was in the room next to the adults when the men who had come that night began talking.

'They are rounding up all the women and children and taking them to Springfontein,' one said. 'All the farms are empty. The British tell the women that they are taking them to a safe place where the war will not harm them.'

'Ag. It is a lie. They don't want the women to give supplies to our Boers.'

Dekker, who used to live near Springfontein, said that the trains were arriving weekly loaded with the wives and children. Another had heard that the British were burning the farms. The talking burned her ears. She felt them grow long like rabbit ears, for they were overhearing things that a little girl's ears should not hear. She looked into the copper pot on the table and saw the fire. She ran outside and down to the dam. There she stuck her head into the water and opened her eyes.

It was cold when they arrived back at the farm. Bloemfontein was quiet so they passed through without seeing anyone. The gate squeaked on its posts. It seemed sad. She felt the same sadness as they drove up the dusty road. You could see no one had been here for a long time. A home knows when it is loved. It knows and it shows it. The trees seemed dull. They hung down much further than she remembered. The first shock was the old shed. It had been torn down. Sheets of corrugated metal reached like some bizarre giant's clothing from the sweet thorns. The giant was at the house. His huge back was towards them. No one else has seen him. She was frozen with horror, could not call out. The giant swerved to avoid a large flare that spat at him from his fire. He growled and spat back at the flames. His hand reached out for more wood, fetched a whole door from a pile. He tossed it onto the fire.

All around him were his cast-off clothes and utensils. A bucket swung from the chimney, a cast-iron bath from the balustrade. He groaned as he waited for the fire to warm him. All the time their wagon was getting closer to the house. She tried to call out, to tell them that they were in danger. Her voice – it was as though there were icicles in her throat. They stabbed her palate, sliced her tongue.

They slept in their wagons that night, restlessly. When the sun rose they could see the whole horror of the farm. The house was broken into so many pieces; they could not even find a table where they could lay out our food. The English destroyed everything. If a hurricane had ripped through the farm it could not have left a greater mess.

She could hardly remember those first days back at the farm. They spent days piling the wooden beams and corrugated iron that could be used. 'Soon,' said Ouma, 'we had a shack – like those ones we see now near the airport. Some chipped mortar off bricks. Others made new bricks from mud. If people knew how we had lived.'

Catrina remembered how the sun glowed through the net curtains, the velvet that hung from the pelmet in drops. She was with Ouma, right there with her. It was as if she was her.

'begin again' – Bloemfontein, 1902

It is 8 August 1902: I see all but one thing. This is my saving. This is what gives my suffering an unceasing life. I can see it all. I can feel it all. I have survived the years. I am here. It is over now, some say. They can all begin again. Again? I see that this is just more. More of the same.

The body takes this as it took the other things. I stand here in line, waiting, moving slowly forward. This is the same standing. Standing by the stream waiting to wash our bodies, or wash our clothes. It is the same standing as we did in line for our food in the soup kitchen when we had no more food to cook for ourselves. This is the standing we did waiting for the tents to be erected. Row upon row of tents. A family to a tent, they said, and meant the grandmothers and aunts and children. Each family had at least five children. Waiting with sick children at the tent, when the nurse came, or later at the mortuary tent. Waiting for the frozen buckets of water to melt on frosty mornings or for the winter sun to warm our hands. Waiting for the war to be over. Waiting for our fathers to come home. I wait here today. My feet shuffle forward. Waiting for the end of the line to hear my fate. Will our farm be there, or do we go down to the town hall with the others, the many others. And how long to wait for such news? Time means nothing to these men. The so-called *civilized English*, defenders of the faith. Waiting is waiting, no matter the hours. They all press down with the same weight. Seconds have the weight of stone.

Shuffle a little. Wait for life to come or to go, to pass as clouds in the sky. The others stand alone or in pairs, blowing against their hands, shoulders hunched up against the bitter cold. They, too, carry very little.

We stand in silence, in the dark alleyway that runs the length of the railway station. The long, sad line to the commissioner's office. A mother carrying a thin baby, another with only the clothes her baby left behind when she buried him. A child holding a younger child. An old

woman her gnarled hands clutching a grubby paper. Her eyes dart up as if to find someone, then down again in resignation.

We all wait as we have become used to doing over the years. We move only when the sergeant yells. The British soldiers are also worn out. We can see they too want to get home. These Boer women and children are albatrosses around their necks. They are thin and gaunt, fed up from fighting in the blazing African sun and the freezing highveld winters. This war makes less sense as it continues. They had already lost two years ago. Then they burnt all our farms, destroyed all our livestock. Still our men would not give up. They began fighting a new war. A war of blown-up train lines, smashed bridges. They became invisible, so the British took the women and the children.

I can see it all. It is all so clear. Our lives will begin again – and again and again.

We will bury the children yet to die. We will wait for the husbands to return – those who do. And then, when they are settled and forget what war was like, it will begin again.

Again and again.



Memory is unreliable. Was Ouma telling me her life? Catrina thought. What was her purpose? Catrina kept remembering a place. She was not sure if she'd ever been there or maybe she still had to go. It was in the Free State or old western Transvaal. The red curtain against her cheek. An old farm house – the back door opening onto the yard. A chicken run is in the back. Down a lane she can see a dam, the farm dam and a windmill. It turns with high creaks as it pumps water. She wakes early to the cock crowing. She gets up and feeds the chickens. She knows the kitchen inside the back door. There is a servant's utility room just before the main kitchen. There the servants wash dishes, clean out the heavy pots used on the outdoor fire, polish shoes. The kitchen itself has a large table, simple chairs. The dresser holds jams and cups of ivory china that hang from hooks.

Outside the chickens leave their nesting boxes and cluck around the gravel floor of the *hok*. She knows it well. Maybe it's a farm from early childhood, a recurring dream.

The passage was always dark. Even in the day it was dingy. A lamp burned at the top end and another at the bottom. The floorboards were dark from years of polish and too little light to see where the dirt gathered. Nella was frightened to pass the middle door. The passage led to her bedroom but to get to it, she had to pass her uncle's study. From under the door a light crawled. Its long fingers waited to grab her ankles. The red runner breathed in heavy trembles, drawing its breath to the dark corner at the end. She had never seen such an awful carpet. Huge, overblown roses in crimson and black stared up at her. They seemed to laugh. Black beetles crawled at their eyes, out of the gaping mouths. Sometimes she just stood and stared at the awfulness, knowing that what she was looking at was just a carpet runner. Then she allowed her eyes to trick her; the carpet's woven patterns moved and shifted until all she could see were the man-eaters and the black bugs crawling in them.

For a moment she brought her eyes and mind back to reality, then let go again. The roses opened and closed their mouths.

The hay smelled sweet as she opened the door to the barn. A lizard scuttled up the wall, a chicken darted out clucking in protest, caught unawares. Up the ladder and into the loft she quickly climbed. The warm rays of sun streamed in. Nella lay down in the straw, sunlight warm and immediately knew her reward. The dust particles rose in the shaft of light.

She loved the fantasy of watching tiny bits floating up and down the stream. Like angels, fairies and elves going up and down Joseph's ladder. She watched transported.

She made her move, darted down the passage towards her room. In her hand she clutched the blue egg. As she passed his door, she took a deep breath and closed her eyes. She had passed it, heard nothing. As she put her hand on the handle of her bedroom door, he stepped out of the shadows ahead.

'I've been waiting for you.'

He put his large, browned hand round hers, took it off the handle.

'Kom Witkoppie. Kom met my.'

'No!' she began but he picked her up, placed his hand over her mouth and hissed.

'Be quiet!'

He opened his study and pushed her in, closed the door.

'Now sit in that chair over there!'

She shivered. What was he going to do? He stood by his desk, his great hands leaning on it, his lids heavy, hanging. His eyes closed.

'What am I going to do with you?'

He turned, saw her cowering in the corner. He pulled up a stool, placed it in front of her. A curl of hair had fallen over his forehead. She looked at him. He turned his eyes up to her. All the blackness of the cave, the night, the bugs in the flowers loomed there.

'Nella. I don't want to hurt you. You must listen to me.'

He reached out, took her clenched hand. She pulled it away.

'Now listen here!'

He stopped, looked down. Then he reached for her foot and took it in his hand. She kicked out with her other foot but he had anticipated it. He caught her ankle. Holding both feet he looked up at her.

'Nella, please. I don't want to hurt you.'

shape of sand

On the floor in the corner of Flame's familiar lounge was a large pottery bowl filled with stones she had collected. Catrina looked at a grey stone. It had a white seam running across the middle. A close study of stones reveals much. Firstly the question, why had she chosen this one? There is something about stone that intrigues. She picked it up, randomly, from many. She held it in her hand. It was cold at first but warmed, energy exchanging. Pressed into hardness by time and earth forced down until it is shaped. Maybe by a river or by the sea, tumbled and turned. Perhaps she is like stone, formed over eons by tumbling, being pressed down. Chips, conglomerates, chunks, chiselled down by the elements. Stones stand for us. In graveyards they hold our names. On open plains silent stones stand in testimony to our ancient practices. Stones at doors to hold them open or to seal tombs. Stones on roofs to hold the tiles down, stones on the path to show the way. A cairn to mark a monument. Until the history is sung, the world waits in silence.

'I've hit a wall,' Catrina said. I was sure Ouma was telling me something but I am too afraid. I don't trust it.' Flame sat quietly as she spoke. 'Something's been broken in our family and I don't know if I can face what it may be.'

'Maybe it's not what you think it is,' said Flame. 'Stories help us find the words to heal.' Catrina sat and stared at the stone in her hand. 'Here, let it fall into this water, it will become a fish.' Flame held a bowl of water under Catrina's hand. 'Let it go.'

Catrina dropped the stone she was holding. 'How does one fit into another's skin? I really don't know anything about Ouma's life, how can I tell her story? I've let her have her say but no more.'

'Stories may not be literally or historically true but they could be emotionally true,' said Flame. 'Maybe we must be healed by our wounds?'

Catrina tried over the next few days but could not write any further. Ouma's story waited in a dark passage for her and she could not walk past it. And so she left it there with the light glowing from under the door. She tried walking around it, so to speak. She tried writing other parts of her story but was stopped by terror. It was as if opening that door would end everything. For weeks she left it. Then she'd try again but she could never write past the door. The passage loomed darkly and although she wanted to complete the writing, she could never go there.

University of Cape Town

a senseless wheel

Catrina had sought Ouma's story, to write a story of a grandmother and a granddaughter. She had wanted to explore what it was like being a woman in South Africa one hundred years ago. Ouma had travelled by ox-wagon, was a refugee in her country, lost a husband when she was very young, another when she was old, and a beloved son. She'd scrubbed and cleaned her house all her life. She lived through two world wars, the English ruling the country, then the Afrikaners, then the blacks. Catrina wanted to go back but could not. What was Ouma trying to say? She heard her whisper, the whisper from the red curtain, 'Leave it now. Look somewhere else.'

Thinking about Ouma, the row over the bushman, how a copy of it had pricked her memory at the gallery, Catrina decided to go to Italy. She knew that the figure had been cast there. She discovered that the foundry was still operative, run by the same family. She would go to Italy to look at paintings and also visit the foundry in Florence at which the bushman had been cast.

raw umber

On the parapet was the name of the Roman hotel where Catrina was staying, *Albergo Lorelei*. The terracotta tiles on the patio were aged. The shades of the earth. She had seen the travertine quarries near Tivoli. Great slabs of the marble cut leaving deep white walls exposed. On the terrace, the clay tiles were marked with lichen and time-cracks. The walls were once plastered a wine red, the edging ochre, the door and window surrounds green. She could hear the afternoon wearing away. People walked, the traffic got busier. She had contacted Andreas

Vignali, a sculptor from the foundry in Florence. She would take the train the next day.

Rome station had not been too busy. The train to Florence was waiting, so she boarded it early. She read for a while, drank coffee. The newspapers at the news stand, the world was in order, just the usual political scraps. Billboards posted around the station advertised Italian candidates for the June election – clean faced, smiling men.

The countryside flashed by, green and yellow. Black inside a tunnel and Catrina could see her reflection in the glass. A man opposite slept. She remembered her dream of the previous night. She had dreamed of a round house and a man and a young daughter who had come to live with him. She liked the man; he seemed nice enough. On the wall of his villa was a beautiful fresco of spring, *Prima Vera*. Catrina decided to clean his house in exchange for living there. All the water jars were cracked. The girl found one for her. As she washed the wall, the fresco came off in long dripping paint.

Maybe it would rain. Yellow broom, blossoms on peach trees. Still too close to Rome though, buildings near the railroad hung their washing on lace-lined balconies. Now hedgerows, fig trees along the tracks. Every house had a tall cypress or two. The colours of Tuscany; muted and freshened by spring. Red poppies, flax, lupins blue in fields. Why do I come here alone and long for love? She thought of Joe, of how she lay in the bath pleasuring herself a few nights ago. This is the place for passion, for love. She wondered how he was coping, he and Sam.

The grapevines were cut low, beginning to bud. Now the hills were emptying of towns, fast flowing rivers with green water, hilltop fortresses, speckled clay tiles on farmhouse roofs. She watched a dove fly. A man walked into the carriage, looked at her, not shy of looking at a woman. She returned the compliment. Catrina thought of again of Joe as she stared out at a house of yellow stucco. The train had stopped at a station. It moved again. Earth colours, a palette of earth. He had loved

her enough to let her go. Then the first farmhouses – white geese on the green, oleander.

Another castle on the hill. She wanted to avoid the tourists, wanted to sit under a peach tree with Joe, a basket of bread, cheese, wine. Life was beautiful. She knew it, it had taken a long time. But she knew she would forget again and have to relearn it.

The convent was as Catrina remembered it. The majestic country estate donated to the sisters of Giovanni de Baptista stood solidly on its gravel driveway. The pansies, planted in the terracotta pots, held up smiling faces. It was late in the afternoon when she arrived. The bus brought her nearby. It was an easy walk up the Via Ripoli. Sister Augusta stood at the desk.

'Buona sera, Suora.'

Villa Merlo Bianco, with its white blackbird fastened to the heavy wrought iron gates, closed off the streets of Florence. It was an illusion of the Tuscan countryside; the vineyards that ran up behind. Upstairs the huge library off her room was lined with bookshelves. Catrina opened the shutters and looked out across the garden. For a moment she thought she saw the moon – full above the tiled roof but then realised it was a television satellite dish. White moon-disc in a blue sky. She remembered that it would soon be full moon. Two days time. Full moon in April and the beginning of the Easter cycle. Lent broke on Sunday – full moon day. She wondered what it would be like to be up on the highest hills to watch it rise. This is the city of Galileo, of moon observation, where he charted and wrote of sunspots, insisted that the earth moved around the sun, that Jupiter had four moons. What was it about this place that shifted people's thinking? Could it still happen? Could I have a renaissance? she thought.

She stood, as she had done before, looking at the painting. It still sent a ripple of emotion down her spine. Botticelli's *Prima Vera* painted almost 500 years ago, still clear, lucent. She stared at the lovely face of Venus, in her dress resplendent with flowers, petals falling about her face, the very earth bursting with abundance. Cupid hovered above blindfolded, his arrow pointed to shoot indiscriminately, Mercury, on the left, stirred the weather clouds, the three graces dance in a circle. She had never noticed the green man before. But there he was looming, threatening, and grabbing. And here? Here right next to *Prima Vera* stood a woman. More like a ghost: she seemed to be part of the lovely *Vera*, emanating from her. The green man belonged in the woods. His essence was sap, his element the forest. He was grabbing at her, pulling her back into the forest. Her three sisters had not noticed. Suddenly she knew. The green man had ravished *Vera*. Yes. It was so obvious. Venus in the centre, the untouched, the virginal symbol of love. But *Vera*, ravished, impregnated by Chloro. This was her own ghost standing next to her, this fey thing in white. She was dying, disappearing. Catrina staggered back. Why had she missed this before in all the viewings of her favourite painting? She looked again, as if for the first time. She felt the feelings rise up in her throat, she felt the dizziness. Is this how it was? That men were ravishers? Or were they like Mercury, his back turned, preoccupied with the weather. Are all men mercurial or green? Is this the story of love?



The crowds at the Uffizi had dissipated. It was Saturday evening and people were leaving for a stroll along the glowing Arno before supper. She stood at the Loggia's window and stared out. She could not see the Ponte Vecchio golden, the mist rising off the water. She could only remember the old story of how she was once loved by a river.

The next day Catrina met Andreas at his studio. He shared it with a sculptor. As they entered the studio, the sculptor looked up briefly from chipping stone. He waved a friendly greeting. 'I cast his sculptures,' Andreas said. The age-old process of sculpting forms in wood or clay had been supplemented somewhat by modern processes like welding and construction of materials. Andreas explained the process briefly, 'But we still like to use traditional methods.' He picked up a sculpture. 'Once the work is finished, a mould is made. Layer upon layer of plaster is painted over the original. Then the two halves are separated and molten wax is poured into the mould. This leaves the artist with a wax copy which it sometimes worked into again to refine detail.' An enormous furnace stood in the corner. Catrina walked over to it. 'A mixture of copper and tin is heated to 1500°C,' Andreas continued. 'A ceramic shell mould is made and then molten bronze is poured.'

Catrina looked at the blow torches and the oxides standing on the window ledge. Patina to achieve the required colour, heated by the torch.

'Did you ever meet my uncle in South Africa?' Andreas asked.

'No,' said Catrina and told him of the bushman her family owned.

'Yes, my grandfather went there in the 1930s to help Van Wouw cast bronzes. Come over here, I have a copy of one he made before he left.'

Catrina followed him into the next room. Tall cabinets lined the walls. They were very old, some were hand painted. Faded flowers and peeling designs. Andreas opened the door in the furthest corner. Dust lifted into the air, as he pushed the doors back and reached in.

'Here, this was cast before he went to South Africa.'

He pulled out a sculpture and moved towards the window. Katrina recognised the shape of it but because the context was so unexpected she moved forward and peered at it as if she had trouble seeing.

Andreas held up the bushman. 'It was cast around 1902,' he said. 'My grandfather did it, then he went to South Africa to work there. His son, my uncle Renzo, stayed on.' The room spun around Katrina. She sat down on a pile of old wooden chests, staring up at the Andreas. 'His name was Gusmano Vignali. Renzo was his son.'

The bushman. It had followed her, would not let her go. It pierced her. She knew she had to go back and complete her journey with Ouma and her stories. She had to go on trying to find the shape of her past.

Catrina walked through the streets of Florence aimlessly. Then she found she was following a monk. Whenever she turned a corner, there he was. She followed him past the Duomo, down the Via dell' Oche, and the narrow lanes past the Casa di Dante and Santa Margherita de' Cerchi. The monk was waiting at a corner. He was looking at a pocket diary, reading it with squinting eyes. The sun had broken through the clouds; the day was warming considerably. Catrina walked towards him. Suddenly he looked up and began to walk on. He turned at the next corner, his robe trailing. She followed. The narrow streets of Florence brightened by the sun. Each corner held a surprise. A man sat making books from *papier-mâché*. He layered thin sheets, brushed glue. All around him hung skins like leather but made of paper. Catrina looked for the priest she had followed. As she turned the corner, she saw him. He had stopped outside a pair of carved doors. His hand was on the knocker. He let it drop once. The door opened. He disappeared inside.

A few steps on, her eye fell on something that had fallen. She stooped to pick it up. A silver napkin ring with the napkin – green floral linen. She looked up. The shutters were closed. A balcony a little way down held flower boxes of red geranium. No window was open. She wondered if it had been dropped from above. No. There was no window directly above her. She looked at the inscription – *FRANCESCA*. The hallmark was on the right side under the twisted coil edge. She put it into her pocket. She wondered who Francesca was. Had she used the napkin the last time she had had a meal?



She returned to the Duomo. After the glorious mosaics, the floors, the ceilings, the many carved marble pillars, Catrina slipped into a side chapel. She sat and looked at the Madonna and child above her. She gazed at the flat face, the one repeated so often in iconic art. She recognized her easily – the face of piety and purity, the symbols to indicate this – the blue robe, the lily. The golden halo. This Madonna's face was much darker than usual. Maybe it was the Byzantine influence. As she stared, her face began to glow. Suddenly she realized it was her mother's birthday. Her mother would have been seventy years old today. She rose to light a candle. There was only one left in the box. She slipped in the silver coins and put the candle to a flame, placed it in its holder. She returned to her seat, glancing at the Madonna.

She sat there for a long time.

When Catrina stood, the church had emptied. It was almost seven o'clock. The church wardens were closing the doors. Andreas was waiting across the square. They sat together at a trattoria off the Ponte Vecchio and sipped wine. She looked up at the distressed wall. A photograph framed in an old walnut frame of two people. It was titled *Josephus and Catriona*. She was getting to know Andreas, liked his energy, the outgoing positive nature, but Joe was calling her home. Joe and Sam.

The orchestras outside the restaurants were striking up waltzes and Italian love songs. People were sitting down for an early supper. She decided it was time to go back to London and after that, home. She would leave the next day.

The train pulled out of the station. She lurched forward, pulled towards her destiny. She watched as another life passed in the fields. The sunflowers dropped faded faces to pick up stones. A priest walked across a piazza, drew his hood lower. He carried a book. A long cord dangled down from his robe. The man across from her, the man with the

leather book, looked up from his work. His eyes had taken it all in before she had stepped across the threshold into the coupe. He went back to his everlasting layering of paper and pasting, moulding patiently.

When she jolted awake, the fields of yellow flax dazzled her eyes. She closed them again. The armies of Europe marched the fields. Across from her, she felt his question, her withdrawal. The train jerked and she fell closer. She could smell the leather of his shoes, his gloves. He would carry her across the battlefields, she thought. They passed a shoreline. Swans on the lake. Eleven cygnets. A boat ploughed through. She gasped, stood up at the window. They bobbed up again separated.

University of Cape Town

kitchen ghosts

Back in London, Catrina held out the silver serviette ring to Flame. 'I found this. It has your name.' Flame took it and they sat together on the cushions on the floor near the sand tray. Flame looked the silver ring and placed it in the sand. Catrina told Flame about Andreas, the priest and finding the serviette ring.

'I also saw the bushman.' Catrina told Flame about Andreas and the foundry. 'I cannot get away from my life. You entered too,' she said pointing to the silver ring.

'We are both being called back – back home to South Africa, to our past.'

'You too?' Catrina asked.

'This silver ring with *Francesca* engraved into it is a message. I need to go back too and face my past. I need to be with the part of me that is Francesca, the part I cut off from when Poland and Themba died.' Flame spoke of Poland and how he was tortured, killed by the police, how her young child, Themba, died a few months later of meningitis. 'Flame is my wall of fire,' said Flame. 'to keep out the bad ones. I have forgiven the killers but now it is time to face them. Maybe then I can be Francesca again or even Mapula?'

'Yes, I think we both need to go back. I need to go back to the Catrina who lived in Klerksdorp and the Catrina who loves Joe.'

The year of sojourn had come to an end. Catrina packed up her flat. It was being let to another South African on a sabbatical, so she left most of the stuff in it. Flame was returning to South Africa a week later. They said they would meet up there.

the shadow of an elephant

The return was difficult. Joe was distant despite the calls and correspondence. The separation had pushed them further apart. Sam was at boarding school in Somerset West and they took a drive out to spend an afternoon watching his rugby match. The N2 had become more of an obstacle race than a major route out of Cape Town.

'Urban farming, they call it,' Joe said, pointing to the cows and goats grazing on the wide grass verges along the highway. An old white horse was pulling a cart laden with cut wood – rooikrans and wattle. A pedestrian bridge was covered in mesh wire. A herd boy was leading his Nguni cattle over the bridge to the small kraal on the other side, next to his shack. Beyond the airport the marshlands of the flats grew thickly with arums and bulrushes. A flock of sacred ibis flew over the car and a grey heron stood poised to catch a frog. Then the fields opened to a haze of violet-blue flowers. Newly planted vineyards and the Helderberg was purple against the blue sky.

Sam had to be called from his dorm. He came running, his scrum-cap in hand. He was tall for thirteen and ruddy cheeked. She had not seen him since the Christmas break when they had whirled around London. Tears filled her eyes as she hugged him. He hugged her for a second or two and then pushed her gently away.

'I need to join the others on the field. I'll see you after the game?'

The veil of childhood had lifted. His eyes showed he was already looking across the brink – the threshold into manhood. She was being distanced so that he could become man. She followed Joe to the rugby field and they found shade under an oak. She looked around her. The fathers and sons eagerly awaiting battle.

Catrina thought of Flame and of Sarah. She'd been thinking about Sarah all day. She heard the clock in the dining room strike five. She went downstairs. The lounge had a sherry decanter, Waterford, and she poured herself a glass. She looked out of the window; the frame held the elements of a place that she loved; the thorn trees, the rocky outcrop on the koppie, the sun setting. No painting could capture this. She sipped the sherry and watched the sky deepen into red and the trees blacken. Kiewiets protested and a cricket struck up. She knew she was going back. Ouma's story, it seemed, was stuck in a dark passage and she needed to go back to the beginning. It was a theme of her life; to turn back and begin all over again. Was she ready? Did it hold the answers to her questions? Catrina couldn't say. That evening she wrote another letter to Lucy.

Oh, Lucy!

Today there is an elephant in my window.

I want to remember everything.

*I want to write poetry about the world I see
around me, about place and the loss of place.*

I want to record, challenge, provoke.

*I want to write about extinct quaggas,
the drum, the elephant and
the building on Table Mountain.*

*I know it is hard for you but if I write
them all down in a story
then maybe you would read it?*

*The elephant is fading now as the early morning mist
lifts off the window. But she will always be there
watching, silently, as we go our way.*

First I must write about what she wants me to remember.

Lucy, do you remember Sarah?

the shape of Sarah

Sarah's room was in the back. Behind the garage in the back of the yard. A room in her mind filled with memories. The white starched bed, set high on *tokoloshe* bricks, the precisely placed pillows embroidered brightly. Soft black pillow-bosom, the faint whiff of Lifebuoy soap, a sweet, oily smell not found on Mother.

Small battery wireless radio blared sounds of Soweto; the tin guitar and penny whistle. Not Paul Simon, this music strummed away her childhood under African skies. The music, the language, sounds that lie on her ear like seaweed drapes a rock at low tide but never found anchor. Sweet sounds, rounded Os, melodious melodies. The clicks and hiss of Tswana so familiar, yet she did not speak it. Sarah – *she who laughs* – her English name, her Christian name. She lived in Jouberton, a dusty township. They called it *the location*. Names had changed. The Western Transvaal was the Northwestern Province. If she went there, on which door would she knock? Catrina did not know where Sarah lived. She only knew the back door, the one Sarah entered each morning, as faithful as sunrise, to make tea. She knew the door through which she exited late at night to go to her quarters. It was locked behind her. But Sarah's own door was always open.

She remembered one night. It was a night with noises that she still carried and they still terrified her. Who knows, but a child, what a hand run along a passage wall can do? Or dull low shouts from behind a study door beyond the long passages of the house?

The long fingers of branches scratch at my face in the moonlight as I dance and moan. The fairy ring lit, the wind a soft moan. Suddenly arms around me, lifting me. I think I am flying at last, as I long to do. Clutched and smothered I recognize the smell

of her breast. She takes me into her bed and hushes me to sleep. I dream of cows being milked, drinking the warm fluid, the creamy taste bringing summer. And the fields full, the air pure, I am drunk from milk and happiness.

Very early she wakes me, confused with dreams and memory. She smuggles me back to the house, pushes me through my bedroom window and tells me to lie quietly in bed.

I shall search for her, ask for Sarah. Someone is sure to know. Someone will know where she lives. Sarah who? Did she have a surname? Sisters and childish games in the car going to the South Coast as we cuddled up to Sarah on the back seat. What is your surname? I know you are Sarah Muller like us. Sarah smiled silently. I never heard stopped to hear her.

Do you remember Sarah?

Please let us talk again, Lucy.

I love you.

Catrina and her family used to go to a farm in the Maluti Mountains near the Lesotho border. An old man lived there, Ouma called him a bushman. He was one of the few left. He said that he always knew when they were coming. He would put his ear to the ground and he could hear them coming. He was always at the gate when they got there.

The water was muddy again. Catrina could not write. Each time her writing approached Ouma's story on the farm, it was as if a tall man blocked the way. Catrina felt fear for what must have happened to her. Only Sarah's mother Freda had been there and was still there to tell. She decided to go to her. The water, the water that was clear had been stirred up. Sediments that lay still and unseen on the bottom, now polluted the clarity.

Sarah was not there but she did find Sarah's mother, Flame's grandmother, Freda at home. She was almost one hundred years and was living in a small house in Jouberton. Freda was alone when she arrived. She heard the car and came to the front door. She seemed even older; her eyes two tortoisises as she recognized Catrina.

'Come, come.' She showed her in to a chair at a small table.

Tea was brewing. A table in the corner had a vase of orange-red dahlias and photographs of Flame and her son, Themba. The walls were partly papered with pages from *Drum* magazine. On the wall was a picture of the State President, Thabo Mbeki. She remembered the days when Freda had a picture of Verwoerd in her room. The house still had the original corrugated iron walls. The ceiling was so low that a tall man would bump his head when he stood upright. The fan on the table revolved lethargically. The air lifted a loose flap of one of the pages from *Drum*. A picture of Miriam Makeba hummed and rocked to the rhythm of the fan. Catrina spent the morning with Freda trying to unravel the

mystery. She was full of questions. Freda took her time. She looked into her eyes for a long time. Could she remember back a century? Catrina wanted to know if something bad had happened to Ouma.

'No one hurt Nellie. No, it wasn't her. She was alright.'

'Who then?' The fear overwhelmed her. Freda sipped her tea. Her eyes were fading fast. Cataracts covered her right eye. It looked like the moon when it wanes.

'It was Josiah,' she said. 'Josiah, the old sangoma. They beat him and his young son. That was when Lalie left. He never went home again.'

'Lalie? Ouma's friend?' She was trying to clear the mud from her own eyes.

'Yes. She loved Lalie. I thought they were matched. Their hearts beat together. They should have married but he left the farm and never went back. Then it was too late.'

'Her grandfather, her father?' Catrina feared the males of the family.

'No. Not them. It was her uncle and the other men. The men from the farm.'

'They were bad, weren't they?'

'No, Catrina. They were not all bad. You must not hate your grandfathers. They were good men.'

It was too tangled. Catrina had wanted to write about Ouma, not about the men in her family. The web was sticky.

Freda dug back, her far-off memories clearer than today. Shading came with the present. There had been an argument after Ouma went off with Lalie to the hills that night. She was going to meet Josiah with whom Lalie had spent time. They called him *Outa* on the farm. His son, Jan, was Lalie's good friend.

Josiah's prophecy was unpopular in the year 1900. The Boers had had good victories over the English. God's chosen people, it seemed, had been chosen again. Lalie's uncles had victories at Stormberg, Roodewal. The men were good at disappearing into the hills. But Josiah's eyes saw something else that night at Drum Rock. They were sitting around him as he began the story. Nella thought it was something that had happened a long time ago. It was only later that she realised he was speaking of the future. He said he saw a great smoke rise over the hills of Bloemfontein. It covered the town and spread. It spread far – to Kimberley, along the river to Potchefstroom. It rose up and blew to Johannesburg and to Pretoria, and then it swirled and backed down to the great river, the Gariep. There the smoke dipped low over the river and followed the course to Augrabies where it thundered down the gorges to the coast. Then it lifted its head and travelled south to Springbok, Loeriesfontein, and Nieuwoudtville. It spread great fingers out and reached all the way back to Rustenburg, the Waterberg and to Messina. Then it turned again, down to Molteno, Murraysburg and Bedford. Josiah said it was the angel of death. Nella thought he was confused with the story in the Bible that her father had read to her – the one when the smoke of the angel of death travelled through the land of Egypt and killed all the firstborn babies.

Josiah continued. There will be a terrible crying in the land. The whole land and the people will cry, he had said. He talked of the defeat of the strong, the victory of the wicked and the herding of people into places they did not want to go. He said that peace would never come, not in his lifetime, not in Nella's and Lalie's, nor in their children's. They would see their homes destroyed and their children dying. He said this would happen over again for all the peoples of the land. Winners will be

losers. 'The weak will rule the strong,' he said. 'One day a great man will rise, a man from Josiah's mother's tribe. He will grow so great that he will speak to all the nations, even kings and queens from lands across the sea. He will bring peace to the land.'

That night, when Lalie and Nella got back to the farmhouse, their uncle was waiting for them. He took them to his study where he questioned them. Gert, his son, was there too. Gert had told his father that Nella was out in the hills with Lalie and Josiah. Later that night, Josiah and his son were found beaten. His son was so badly beaten that he lost his hearing. Lalie left the farm the next day. Josiah could not leave. He was born there in the foothills of the Maluti Mountains, as had been his father and grandfather before him. His ancestors had lived in the hills and had recorded the events of their lives on the rocks hidden in caves on the hillside. He had inherited the gift of sight. He was a sangoma. Freda filled in the details. Before the war was over, Josiah cursed Nella's uncle and all the males of the family. He said their anger would rise against them. Their own sons would be blind – some to the truth and some to the sun. The male line of this family was cursed and the generations would follow the female line. All the male heirs would be dead by the time his sons died.

'And when did Josef die?' Catrina asked Freda.

'In 1969.'

'The year after my father died.'

Freda just looked at her, her eyes clouding again.

brown paper – Bloemfontein 1910

The story of the waratah: a woman and a man loved one another very much. Then the maiden's beloved went off to war. She waited faithfully. She wore a red scarf and stood on top of a hill, a rocky hill, waiting for him. She waited and waited in the hot sun and he never returned. Slowly her body shrivelled and she sank through the crack in the stones. All her tears watered her and, after a long while, a green shoot grew out of the crack. Then a red flower rose up, burst into full colour and stood in her place waiting for her lover.

Lalie and Nella met once after the war. She was proud of him. He had been one of the chief negotiators for the Eastern Highlands and had been invited to the Union talks of 1910. He had developed an irrigation system for the farms. He stood on the front step that morning in the early morning sun. Tall and handsome he was, but his eyes were sad. She saw him coming long before he saw her. She had watched him before the moment she stepped into the doorway. The darkness inside the house had held her and he was surprised when she appeared so suddenly.

'Nella. I'm here.' He said it simply. She smiled at his hat in his hand, his announcement. She hugged him. She could feel the tension in his shoulders. She held him closer and his sigh brushed her ear. She pulled back and looked into his eyes.

'You are well and safe. I am so proud of you.'

'We failed. They humiliated us and it is going to be a very long journey.'

'Lalie, the war is over. We have all had to start again. Everyone has. You haven't failed. I am so proud of you – of what you did, of what you have done.'

He held her close, smelling her soft hair, feeling the soft flesh against his veld-hardened chest. He kissed her. She tasted like wild cherries picked in late summer. He had forgotten so much of what had given him pleasure. They sat at the kitchen table. He drank in the familiar objects, the smells, and the comfort of home.

'I have something for you.' He held out a package, wrapped in brown paper. It was a carving of an old bushman hunter. His loincloth, his bow and arrow intricately carved. The detail – his peppercorn hair, even the veins on the hand that held the arrow.

'It's Josiah.'

'Yes.'

The shelves were empty, the kitchen bare, but Nella had tried to fill it for him. There had been not enough time to replace all the things lost. Nella poured the coffee, placed a pile of soetkoekies before him. He looked at her as she sat down.

'Yes, we all suffered. War is bad. There are no winners except the politicians. I spoke with one of the English soldiers. It was hard for them out in the hot veld so far away from home. They also forgot why they were here. Some take a long time to forget, but bitterness – it's a worse enemy.'

After coffee they walked out into the yard. The sun was bright, the promise of spring in the air.

francesca

The week after Catrina arrived back home in South Africa, Freda died. Flame called her. The funeral would be in Jouberton but her body was to be buried near Clarens. When Catrina arrived, the minister was leaving. She waited in the car.

'Catrina!' It was Flame. She stood tall and beautiful.

'Flame.' She walked towards her, long strides, her hand stretched out. They shook hands and then hugged. Inside Freda's shack an old woman, a friend from Freda's church, poured tea out of Ouma's teapot.

'I was here only a week or so ago,' Catrina told her.

'She was ready. It was time. Being so old is not good. I think she was glad to go.'

'Yes.' The link with Ouma, her secrets, the loose ends Catrina wanted to tie up were gone. But she sensed Freda had left her enough.

Between receiving visitors and organizing the funeral, they talked. Their lives had been different because of circumstances and yet they were so similar. Flame's father was jailed when she was young. He died a few years ago. Her mother, Sarah, died ten years ago. Catrina told her of her times with Freda. Flame told her of her life. Freda was her link too. It had not been easy.

Flame and Catrina sat in the room lit only by a candle. They talked into the night.

the shape of a cello

Francesca is eight years old, sitting at the window of her mother Sarah's house. It is not really her house but the house where Sarah works. She is the maid here at this big house. The people who live here have gone away and she has come to visit her mother during her school holiday. They are not allowed to stay when the people are here, because Sarah has to work.

Francesca is in the girl's bedroom. It is such a big room. Their whole Jouberton house could fit into it, she is sure. The girl's toys are all in a box under her desk. She has two beds in her room and a dressing table. Under the window is the desk, under that – a kist. Her mother says she must not touch anything. Sarah is outside the back door cleaning the brass. There is nothing for Francesca to do. The girl, Catrina, has gone on holiday with her family. She looks into the girl's cupboard. She has a lot of clothes. There are so many clothes left there even though she must have taken clothes on holiday. When Francesca goes to her grandmother's farm, she takes all her clothes and they fit into her small suitcase.

It is a cold day. She thinks it will warm up as the sun is out. The grass outside is white with frost. White, white frost on the grass. This time white is not good. White is bad. The frost bites her feet. It feels like she is walking on fire – or on ice blades that cut into her feet. She blows on the window – Ha! It mists up. She runs her finger in the mist, writes an F for her name. Sarah will be cross if she dirties the windows but she blows again – a big HA! She draws a circle; rubs out the middle – now she sees the grass – white, in the circle.

The dog is walking across the lawn. She sees him in the circle. She is scared of the dog. He barks at black people. She is never sure if he will bite her. He always shows his teeth at her. He stops near the tap and pees against the tree. She can see the piss. It is a yellow puddle on the frost. It melts the frost. A yellow circle in the white frost. Steam rises from

it. Dog's piss must be very hot. It melts the frost quickly. The steam still rises, adding more whiteness to the day.

The next morning, as she brewed black tea, Flame told Catrina a memory she had:

'We were at Buffelspoort Dam. My father, Poland, me, my mother and Freda. We were having a picnic at a deserted end of the dam. We often went during the week, when no one else was there. It was warm and sunny and the dam was as clear as a mirror. But no one was swimming because they said a python was in the lake. It was swimming near the bottom, waiting. Freda had been telling us folktales and then Poland started saying it was in the river. He was teasing me, of course, but then even he would not go in.' She poured a cup of tea, added lemon and placed it before Catrina.

'Everyone was scared to get into the water, then you came. Your family had brought meat to cook and they were too busy making a fire to notice us. You suddenly got up, took off your shoes and shirt. Underneath you wore a swimming costume. Before anyone could stop you, you dived into the water and started swimming away. I followed you in and we both swam together.'

'But you can't swim,' Catrina said.

'That was when I learnt.'

'Didn't I have everything?' she asked Flame. 'You must have hated me.'

'No,' Flame said. 'I never questioned it. Later I felt sorry for you.'

'Why?' Catrina asked her.

'Because your father died.'

'But your father was sent to prison. There must have been shame.'

'No,' she said. 'He was a hero. Even if he was in prison, it was because he was fighting a just cause.'

'Yes,' Catrina said. 'My father gave up, overcome by personal failure.'

'It is hard to begin again,' she said. 'Have you ever returned to your childhood home?'

'No, I don't like to go back. '

'From London I returned to the eastern border where I was born,' Flame said.

University of Cape Town

kameeldoring shade

The hut was near the river. They called the river Ungluvu. She had been born there, in this hut. She had come far – far from the place, far from the expectations, but not far from her mother's secret hopes and dreams. The hut is still there. She returned to it a while ago. Still there near the kameeldoring tree, near to the river. She walked from the road where the bus dropped her. She saw the smoke rising. When she got closer, she saw it was from a black *potjie* outside. She saw the black *potjie*, the tree, the river, and the hut. As she remembered it all. The hut was still thatched with grass.

'I got to the farm late in the afternoon,' she said. 'The road has changed somewhat. The gate was in the same place, but now there were grand white pillars with gables and the name *Rietfontein* in fancy iron letters. The cow grid was double the size. The old concrete dam was there and the windmill but the huts were gone. Three huts that had stood there since my grandfather's time had been replaced by six white cottages with corrugated iron roofs. Grandfather's crops, where his little field had been, were thousands of rows of corn. The ducks – muscovies and teals the same. Yellow weavers still built nests in the rushes near the dam. A *sakabula* flew low. The smells were familiar, except for mother's cooking. Her samp and beans waft in my memory.'

Freedom characterized her childhood. The farm school was a five mile walk. A long walk to and fro each day. She never minded; this was what she had done each day since she began school. She did not like the cold frosty winter days though. The days when the grass was white from the door all the way to school. Frozen crisp and dry. Sometimes the water in the bucket was frozen and she could not wipe her face. If her mother didn't take the bucket inside at night to warm up by the fire, then she would have to walk down to the stream to fetch water. That just made her

colder. She had to wait for the water to warm up on the fire. On those days her face stung, her hands became red and blistered, her knees knocked together under her thin cotton dress. She tried to pull down her short jersey. Sometimes she would wrap a blanket around herself.

When she was thirteen years old, Francesca and her mother went to live in Jouberton, near Klerksdorp. It was a week after her birthday, a very exciting week. The new State President was coming to town the next day and they had the day off school. The white schoolchildren had to go and welcome him. The children of the township could choose to go into town to see him if they wanted to. That night promised to be much more exciting. At the spaza shop *The Mambo Boys* were playing. Francesca was with her boyfriend, Poland. This was first time they were going anywhere special together.

Francesca dressed in her red dress, the one with the gold cartwheels printed on it. Her hair braided, a red bud from an aloe tucked behind one ear. Her friend, Lindiwe, did it for her. She walked down the road with Poland. Poland was a tall young man. Even at fifteen he seemed much older. They walked slowly down the gravel road to the spaza shop. *The Mambo Boys* had come all the way from Johannesburg, which was over 100 miles away. It was the first time anything like this had happened here in their township. Francesca walked with Poland on this beautiful evening. He bumped her gently as if by accident. She knew it was deliberate. He wanted to hold her hand but they could not be seen in public. They lingered on their way, not sure what was more exciting – *The Mambo Boys* or the fact they were together and alone. When they got to the venue they knew their time together was over. Already they could hear the strains of guitars. The moon hung low in the east.

In the morning she nodded her head to her mother. Yes, the big white man was coming. She looked down the long Voortrekker Road. She saw a big car turn into it far down. The children down there raised little flags and waved them, began cheering. Francesca watched as the wave

of flags moved up the road, along with the long black car. Her mother looked up her again sitting on a branch in the big gum tree.

'Can you see him?' she asked.

Francesca nodded again. She could see the car – not him but she knew what her mother meant. She waited, then called to her mother.

'Ma! Ma! He's here now! Look!'

Her mother stood on her toes, craned her neck. Yes. She could see him too. All the white children were in their school uniforms. It was a hot day for winter. They had on their blazers. Francesca looked down the road. The schools stood grouped together – green and yellow blazers, dark blue, navy with red and blue stripes, plain green ones. She had no blazer. She had never had one. At her school she wore grey – just grey or black. It did not matter. Whatever they had, they wore. She had a yellow dress that was a school dress. It was not for her school but she wore it just the same.

Francesca also did not have a flag. She wanted one. She watched. There were hundreds of little flags waving. She watched, hoping one would fall, fly to her. She would wait. Maybe someone would leave one on the ground. White people always threw things away. Things that she wanted so much. She watched the flags long and hard. She hardly took her eyes off them. She watched so that she missed the car. Her mother asked, 'Where is it now?' Francesca looked up to the other part of the street.

'It is coming now – to the Town Hall!'

Her mother craned her neck again. Francesca looked at the children moving up from the bottom of the street. Now they were walking quickly towards the Town Hall. They all had ribbons around their necks. Orange, blue and white ribbons with something dangling from them like necklaces.

She saw them blink in the sunshine. She noticed a girl holding up her pendant, showing it to her friend. It looked like gold money – a coin. She saw that they all had one around their necks. She wished she could have one too. Then suddenly, she saw a flag on the ground. Someone was walking over it. She scrambled down the tree to the flag – too fast – her knee was scratched. It was bleeding.

'Francesca! Come here!'

Her mother rebuked her but she scrambled into the gutter. She had it. The stick was broken; the mud ran off one side of it. But now her stomach was singing. She, too, had a flag!



Sarah, dear Sarah. She was a mother to me too, Catrina thought. Her senses reeled. She knew Flame's mother and grandmother in ways she did not know her own. I've stolen her mothers from her, she thought. The government stole her father.

'He never came home,' Flame said of her father. 'He came and then got lost again. He had to go in disguise. They were looking for Mandela and the others. When they were caught, Mandela was already standing trial.'

'What happened?' Catrina asked her.

'He died in custody. We learned of it just as the people were jubilant that Mandela had not got the death penalty. He fell, they told us. Tripped and fell. My mother was not allowed to see the body. We buried him under an aloe near his father's kraal. He was a saint to my mother but I didn't really know him. Then Poland came. He had been in training in Eastern Europe for years. I met up with him again in Port Elizabeth at a conference.

'Themba was born in 1982 just as Poland was recruited for MK. He went overseas, to Holland, every year; he had a few passports. A solution for us was to say we were not married. So we lived apart. Then a spiritual woman, who knew my father, said we should go and live in Clarens, Themba and me. Themba was six when he got sick. By then they had arrested Poland on suspicion of terrorism – 180 days. They wouldn't let him come home when Themba died. I had to bury him myself.'

'Rivers take many turns,' she said, as she rocked, holding her shoulders. 'Mine flowed uphill for a long time. I used my grief to push myself through my studies. I qualified eventually as a psychologist. My love of music had to take a side-line but now I want to go back and take cello lessons.'

'How do you forgive this?' Catrina looked at Flame, her face clear and lovely. Not a trace of bitterness.

'You pull yourself up by your bootstraps and just live to spite them. Then you realise that you are spiting yourself and you let go. Somehow I

had to make life and love possible.' Her story was a catalogue of pain but like the haemotopia, she had risen from the flames. Flame was everything her name represented.

'I rode trains, travelled widely doing peace work. I proved myself, made my life possible. Then, after the 1994 elections, I was appointed to the TRC.'

Flame sat on the floor, against the edge of the couch. Her body curved inwards, her arms wrapped around herself. Catrina looked at her, her long hair in a plaited coil. She is like a cello, she thought, not as fine as a violin, not heavy as a double bass, not as folksy as a guitar. A cello woman. She is round hipped, can be held close and when stroked, she makes mellow sounds. Her russet grain mixed with tawny shade and darkened with care. Moments of music marked her life.

Flame had seen Poland standing under the aloe one evening. The sun was going down and he was gazing out across the hills. The Eastern Cape in winter – its hills dry, the grass yellow but all around the burnished red of the aloes. He stood under such an aloe, a very old aloe it seemed. It was much taller than he. Most of the others came up to his waist. Was it his height? His blackness? Later she wondered why she had noticed him. She dreamed of him. He is striding across the grass towards her, tall striding steps. He is carrying a dark box but she is afraid and wakes up. Flame was studying at Fort Hare. Whenever she went to town she caught the bus. The bus station was nearer than the train station. The train was quicker but she got the bus instead. She liked the bustle. The crowds waiting at the bus stop were the usual. Women with large plastic carry-bags filled with packets of food, diapers, shoes, Omo. She wondered why they took so much if they have to carry it all. Men in suits with hardly anything to carry. A briefcase. Women carried their lives. Babies on the back. Bundles on the head and the large plastic carry bags. The bags must be imported especially for the women of Africa. Large woven bags of

blue and red plastic. Every black woman had one. He came and took the seat next to her.

'Hello,' he said, sitting down.

They met again the next day at the bus stop. He sat beside her. It seemed he just made it to her seat before the bus left, as if it wasn't planned. He made it to the only free seat left on the bus.

She did not talk, only answered questions with a 'yes' or a 'no'. She looked out of the window. He watched her reflection in the glass. He turned to face her. She looked out of the window. The veld was a dry brown carpet. The red aloes like candles across the hills. She looked at the blue sky, knowing it would meet the sea. Then the sea and the sky would be one in colour. Dry, cold days were blue. The bus was drawing into the bus station. She got up.

He stood up, made way for her to pass. Then he took his jacket off the top rack and moved to the exit, walking behind her.

She did not look back as she walked down the road. She walked looking straight ahead. He just stood at the bus stop watching her. He watched her stride, long and steady. He watched her head held upright, her pale hair a shiny cap, her scarf flapping behind her in the breeze. He watched her legs in sheer stockings – the narrow ankles holding the well-formed calves. He watched her backside bounce evenly with her gait. Her sling bag marked the steps like a metronome.

'When Themba died I just sat there,' Flame said. 'I don't know how many revolutions the sun turned nor what time of the day or night it was. I couldn't have told if I was staring at the floor or at the ceiling. It was a long, dark death. The old kikoi on the wall ran tears down its stripes. My face remained dry. The mask on the wall with the mud braids was a poisonous spider of hate. I hated everyone. I hated the world. I hated this room. This room that held the body of my child. I hated his body – the

lifeless, limp, dead thing that was once warm and soft, had the smell of hay and sunshine. Most of all I hated myself with such a loathing I didn't know how to contain it. I just stared at that mask – its hollow eyes holding all the contempt of the world for me.'

She left everything, everyone she had known. The day rose red. The hills glowed with an angry fire. She knew it. She knew it was burning her from the inside out but she could not stop it. It had to rage, run its course. She had packed most of her bags the night before. There weren't many. The tapestry backpack, the sling bag, the waist-belt. They didn't take long to load. She set off like a pack donkey abandoned in the desert, hit with a stick to shoo it off, the scapegoat sent out into the wilderness. She left slowly. Her feet moved across the red sand. It wasn't as if she was reluctant. She couldn't be bothered to move, fast or slowly. She went the direction her feet took her, walking away from everything she had ever known. She walked away from her son's body, laid under the red earth and covered with stones, the same weight as the bags she was carrying.

She carried his body weight in her bags. No personal possessions, nothing but necessities. Even then she didn't know why she hadn't left empty-handed. No one saw her go until a small girl with huge, black eyes peered out from the dark mouth of a nearby hut. She just sat there and watched Flame move out and towards the hills. As Flame passed, the girl raised one small hand.

At first she couldn't move for days, months but then for the next years she moved constantly, hardly ever stopping long enough in a place. She would hop on a train or a bus and travel for days without stopping. The conductors would renew her tickets when she had used them up. Sometimes she would do the same round trip over and over. Sometimes she would move for a month or more, not knowing where she was going to, not caring. Trains, buses, cars, and boats. She took nothing in, did not notice when the language changed. She became invisible to everyone, even to herself.

where there is nothing

'There was nothing for years,' Flame continued. 'I also run away when I am in pain.' When she returned home, Flame went to the Maluti Mountains, where she was born. She told Catrina what happened there.

'A dove flew above the mountain dark in a storm. It lifted away my sadness, lifted and lit up the night sorrow. In an embrace two round huts sat heart to heart, a refuge on a stormy nights. And an angel or did I say it was a dove? White cumulus clouds rose.' It sounded strange but Catrina understood what she was saying.

'Give me an angel, I said, and I'll believe forever,' Flame continued. 'An angel to hold the door closed, an angel to hide me.' Two arms held off the storm. She looked out the window. The dove was still there, hovering. A flat apron of earth around the huts. Everything was gone, opened up into spaces of nothing. She stood intact. She walked out. The storm had tumbled twigs, logs, leaves, and even stones. But around the hut a circle – a clean, clear circle as if someone had stood guard. She had prayed for an angel. The stones littered the ground. White stones, hail-sized stones so hard they would never crumble nor give way.



measuring time

'Tell me about your work,' Catrina asked Flame. They were sitting at a table in the sun. Flame was busy beading a piece of antique linen.

'This is going to be a quilt,' she said. 'I will line it with shot silk before I quilt it.'

'It is beautiful,' Catrina said. 'It will be an heirloom.'

'After Fort Hare, you know, I worked for some years as a counselling psychologist. Then the Truth Commission?' she said. 'I was appointed and had been at the hearings in Cape Town and had to go to the site. At two-thirty on a Tuesday I boarded a train in Cape Town. Twenty-one hours and a sleepless night later, I got to Klerksdorp. I had to go directly to the location. The heat was awful. I was picked up by someone assigned to host me and we drove directly there. The commissioner was already there as were the policemen who were applying for amnesty. They may have got there earlier, I don't remember. I had been held up in Cape Town and was late. The grave digger was already digging at the spot the policemen had pointed out.'

'Out on the veld a windmill stood sentry, a slope of suikerbos, red grass, blue sky, some fresh soil. The red topsoil mixed with black subsoil, spade metal hit stone. I looked at the commissioner. His eyes flashed. The windmill moaned. We maintained this position, this fine balance. My foot dislodged a stone, it fell into the hole. Heard the echo. The subsoil gaped, the white of bone.'

She embroidered the darkness as she spoke. Catrina watched as Flame picked up another bead on her fine needle. In and out the quick black sutures, as she beaded her quilt. Black beads on black, she picked

up a silver one, then a red. Catrina closed her eyes and Flame continued. The only way to see the light was for her to close her eyes very tightly. When she opened them again, she saw stars flash and sparkle. But the stones were sewn into the night, they were buried in her stomach. They polished each other's blackness.

'The commissioner whistled softly through his teeth. "She simply would not talk," said the gravedigger. The skull had a bullet hole. She must have been kneeling. Ribs that held the heart, a breastbone, knees bent. The pelvis cradled a plastic bag. "God, she was brave," the gravedigger said under his breath. The commissioner's eyes burned yellow.'

Flame continued, 'Sometimes at night I wake up with a rage pounding in my breast as if to wipe me out like a veld fire.'

The raging fires that are seen from satellites. The wrong dreams chained to Africa. 'There's no metaphor for the feel of anger for the waste,' said Flame. But breathing rock for fifty thousand years is essential. Between the burns, whenever Flame sees veld fires or a plastic bag caught on a fence on the side of the road, it will be a flag to her. If a veld fire burns each night for fifty thousand years, it will carry her essence to the stars. The smoke is carried up to the heavens for infinity, the stones crumble to grains. Each grain measures her time in sand.

'Then I went to the hearing,' said Flame. 'I sat in the third row, on the same side as the accused stand. I sit a row back from where he will sit. I will stand in the same witness box as he will, later on. I sit, not knowing what to think, not feeling anything at all, just the numb cold of feet in shoes, of hands in a lap. A fly buzzes. No desire to push it away, I sit. The judge walks in. Everyone rises. The woman at the typewriter looks like what I expect a stenographer to look like – lank eyed, dressed in dusty pinks with grey shoes. The judge is a man, old. He seems impossibly old. He fumbles, drops a pen, mutters, asks the dusty woman something.'

“What’s that, what’s that?”

‘I sit. People fill the rows from the back. I turn and see a man with a camera. A reporter. I sit. The judge knocks the hammer loudly. I sit. The commissioner spreads the photos out on the table. The accused is brought in. I sit. I wait. He is led up from the floor below, ascends the stairs. I first notice the head of the warder, then his grey jacket. Before I see his pants, his shoes, I see the other head. It is him. His hair is cut short, his eyes cast down. He is led to his seat. He doesn’t look up or around, just sits and I sit. It is a terrible time. I listen to a lot of tears. Eventually I am so exhausted from it all, I get sick and have to take a few weeks off. Shingles. It’s caused by stress.’ She moved her beads away and looked at Catrina. She had begun to sew white beads into the quilt.

‘I worked on the commission for two years. It felt as if my heart would burst from hearing all the pain. I have already seen and heard and smelt things I won’t need a notebook to remember.’

‘How did you let go, forgive?’ Catrina asked again and again.

Flame said that it was something so beyond the human experience, no one could really understand. The standard human way is for revenge. Revenge and hate. Flame said that people are afraid of forgiveness, don’t believe it is possible. ‘They think you have to be a Jesus or a Ghandi to forgive, that we forgive because we are black. I cry when I think how much pain families have had. Yet, when I think of what it would be like if they held onto their resentment, it would be worse. Resentment could be all that remains of Africa. One of the generals whom we approached on the amnesty issue,’ Flame continued, ‘remained steadfast in his refusal to participate. I went to his office for a final appeal. When we stood outside his office that day, I felt a shiver run down my back. No, it wasn’t cold. It was one of those days when the heat wanted to smear its stain on your face. Your clothes bore its smudge from the first hour you were up. He

was sitting at his desk drumming his fingers as if to beat out an answer, as if to keep himself from beating us. He answered our questions with perfunctory politeness.

“Yes,” he had been a member of the police.

“Yes,” he had been on the special task force.

“Yes,” he had been at Vlakplaas. He answered our questions, his eyes crocodiles in his large head. His black hair hung in oily tails across his forehead and his hare-lip snarled, barely covered by his moustache. He smoked all through the interview – on a thick cigar. He never offered one to me or to Tommy who was with me. Halfway through a question I was asking, there was a knock on the door. General Van der Merwe looked at his watch, called out, “Open!”

A young, black woman walked in carrying a silver tray of water and glasses.

“Thanks Sannie. Put it over there.” He pointed to a table on which stood a pot of pink orchids. Sannie placed the tray on the table. Tommy, who was with me, spoke for the first time.

“Nice flowers.” Sannie said thank you, as if they were hers.

“Do you know what they are?” The General was looking at Tommy as if he were an insect sitting on his precious flowers. He did not.

“They are *Orchis Masculula* – orchids.”

“Oh,” said Tommy.

“Do you know why they are called this?” the General asked.

Tommy was nervous. ‘I was also nervous,’ Flame said. ‘I didn’t know why but I wished Tommy would keep quiet.’

"They are called Dead Man's Fingers."

"Oh," said Tommy.

I just sat watching him. His lip curled ever so slightly.

"Get my box out." The General indicated the cupboard on the far wall.

Sannie opened it and took out a large cigar box. She handed it to the General and left the room. I could see Tommy thought he was to be rewarded with a cigar. The General's eyes were yellow. He opened his box and took out a black finger. It was a single finger, probably an index finger. He pointed it at Tommy.

"Do you want to smoke this?"

"No, Sir."

I felt the nausea rise. My head began to spin. The General got up, walked behind my chair. I sat still, not moving. He tapped me on the shoulder. I turned. The dead man's finger was just below my eye. He tapped it again on my shoulder. Tommy just sat there, his head slumped down. I stood up.

The General shouted at me, "Sit down! I am not finished yet." I sat and waited for him to walk back to his chair.

I said, 'The Truth Commission is waiting for your application for amnesty. You have until June 30.'

"Don't you tell me what to do!" He leapt up out of his chair. His hands were shaking, his lips curled. The lock of hair had now fallen across one eye. 'I have to go now,' I said. 'Are you going to apply for amnesty?'

"I have done nothing I am ashamed of!"

As I got up, he sat down. He looked down at his desk. Then up across to the window. He was still staring at it as I left. The orchid on the table moved as if blown by a breeze. The window was closed. I thought the orchid was calling me. Then I thought of the dead man's finger – all the dead men's fingers.

They were pointing at him.'

University of Cape Town

allowing the day to act

'Everyone has died and we are left with threads,' Catrina said to Flame. They were at Flame's flat in Northcliff, Johannesburg. It was set high up on the ridge overlooking the northern suburbs. The jacarandas were a purple cloud below. Flame's sandtray was set up in a sunny study. Catrina had placed a small black spider into the sand. 'I don't know how to tie up all the ends.' Flame and Catrina had talked a lot. She had encouraged Catrina to go back to the past. Catrina trusted her. Flame knew about loss, she could recite the memories of pain. Stories weighed like stones in her life, yet she had allowed them to polish one another into jewels.

'Time really is a healer,' Flame told her, but she did not want to go the route of her forefathers.

'There is too much violence and a history of hatred amongst the men', she said.

'Seek what belongs to you in truth,' Flame told her. 'What do you want? What will make you happy?'

'How does one forgive? How do you hold all these people in forgiveness,' Catrina asked her.

'It's like making bread,' she said. 'If I want the bread to rise, I need yeast, don't I?'

'Go on,' she said.

'You know how the Jews see yeast as sin. If there is just a grain of yeast, the whole ball of dough will be contaminated. It is like that with

resentment, it will affect your heart and your whole being. You will never get rid of it. It rises like a new flame when you think the fire is out. To make the future possible,' she continued, 'you have to forgive the past. And you can't forgive what you can't remember. You need to take a look at the things you have locked away. It is time to go back,' said Flame.

University of Cape Town

jouberton tones

Back to Klerksdorp. It was thirty years since Catrina was last there. Thirty years. She tried to take it in. Her whole adult life had happened in this time. Thirty years. Yet the sixteen years she had lived there marked her, would never go away. It was remote, yet she stood in her past, in her future.

Flame, too, had to go to Klerksdorp, for a TRC meeting. Catrina went with her. Flame knew that, apart from her visit to Freda, Catrina had never been into Jouberton, the township where she and Sarah had lived and where she had grown up. She offered to take her on a tour.

'I have to go anyway,' she said. 'I have a meeting there on Tuesday. You can come along, too. I think you will find it interesting.'

They drove towards Jouberton. It was out on the road to Hartebeesfontein. The turnoff seemed to come up too quickly.

'Back then this was so far out of town,' Flame said. Catrina wondered if the town had grown or if the township had changed.

'They have both grown,' said Flame, 'but so have we.'

Flame slowed down as she approached the turnoff. A blue BMW, the old 3-series, had stopped at the stop sign. The driver waited before turning out onto the road towards town. She looked at him. He was young. Maybe twenty. His passengers were all young too, well dressed. She smiled. There were few cars in the township back then. She knew Mr. Mahola, the taxi driver who had his own car. And Mr. Setsote who was employed by a white man who owned taxis. He brought his taxi home each night, but the other taxis stayed out overnight at the rank in town.

She had not been in a car until she was 10 years old. Then it was because of an emergency. She was sick and her mother called Mr. Mahola to take her to hospital in his taxi. In her time having a bicycle was a status symbol, as was a radio or shiny new shoes. A bus behind tooted. Flame laughed.

'We are talking too much,' she said turning the corner. The large grey bus was familiar. How often she had caught one just like it into town and back again. The bus driver waved an impatient hand. She waved an apology.

The road into Jouberton was tarred. She drove along Jabulani Road. The bus had disappeared. The side streets were tarred mostly too.

'This is different,' said Flame. Back then only the white areas had tarred roads, and downtown of course. Some houses were quite new. Others, the originals, were painted different colours. The new houses all looked the same. They were built of large concrete bricks, the ones that are hollow inside. Catrina could see where the lines of the bricks showed through the plaster. It would take time for these boxes of houses to evolve their own character. These were heartless houses. Painted in matching pastel colours, they had fenced-off yards of dirt. A few inhabitants had tried to plant trees.

'A tree, a few inches high, will take years to give a cat shade in the dry, dusty west,' said Flame. The older houses were made of corrugated iron. Corrugated iron and cardboard. Later the brick houses. Dark red brick aged to brown. Brown houses with tin roofs. Most of them had extra rooms built on the back. Some had outbuildings. All the toilets were in the yard. In the early days there were communal toilets, one for every twenty or more houses, located in regularly spaced yards. Flame's family had their own toilet in the back yard. She remembered the icy winter nights when it was too cold to cross the yard. Any water left dripping would freeze. They used buckets then, buckets they kept under their beds.

Flame turned left into Vaal River Street, past the police station. Is this building new, Catrina wondered. It seemed brighter. She also wondered what it was like being a policeman today. In the old days the police were hated. The plot opposite the station had a large Shoprite, a video store, and a butcher. Chickens in cages squawked under the thorn trees. They drove along Happiness Avenue. At the end of it, the cypresses were taller than Flame remembered. The graveyard had a wire fence around it. It was new but already it has rusted. The fence was also rusting. Slivers of peeling green paint snaked down. The gate made of wrought iron with flowers curling up. She gave it a push. It squealed resistance. An old yellow dog barked. Flame smiled. 'There are always those kinds of dog here. Some things never change. Do you know they are acknowledged as a breed now? *Canis Africanus*, the African dog with a lineage to the Pharaohs. It's okay to be a kaffir dog nowadays.'

They walked along the gravel path. The graveyard had grown, was overgrown too. The population of the dead had increased and there was a new area within the graveyard. A new area with a low brick wall. *Hero's Acre* emblazoned on the steel banner. The wheel of the ANC – workers holding flags alongside the shaft head of a mine. They walked between the rows. Flame recognized some of the names. Miles Makgetla, Thabo Tsepong, Enoch Masinga. Names she had heard in her childhood, whispered at first. Then they were sung, and then shouted. Catrina wondered about all the other names that never made this acre, names that, too, held flags. They left Hero's Acre at the opposite end, and walked along a dirt path waiting to be gravelled. There was a monument to the soldiers who died in the Second World War. The few who went from this town. Catrina wondered about the names of the soldiers from the First War, the Boer War.

'The grey granite slabs of the graveyard tell stories,' Flame said. They sat on a bench in the sun. 'I know some of those stories,' she continued. 'Stories of yesteryear when goats and oxen stood tall. When pieces of chicken fell from the sky into pots and were cooked up by the

starving women whose husbands had gone off, warriors to some wasted war. One day an angel came and flew low over the village. Crows cackled and cawed in the gum trees and ants made off with a few crumbs too small to be retrieved by the chickens. The yellow dog managed to stay still. And the crows flew in circles waiting and laughing as they waited. The brook ran for the first time in years and gurgled its happiness.' Flame was telling the story well. Catrina listened as if she were a child again.

'Our grandmother said we must wait. So we waited. We waited in the morning for she said she knew where the chicken came from. She knew and she did not tell. No one would believe her anyhow. She waited, too, so she could keep the crows away and quickly put the lid on the pot. The day was warm early. It would heat up quickly and she knew she had to fill the pot before it was too hot.'

'Did you see anything?' Catrina asked.

'A strong wind came just then and blew a piece of corrugated iron off the roof of the hut. We ran to get it and when we returned Ouma was already cooking a stew. Come,' she said. 'We will be late for my meeting.'

She drove towards the clinic in the centre of the township and turned into the parking area. The old pre-fab had been pulled down some time ago. In its place stood a new building in yellow face-brick. They looked in at the front door. It was glass-fronted and had an entrance that welcomed visitors. Catrina could see posters for AIDS, TB, and family planning.

'Did you know that Desmond Tutu comes from Klerksdorp?' Flame asked her. 'Well, you are going to meet him now.'

They entered the clinic. Tables were laid with snacks and tea. The archbishop was chatting to a group of women. They went over and he smiled as he recognised Flame. She introduced Catrina and she held out her hand.

'I am so pleased to meet you,' she said, and tears welled up. Tutu took her hand and then drew her to him in an embrace.

'Thank you,' she said. 'Thank you for what you have done.'

He smiled at her as he hugged her. 'I love you,' he said. He had said he loved her.

Just then a group of children from the Holy Cross convent were led in by their choir mistress. They formed a shy row in front of the bishop. The choir mistress lifted a baton, the children began to sing and dance;

mmangwane mpulele, ke neiwa ke pula

Reaching far back into childhood these words she knew. Where did they come from? She knew this; veiled in her story were gaps even lies. Outside at the black marble at the memorial, she unwrapped her sadness, took it from under the stones hidden in the night.

'My own father did not love me enough to stay, but a black man has said he loves me,' she whispered to herself.

They drove back in silence.

he knows me not

Catrina stayed with Flame for a few days after their visit to Jouberton. She sat on the balcony looking out towards the Magaliesberg mountains. 'I've made some tea,' she said. 'Come and sit here in the sun. I want to show you something.' Flame had stepped out of the shower, her hair wrapped in a towel. Catrina took out a poem. 'I have written another poem.'

'You have done something good,' Flame said to her. 'We all have the ability to do it. It is a choice, a good choice. Catrina, you have to go back to your past. You have to go down that dark passage and look into that room. You're on the wrong path. Go and look at that thing behind the door and then turn around and follow your heart. It's all there for you.'

'May I read this to you?'

I trace a sand circle, place,
moon middle, an ostrich egg.
Laying my ear to the ground
I hear my father coming across the land.
I enter the cave,
graffiti rocks and midden floor surround me,
my ankle bleeds a hakdoring tear.
Red spots on the sand,
on the wall, bloodlines.
Hookheads and hunters join the fire flames,
outside quagga muffle a stampede.
A rope of sand dangles umbilical,
he knows me not.

kneading shadows

Flame asked to see the photographs that Ouma had left her. Catrina was stirring the sand, whirling it round, lifting some in her hands and letting it fall through her fingers. She took a little white horse and put it on the left-hand side. Then she picked up an acorn and put that in the middle.

'Go on,' Flame said.

Catrina spread the photographs out. The family under the tree, the group outside the rondavel. Her father as a baby. 'Photographs', Catrina said, 'bear a terrible burden. This one pierces me.' Catrina pointed to the family group under the kameeldoring trees.

'It seems to utter a truth beyond what is evident. There is something I cannot put my finger on but I hate it.' Catrina showed it to Flame. All the characters in the poem Catrina had written were there. Grandmother who kneaded bread, grandfather who wore his face like blank feathers. Uncles and aunties and cousins. Her father and his khaki glance, and her mother who sat silently in her Jackie Kennedy suit.

'I felt sick that day and I lolled onto my father's arm. This was the proof they chose.'

Flame encouraged her to go back. She said 'The struggle is now. The past continues in the present. Your photographs show you your past. You think history is in the past but it is what you do with it, how you use it that is important. Your past is really about today, not yesterday.'



It was as if Flame had known her her whole life. Today Catrina was sad; she saw it in her colours. She looked down as they spoke, at the purple scarf that hid the green collar on her black dress. Her heavy boots over dark stockings.

'I've looked at it from all sides,' Catrina said. 'I don't know how to heal this – it's too big a wound.' She said she felt it in her heart, too. Flame knew sadness could lose one in a desert of dry tears.

'What do you most love?' Flame said.

'It seems to engulf me some days and wash me away,' Catrina told her. 'I dreamed that someone had cut open my chest. When I looked down, I saw a dark well of blood. I turned and saw my father with a knife in his hand but then the liquid moved and I saw something grow from the bottom. It was a deep clotted red. The bud opened and then it began to flower.'

She told Flame how she had searched for Ouma's story, unearthed the bones of her biography, but it had ended in a cul-de-sac. 'I decided to go further back, to the family history. I spent time at the archives in Roeland Street and scratched in my father's kist again.

There were a few articles about Georg Fredrik Linde, Ouma's father. He left Swellendam in the mid 1800s and trekked to Colesberg. I thought he was the Oupa who would lead me back but he's the wrong one,' she said. It was another cul-de-sac.

Catrina had continued writing her letters to Lucy. They were like lines in the sand. Would they ever lead to anything? 'Going back is like the work of an archaeologist,' Catrina said.

Flame agreed. 'The legacy of suicide is an endless question. It stretches out beyond the horizon like an invisible line of longitude. One never gets to the end of it.'

'I remember,' Catrina told her, 'how I once visited a cave near Elandsbaai where indigenous people, how long ago I don't know, left marks of their hands on the wall, indelible prints. It was like a shrine to memory -- I was here, and so was I, and me, and me too.'

'When going back gets too much, I float down rivers,' Catrina continued. 'I love fast flowing rivers, lying in them and being carried downstream.'

Catrina stepped again into her past. 'Even though the surface things had changed,' she thought, 'I'll be sifting through that into the reality of memory.'

dream green water



Snakes swim in rivers. Most of the rivers I know are brown. Dark murky water with barbels and slimy creatures. I grew up near the Vaal River, Parys was a far cry from Paris for which it was named and the Vaal a far river from the Seine but it formed me as surely as the mudstone carved by ripples and rapids. Papa swam the river every day. The Modder River, a few hundred miles away, was where Oupa's father had farmed. He carted sand from the banks of the river to Bloemfontein. But I dream of green waters, waters fast and flowing. The waters of childhood hide the pain. I try and look into the rivers sometimes to remember. I cannot see through the thickening mud. I dip down into the depths, the rotting leaves and reeds slip through my fingers and I find a stone. It's dolomite. I know it from its blackness. A meteorite banged into the earth nearby, the Vredefort dome. Hardness and harsh moments. I dip for another stone. This one is yellow, it's ochre. I can use it to

paint my story. I dream of green waters, not dark storm waters
like the Tsitsikama's, ebony ribbons. In green waters I see a fish
and a silver shoal.

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Klerksdorp is still a red dust town

Catrina drove back to 25 Hertenberg Street for the first time in thirty years. Things had changed. She last found her way around on a bicycle. She realised she had never driven a car here. Now she drove to her high school. It was close to the highway. From there she knew the route she used to take each day back home on her bike. She turned the car around and headed across the highway to a petrol station where she and Lucy stopped for cold drinks or ice-lollies. She drove on, down the road to where the next milestone was – the MCC stores. From there they used to cycle across a field to the road that ran alongside the suburb. Hertenberg Street led off that. When she reached the MCC stores, she knew she was lost. In its place was a huge shopping centre. MCC was no longer there. Around the centre was a block of flats, townhouses and surgeries. The field she used to ride across was gone.

Now what? she thought. She headed the car to the end of the road and turned right. For a while the names of the roads were unfamiliar. Then suddenly Austin Street, then Williams Street, where her best friend Cheryl had lived. She was in the right area, even though it looked so strange. All along the right-hand side where there were once open fields, new houses and cluster housing and developments sprawled. She turned left into Hertenberg Street. It seemed similar, unchanged except the trees were bigger. She drew up to number 25. A wall had been built along the front boundary. A wrought-iron gate stood open. A gardener working there greeted her. He indicated the front door. Another wrought-iron gate across the front door. Time had changed things. A man came. She stammered that she had lived there thirty years ago, that her father was Dr Muller, asked if she could see the house.

A woman came into the front hall, carrying a young child. Her husband introduced her. She was friendly, said she could look around, that they were going away the next day; the house was in a bit of a

mess with packing. She stepped into the hallway. The black slate floor was polished. She could see their reflections, his shiny black shoes. The games cupboard where she had kept her tennis racket, hockey stick was ajar. She could see the man's golf clubs. She knew that behind them was the gun safe. The study off the hallway. Her father's desk still there. The built-in bookshelves and matching desk in dark teak. Her father's lamp of petrified wood had had a raffia shade. This man's lamp was modern – steel and plastic. In the corner, where a divan had stood, was a doctor's examination table. She had seen his brass plaque on the wall outside.

She walked into the lounge. The blue wool carpet was still there, the same one. He said it was. Her mother's style was classical – antiques, paintings. These people liked cottagey. Blue curtains from *Biggie Best* with baskets of pink roses. Frilly cushions, lace at the window. A cutter of decorative dolls and teddy bears on wicker chairs, vases with dried flowers. Outside the garden called. She stepped through the sliding doors. The seventeen thorn trees, *kameeldoring*, camel thorns. The grey ear-shaped pods, the sharp double thorns, the yellow pom-pom flowers, her friends from childhood.

'Two trees have died and had to be taken out a few years ago,' she explained. 'They were very old.'

'Did you know that the English soldiers slept under them during the Boer War?' Catrina asked.

They walked up towards the serpentine wall. The willow tree was gone but the Wendy House was still there. The garden had shrunk. It was a short walk up to the pin oak at the top of the garden. She remembered how she and her sisters used to have running races up and down the length of the lawn. She had a photograph of her father sitting under the pin oak. It was her first camera. She had been ten. The pin oak turned scarlet in autumn but struggled to drop its leaves. One winter's day when her first boyfriend, Keith, came to visit, her

father made him climb the tree and pull off the leaves. She was embarrassed. He spent all afternoon dutifully pulling leaves.

At the house, she went into the kitchen. For a moment she was confused. Was that Sarah standing there, her head in a red headscarf? She turned and smiled, greeted Catrina with a wide smile.

'Dumela.'

'Sarah? I thought you were Sarah – who used to work for us in the 1960s!'

'No. I am Pumla.'

'How do you do?' Catrina shook her hand. 'Do you live in Jouberton?'

'Yes. That is where my house is.'

Things as they were in her child-mind's eye, as her mother had left them. Even the café curtains. The pantry, the fold-down table for breakfast, the scullery. Next door was the walk-in linen cupboard – the one Raubie, a family friend, had pushed her into and kissed her, fumbled with her underwear until she pushed him away and slammed the door on his hand. The passage to her parent's bedroom seemed short. The bedroom itself small. The dressing room was still lined with cupboards. The bathroom. There was no blue towel behind the bathroom door. She looked. The blue mosaic tiles of the shower, the glass fibre window above were all there. She saw the woman's clothes hanging in the dressing room, ready to pack.

'We're going to the Oudtshoorn Festival,' she explains. 'Have you been?'

'No. I go to the Grahamstown Festival occasionally.'

Their choices showed the differences in culture. The same split she had experienced in this home – her father the Afrikaner, her mother English. The two cultures competing against each other, never working together.

They drink tea on the patio, sitting in cane furniture that was like her mother's. The indoor plants have been replaced – so has the skylight. The woman says that they are happy here – that there has been happiness in this house.

Catrina says she is pleased.

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imbuia tinges

I visit her kitchen. It is thirty years ago since I last was here. She is gone now, nor does her presence linger. The imbuia cupboards are the same, the walk-in pantry. Two kitchens actually — one for her to cook in when she felt like it and another where she never set foot — the scullery, where Sarah did the washing up. There was a washing machine with wringers, and two stoves. One has a solid iron plate good for flipping flapjacks, the other electric spirals and a good oven. I was 12 when I began baking. Two-layer cakes, frosted with granadilla, lemon or coconut, that towered, little sisters hovering, sticking fingers into the unset icing. Jo-Marie, a visitor from Belgium, taught me to make fruit and cream fillings. I learned to make toast treats from my best friend's mother. The *Frigidaire*, holder of the leftover Sunday roast, meat for weekend barbeques, outlasts us all. At the backdoor was a table used in winter. Papa went hunting, brought back a Kudu or a Blesbok. Then Ouma and Oupa came and with Sarah and all, the great cutting up of meat. Ouma prepared her old recipe — of salt and vinegar and coriander. The marinated biltong strips were hung up on wire hooks inside the garage to dry out. Long *derms* threaded onto the mincer's force tube. Ouma sat at the enamel bowl of mince, added pepper, salt, coriander, a handful of fat. Then, she'd pinch a little ball and tell Sarah to go and fry it, bring it back not too dry. She'd taste it. No. More salt, a little more fat. Another ball. Fry. Yes. Now the mincer's handle turned and long fat worms grew into snakes of sausages as they coiled on to the table. In the kitchen, the biltong slicer and the blender were the only gadgets.

The fold-down table is still here where on Sunday nights we dipped red viennas into blood red tomato sauce, fight about who had the last one.

Sarah, is she here? Her head wrapped in a green scarf, her apron starched and white. She smiles at me, gap-toothed, her eyes crinkle. *Sarah*, she who laughs. It is she whose cooking and softness bring nurture almost more than my mother in blue. I hear the sounds of Soweto blare from her radio.

Papa called me out one evening. 'Come and look here.' He was standing at the front door. I looked up. The night was dark, the heaven pricked with a pin so that light shone through the tiny holes. The Milky Way smudged the clarity of the night.

'Look,' he said, 'Sputnik.' All the stars blinked and one moved. It moved across the sky while the others stood still.

'I can see it.'

He picked me up onto the garden wall and held me. We stood looking up for a long time. After that evening I called all things that moved in the night sky, Sputnik. I had no idea what Russia was but there was a lot of talk about it. That and communists. Papa knew everything and I listened, my ears at every wall, my eyes watching his every move. He was there for all the important events of the world and he knew what things meant. He was there when Kennedy was shot, and Verwoerd, for the first heart transplant. Then he was no longer there. The lost father.

Not for the first man on the moon,
Not for my matric, not for my graduation,
Not for my wedding,
Not for his first grandson nor the others,

Not for the fall of the Berlin wall
Not for the unbanning of the ANC
Not for the release of Mandela
Not for the first free and fair elections

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locking her ears to see

Catrina dreams she is back home at 25 Hertenberg Street. The house is just the same although it is empty. She walks through to the main bedroom. The passage still has the navy-blue carpet with speckles of red and green. She walks into the bedroom. It is as she remembers. Her father lies in bed, just as he always did in the early mornings. She approaches him and says,

‘May I do something I haven’t done for a long time?’

She gets into bed besides him, just as she did when she was a girl. She lies with her head in the crook of his arm and runs her fingers through the hair on his chest. She twirls his chest hair around her index finger; pushes her cheek against his breast. She notices that the sheet has slid off his leg and she can see his penis and scrotum lying limp against his thigh. He absentmindedly scratches his groin.

She gets up and walks over to the window and French doors leading to the garden. It is neglected and overgrown. Her mother would be devastated at its state, she thinks. They must do something about it. She walks out into the garden, walks up a little hill to the top and looks down at the house. She sees the basic design is still there – the serpentine wall is grown over with untended creepers, the flowerbeds still shaped under the dense overgrowth. She thinks what a good design it is, how well her mother planned it – how well she did everything. Her taste, her style, her sensibility. She thinks about how much she gave and how little was seen. Eventually she gives up.

Now she is standing at the top boundary of the garden, looking down the length of it to the house. The wide patio has people standing on it. It looks a bit like a stage set. She wonders briefly who the people are. There is a gardener working near her. He is an old black man. He is on his knees weeding.

‘What happened here?’ she asks him. He understands what she means. He looks up slowly, gives her a brass lock, and tells her to put

it in her ear, like an earring. She opens the lock – pushes it through her earlobe. As she does, she suddenly sees all things as they really are. The people on the patio are like a Brueghel painting – a medieval village scene of people lining up for food. Two large jolly women are dishing a hearty stew out of large black pots. Children hold up their bowls. A dog chases a cat, a man is singing. The pots of stew are steaming – but she can suddenly see that the food in them is an evil, poisonous brew. She shouts out loud, 'But they are feeding them poison. They are poisoning the children!'

No one else can see it or hear her screams, except the gardener who silently goes on pulling weeds.

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tones of thunder

Our parents rented their first house in Klerksdorp. The house was an old Victorian, large and rambling. It had an overgrown garden with old-fashioned, half-dead plants in it. There were roses, clematis and wisteria growing over the fences in our neighbourhood, and the smell of rotting fruit. Rotting fruit, hot days and flies seem to characterize this time. And thunderstorms. Cape Town had had soft rain in winter that blew in on a northwest storm. That wind was very strong and rain lashed the peninsula for a few days. Then it fell softly and quietly. On the highveld, the sudden storms of summer crept up out of nowhere. One moment it was hot and clear, the next the sky became purple and dark. A wind rushed across with a sudden warning and the sky split as a long stroke of lightning whipped the earth. I was terrified by the violence of it. The thunder burst like a bomb overhead. A second later lightning cracked the darkness and another bomb burst overhead. It seemed our house would burst apart at any second. If this happened at night I rolled myself up tightly against the wall, my face as far away from the window and the terrible strikes. I never really got used to it.

Outside in the garden was an old fishpond covered with lilies and weeds. A small stone angel stood guardian at the head of the pond. My mother hated it. 'It reminds me of a gravestone,' she said. I think there must have been some fish left in the pond. We fed them oats.

The only photograph I have of the time at this house is of Lucy, Meggie, and me sitting at a child-size wicker table in matching chairs. Our grandfather gave it all to us. He also gave us

two budgies. I remember when he brought them - a green budgie
and a blue budgie. We called them *Tickie* and *Sixpence*.



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I think of my sister, Lucy. I wonder how much she remembers. I write her another letter.

Dear Lucy

*I'm thinking of Mommy.
A girl, blue eyes, sits on the gravestone
in the graveyard. All her memories sunken.
On that bed, the sand red. Silverware scattered.
Coral rich, her heritage green.
Glory of early morning, the first cuckoo
of spring, day growing. Western pines picking
up rays, mute the morning. Witness silent.
Mute the stone angel observing.
His blood still seeps through the gravel.
The soil is porous. Fishpond in the garden
over-grown, some goldfish left. We discovered
them when we moved the soggy leaves.
Clogged up mermaid's mouth.
Dragonfly buzz their blue wings. Fairy flies
caught in knotted hair. Memories glide .
I reach out to one, two. The garden knotted,
gnarled hedge, no Prince. Cutting away creepers
and roses, wisteria, we play. Fireplace swept
and the old verandah mended. Piles of forgotten
furniture, wicker unravelling, unrolling, snakes.
Paint peeling off in long snakes.
Inside the garage old car forgotten.
Children to enter another playroom.
Iron roof reflects a corrugated sun.
Old tin can flattened by passing traffic
lies rusting. The garden gate hides
centuries of ivy. I pick white, then pure green
leaves. An old step leads up, out of this moment.
I escape though , out the side gate.*

Catrina

I ran away that day.

They move there, to the rented house of the dream, just before the new school term. Her father has completed his specialization as a gynaecologist at the University of Cape Town. It is the early 1960s, a need for specialist surgeons drew them to the country places. Klerksdorp is a thriving town supporting the surrounding mining villages. He opens a new practice as a gynaecologist and obstetrician a thousand miles from Cape Town. With her three young daughters, her mother moves far from a place where she had felt at home.

She has her sixth birthday in the new place, in the very old house. She does not remember the birthday nor are there any photographs. Yet she does remember the house, for the nightmare and also for the fishpond outside, overgrown with weeds, and the garage with an old car left stored there.

She and her sisters play in the garden as her mother looks for a house fit for a doctor and his young family. The rented house is in the old part of Klerksdorp. Irene Park is close to where the town originated in the 1880s – *Ou dorp*. This is not where her mother sees herself settled. She aims higher. To be a doctor or a lawyer or a bank manager is a position of high status, with the doctor at the top.

In the garage is an old car. They call it a *goggamobile*. It is small but most importantly, it is open. They play endlessly in and out of the car.

Lucy,

*Do you remember the house in Irene Park?
The first one we lived in after our move to Klerksdorp?
There was an old car in the garage rusting.
It was a DAW. Paint peels in long snakes.
We pull at the snakes but they break off,
brittle. The car, abandoned, makes a wonderful
hiding place. A secret place to play away
from mother's disapproving eye. The old wheels
flat and the doors creaking, we climb in and play
with our dolls. I have a Betsy Sue doll.
Later, we get bigger dolls. I remember mine.
Her name was Tinkerbelle. Do you remember yours?
You named her Shelley. They were rubber dolls
with eyes that opened and shut.
Mine had brown hair and blue eyes.
You chose the blonde doll because
it was your birthday. That was long
before we got our first Barbie dolls.*

*Love
Catrina*

At night, after supper, Mother reads to us from Hamlyn's Children Bible. In those stories are countries of which we can only dream.

I drive the car. I change gears and steer. Decide to go on holiday. On a fantastic holiday to places we don't know. Little sisters huddled on back seat; I drive them away.

'Keep quiet now and eat your egg-mayo sandwiches!' I yell. 'This is going to be a long journey.'

'Where are we going?' Lucy asks.

'To Egypt.' I answer.

Yes, Egypt. It will take a long time. It cannot take too long or my passengers' patience will run thin. Thinking of pyramids, sphinxes and the markets of scarves, jewellery, brass and copper makes me press my foot down on the pedal. Push harder, harder to get away.

'We're almost there!' I tell Lucy, restless now that the sandwiches are eaten. The Oros and cold drinks empty.

'Look at the palm tree! We must be near the river Nile!'

'I don't care!' shouts Meggie. 'I want to wee.'

'OK!' I stop the car. Meggie climbs out. Her yellow *Dan-River* dress grimy. I know I will be questioned.

'Hurry or we will leave you behind,' I say.

'Be careful of the monkey!' Lucy says, knowing Meggie's secret terrors. Squealing, she scampers off. We know we will not see her again. On we go, pushing north to the land of the ancient kings.

'Will we see Moses and the bulrushes?' Lucy asks. Away, away we sail in the little yellow DKW until supper is called or we are bored sitting in a dark garage, in an old car. Anyhow Betsy Sue needs supper.

The dark garage held other mysteries. The heavy weight holding the door was dangerous Papa warned. We could lift it up until the hook holding it would almost come out. It was rusted, as was the door. The maroon paint chipped away easily. Speckles lay on the ground. The garage held stories. I always felt creepy sensations going into it. Old chairs were stacked up in a corner, stuffing leaking, an old cat slept there.

Things happened in the garage that I saw in my mind. Grey dark things, beyond the doors. Someone is taken in there, killed. The house next to the garage has a woman crying, looking for someone. A car, a Chevrolet, pulls up outside. The gate is wire and steel. A face-brick wall, low and yellow surrounds. A long concrete path leads up to the front door. The car opens. It is a blue Chevy. A man in a grey suit gets out. A small boy stands on the pavement waiting. 'She's inside. She's crying.'

'OK. I'll go to her.' A black dustbin on the pavement. 'My old man is in there. He is a dustman.' The woman, hysterical. The boy outside shoots stones across the road with his catapult. A man inside the garage hangs from a rope. A tin of green paint runs onto the floor, its lid loosened after he has kicked it over.

'The police will come,' says the man inside. The washing on the line flaps. As the sheets take in more wind, they billow out. Sails drive the yachts. Around and around they chase. The whirl lets out a scream. The boy waits on the sidewalk. A Wall's ice-cream van comes by.

'Do you want one today?'

'My father's in the dustbin,' he answers.

An old man on a black Raleigh bicycle rides by. The boy pulls off his green home-knitted sweater, hot in the sun. The street stretches away, two arms wide. Tar begins to tingle in the sun, sends shimmering snakes to taste the air.

University of Cape Town

Going further and further into dim memories, Catrina was finding her story. Her story in the deep shadows.

I am in my cot. I am very young, not yet two. I have been asleep. Now I am awake. I sit up in the cot. It is a hot afternoon. My hair is wet from sweat. It smells salty. I am caged in here, in my cot. My mother thinks I am still asleep. I play with my hands, my feet, and the soft blue and white blanket. I like the satin edge of the blanket. I pick it up and rub my cheek with it. It soothes me and makes me sleepy again. I see the picture transfer stuck on the headboard of my cot. It is a pretty picture of a little woolly lamb. The lamb is standing on a puddle of green grass. There are two flowers growing - one on each side of the lamb. I crawl across to the picture and try and take the lamb. I have tried this before. It never comes to me. It is flat and cold close up. I like the pink flower best. I try to pick it. It too is flat and cold. I run my nail over it. I can feel the edge of the picture. I like scratching it. My nail catches a little of the transfer. A tiny bit comes off under my nail.

I look at the window. It is open and the thin muslin curtain blows softly in the breeze. Outside I can see a tree. The sky is blue. I hear the buzz of summer insects. My mother has had gauze put on the windows to keep out the flies. I see a large horsefly bash at the mesh, trying to get in. It is noisy. I watch it buzz. Bzzzz, Bzzz, Bzzz.

Then suddenly the curtain flaps and it goes away. I stand up in the cot and reach out to the window. It is far away. I turn and reach for the other side of the cot, the side against the wall. I reach it. The wall is painted white. The plaster on the wall is rough and knobbly. I reach up and rub my hand over the bumps. The paint is chalky. My hand is a little white. I lick my hand. It tastes good. I rub the wall again. Again I lick my hand. It has a lime taste. I reach my mouth up

and try and lick the wall. I can! It tastes pleasant. I lick it a bit, and then bite at a rough bit. A flake of paint and plaster comes off. I try again. It engrosses me so that I don't hear my mother enter the room.

Outside the air is hot. Flies buzz at the screen. A sour smell issues from the bucket of unwashed nappies. The pram is taken out of the cupboard and I am strapped in for the afternoon walk. Mother is so proud of this child. She is so beautiful everyone agrees. How could she not be anything but beautiful, with such perfect parents, a friend says. Over and over in childhood I hear this said.

The expectations filter through later. The handsome doctor, his lovely nurse. She so practical, such common sense. He brilliant. This family and the perfect life in the small town. He, a doctor living in Wilkoppies, the desirable suburb; she a wife who is the light of the social scene; daughters taking music and ballet; go on holiday twice a year to the game reserve or the coast; have a landscaped garden, a swimming pool and a house filled with antiques and art.

fire

At the first house in the early years there was a fire. Winter came earlier here than it did in Cape Town. It came with a vengeance. First it got dry. The rains stopped in April. All the leaves seemed to dry up and fall within days. Then the cold set in. It was icy in the evenings and early mornings. Up on the highveld frost blackened the last flowers left from summer and left a carpet of white on the grass. The grass died immediately and was a dead dry, scratchy patch all winter, until the first rains in September. The days were often warm, the skies a bright blue and clear of clouds. But the early mornings and evening were so cold, our teeth would chatter as we dressed for school. Central heating was never considered necessary, as winter was relatively short. So we lit a fire in the lounge at night and sat huddled around it until we felt sleepy. Then Papa carried us to bed one by one. One evening we are in front of the fire as usual, bathed and dressed in our pyjamas and gowns. Our gowns are made of a synthetic mix of cotton and the miracle textile, nylon. Mommy warns us not to stand too close to the fire. She is always worried about our gowns catching light and has a fire screen made, but it blocks out the heat and is only used during the day hide the unsightly grate.

Lucy creeps nearer and nearer the fire, drawn by the flame. Now her gown is on fire. She looks down at it, mesmerized. I shout and point. She suddenly realizes what has happened and screams. The flames are half way up her body. Papa picks her up in a swoop and runs to the passage. He puts her down on the runner carpet

and rolls her up in it. The flames are smothered. Lucy is crying. Mommy is saying, 'Oh my God! Oh my God!'

I stand in the doorway gasping. Meggie is sleeping in her crib, blissful and unaware. Lucy has been burned on the legs. The blisters swell into little balloons on her thighs. I think she still has the scars.

University of Cape Town

HOMEGROWN

Klerksdorp is still
a dusty red town
where mine dumps
blow dirt
so fine
it mixes in
one's cough,
colours the blue gums
gray on the bordering ditch.

We lived there
near the edge
where ant heaps grew
to a man's knee,
wild rabbits ran
to their burrows
before dogs caught them.

We grew there
in the mining slimes –
mielie lands and mineheads
stood sentry
like our father
hard and steel.
Mother tamed the garden
with serpentine walls,
rose gardens,
sprinkler system
to keep brown at bay
and culture in.

The Canadian Hunter
to which my father subscribed
for years piled up in his toilet.
We feasted
on those pictures of foreign forests,
fish and lakes
while the dust caked
furniture and frost
blackened camellias
knocking pink buds onto
the icy pathway.

Thunderstorms broke summer -
soundless afternoons
when my parents slept
after Sunday lunch.
Snakes hid in the shed
near the swing we played
but if we shouted
and woke Papa
he belted us.

I remember one night
my sister screamed
her gown had caught fire.
In the rising flames
my father rushed her into
the passage, rolled her up
like a sausage in the long runner.
Her eyes were saucers,
round and round.

I dreamed the house
was set on fire by a bad wolf
who threw my doll up
into the flames
as he danced
and laughed
on the end of the roof.

winter

I'm eight years old. I am looking out of the window. The grass is so white this morning, it is like snow. I wish it would snow and not just frost. The frost looks like snow, it is so thick today but it isn't snow. It crunches under my feet and disappears into the ground. Snow would be so nice! I could make a snowman and throw snowballs at people. I'd like to throw one at Linda next door and hit her in the middle of her face! Oooh! This window is cold; the steel frame is almost frozen. I touch it and my hand sticks to it.

When I blow on the windowpane, it mists up. It looks so different when I do. I blow, it mists up. I draw a circle, rub out its middle. I look through it at the frost on the lawn. It looks like one of those Christmas globes with villages in them; balls that you shake and snow falls all around. I wonder if frost makes those icicle shapes when you look at the particles through a microscope. Each one is different. Reverend Donald says we are each one different like a snowflake, each one different from another. We don't even know what a snowflake looks like here in South Africa. Papa says that sometimes, once in a hundred years, it snows here, then I will see what a snowflake looks like. I wonder if it has a spiky star shape like I see in comics or if it just looks like cotton wool floating down. I blow on the glass; it mists up quickly and stays misted up. I draw another circle. This time I make a snowflake. I draw it. It looks like a cross, one of those funny crosses with bumps on the edges. I draw another on the pane above. It is different. Two snowflakes, different. They couldn't be the same even if I tried to make them the same. I draw another, then

another. I draw a ball - a circle in the middle cleaned out. It looks like a Christmas ball that you hang on a tree. So I draw a line from its top to the top of the frame.

The mist stays on the grass the whole time. I am misting up the windowpanes — more snowflakes, a tree, a branch, and another Christmas ball. Soon it will be Christmas. I wish we had a real tree. I hate that silly shop tree mother got. It is made of white paper that is meant to look like snow. Mother is such a spoilsport not to let us have a real tree. I want a real tree and snow. Today should be Christmas — not June 26. It is winter and it should be winter and Christmas. It is so stupid to have Christmas in summer and in the long holidays too. So dumb to be at the beach at Christmas. I wish I lived in England. I want to have a white Christmas with snow, and snowflakes and a real tree and glass that really frosts up — not the dumb window that I have to blow and pretend.

blackie swart

We have the day off school.

'Why?' I ask my father.

'Because the President is coming to town,' he answers.

'But why is he coming?'

'Because we are going to be a Republic.'

'But why are we?'

'Because we want to be our own land. Not to be part of England anymore.'

'Won't we have the queen?'

'No. She is an English queen and lives far away in London.'

'What about her pictures? Won't we have them?'

'No. We will have our president's picture.'

The president comes in a long black car. He wears black too. A long jacket and black pants and a black hat. He lifts it all the time and puts it back on his head. I prefer the queen. I've seen

pictures of her and even a film with her riding in a carriage, waving to people. She has nice hats and smiles. She is pretty like Mommy and has red soldiers and horses around her. I like her much more than this very tall man in black with no smile.

His name is black too — Blackie Swart. Papa says that it is so that the blacks think he is a black man. It is a joke but I don't understand it. He is a very tall man. The hotel he stays in has to have a special bed made for him. He is 7 foot tall. He gets out of the long car and waves. We have little flags on sticks and are told to wave them and shout happily. So we do — hundreds of little flags flap along the street.

Some black people standing over the road and some sitting up a gum tree. They have no flags. Only the white children have flags. We are given flags at school. Only one black school got flags. Papa says it is a mistake. There were meant to be only flags for the white schools. Anyhow I like my flag and am glad I got it.

When we get our flags handed out at school, we are also given gold medals that say SOUTH AFRICA MAY 31, 1961. The medals hang on ribbons of orange and blue. All the white kids wear them.

My tummy feels funny when we wave the flags. I feel a turning and tightening like millions of ants are having a circus in there. The flags are flapping, everyone is screaming. I love my little flag. I do not want to lose it. I hold it tight, don't want to drop it and get it dirty. I have to hold it up high and wave it.

Then I see the black people across the road and the black children in the gum trees. I can't scream anymore. I don't know why. I feel something close my throat. It is the way they just stand there and watch us. They have no flags. I feel sad for them, watching us from the other side of the street. My tummy is dizzy

now and my ears sing with bees in them. I hold my flag up but not
so high now. My eyes keep looking up at the tree.



granite

Papa takes us to monuments on holidays. One Sunday he takes us to *Die Voortrekker Monument*. It is a huge memorial to the Afrikaner nation who left the Cape Colony after the British occupied it. They packed their ox-wagons and trekked over ranges of mountains. *The Dragon Mountains* — the Drakensberg, the Hottentots Holland, the Swartberg mountains, through the deserts of the Karoo and the open Free State plains. Teeming with herds of wildebeest, zebra — wild animals of all kinds and the tribes of the Basotho, Tswana and Zulu. Their wish was to get as far away from the English as they could. They wanted a place they could call their own and where they could rule themselves.

We can see the monument from far, from thirty miles away. It stands on a hill outside Pretoria — tall and grey. We walk up to the great granite and sandstone block. It is a hot day. I can hear sunbirds twitter. The red-hot pokers and aloes stand pointing like flaming torches up the gravel path.

The building is as solid as the dragon mountain. It towers above me. My eyes are blinded by the glare from its pale rock walls. Up high, I can see windows carved into the granite. I wonder if people are looking down at me.

Closer to it, I can see the bronze sculpture of trek leaders placed at each granite corner of the building. I am meant to know the names of each bearded patriarch, but I prefer the statues of wildlife hidden in the bush on the other side of the pathway. I prefer the real sunbirds as they twitter and dart from flower to

flower to sip nectar. I see a malachite sunbird flash an iridescent green. A black sunbird with a crimson collar. A yellow oriole calls from a ficus.

Papa leads us into the tall building. It is cool inside. The marble floors gleam in the darkness. The interior is hollow. I stand in a great empty vault, a dark hall of nothingness. Papa is looking at the wall engravings of wagons pulled by oxen, men with whips in their hands. Vast gorges of mountains etched by the wheel cuts of wagons. We walk over to the far wall where there is a marble plaque on the floor. Papa says that every year on 16 December at exactly noon, the sun enters a small hole in the roof and shines directly onto the centre of the plaque. On the marble, engraved in it, is the vow the *Voortrekkers* made before a battle with the Zulu nation. They promised that if they were victorious, they would remember this day eternally, and the glory of God. They won, of course, with gunpowder and rifles.

Chief Dingaan, and his impis, had shields of cowhide and assegais made of river reeds with metal tips. As the Zulus were mowed down, they fell into a river alongside the battleground. It ran red with blood and became known as the Blood River. We know the story well, are taught it annually, for twelve years, at school. The 16th of December was known as *Dingaan's Day*, from 1838 until the 1960s when it was changed to *The Day of the Covenant*.

I am glad that today is not the 16th of December. I do not like being surrounded by men with beards, dressed as Boers remembering the river of blood.

After my father has told the story again of the river and how God was the God of the Boers, that they were his people, his chosen ones for Africa, I feel giddy. I walk out into the bright

sunlight. Again I am blinded. The heat blasts my face like a furnace. I want to get away, far away. I run down the hill to a coral tree, bright with flame flowers. I stand in its offering of shade. I hear my father call from far off. I look up at the monument again. He stands up there against the granite wall. He looks small against the monument. Small because he is far away and he looks like stone.

The dominee at church has the same look about him. He also stands far when he is up in the pulpit, high up against the wood panelled wall on Sundays. His *preekstoel*, the pulpit, is placed up high above the congregation. I have to strain my neck to see him. I always have a headache afterwards.

The dominee's face is a large, grey square. Silver spectacles frame his eyes. He, too, is cold.

Cold like granite.

University of Cape Town

Dear Lucy

*Today I clean out the fishpond. It is awful.
Do you remember the hours playing with the fish?
I found a glass fish. Was it yours?
Glass fish, magical crystal studded with beads, diamonds, jewels.
It was found at the bottom of a fishpond when we had cleared
the water and weeds. The weeds are green and ghostly.
I hate sludgy green water lily weeds decaying.
A long green road lies to the north of the mountain.
If I follow it, it will lead me away from here,
into the wheat fields, beyond the noisy trucks and mills of the city.
I want to follow that road, a ribbon wrapping the world,
parcelling it up and putting it away.
I want to Leap into the cool water, dive deep under the surface.
A lily grows, pink, dazzling in the deep.
I long to have a dress that colour. I once had a pink dress. That
too decayed and faded, so fast.
I remember that crispness of the colour, the freshness and beauty.
When my dress was ready it seemed so complicated.
Its heaviness weightfied me. So unlike the flower I once held.
I felt large in it and weighty, floury rather than simply crisp.
How I hate myself in that dress. I had chosen the neck
from a bridal dress design, covered in thick Belgian lace.
Ironically it was the closest to a wedding dress I ever wore.
Later, when I married, I wore an off-the-peg dress from
an ordinary teenage boutique. It wasn't a real wedding dress.
It wasn't a real wedding.*

Did Ouma want her marriage?

Now I remember. I see Lucy standing in the doorway watching. I fall fully into the memory, guilt is banished. I enjoy the freedom of the fantasy.

The old song plays. I turn up the radio. I'm there again. He is tall, overwhelming. I am a little shy. He pulls me close. I know all the time that he is hypnotised by the dress. I had tried it on earlier. It is an evening dress of my mother's. I had asked if I could try it. He encouraged me. I had stood in front of the mirror. He looked at me with admiration, said I looked like a debutante.

I have never worn anything like this before. It makes me feel grownup, older. I let my head fall back and he pulls me forward, his hand is in my waist, in the middle of my back. He holds me with his entire hand across the middle of my back. I can relax completely against him and I do. He turns me and I whirl on one foot. His thigh against mine supports me. We turn and twirl around the room. The steady beat of the waltz is perfect. Round and round we dance. One, two, three, one, two, three. I am a woman — grown up now. My eyes are closed, my lips apart. The top of my thigh, held tightly in support by his, feels warm. The night air carries perfume — a spicy, heady aroma. I feel his hand holding my back, moving round into my side as we turn, back again as we straighten out again. We are made for one another. He dark against my blonde whiteness. We twine and turn wishing this could go on forever. I love him, am so right with him. My body yields and sways to his lead. I am in ecstasy. I am Grace Kelly with my prince. The music begins to draw to an end, to fade away.

Dear Lucy

It is a futile lineage – where I come from, where I am going.

*Ancestors spring from caves – leap off rocks escape
the bullets of lawmen, low men. Slavers, trappers,
the armies crossing fields in the heat, in the mud.*

*So what's difference? I don't even know those who
passed genetic material unknowingly, unthinking,
without care, into my DNA.*

Who are my offspring, my future, and my futile lineage?

Down which river will my genes be carried?

*My green eyes stare into an unknown sky at other eyes
longing for connection. Live only once or live forever
in a cellular body.*

I do what I do for me – for the present.

Do I know a bigger picture? My lineage made me.

I take the next step.

What a playgroup, merry-go-round.

*I spin and spin and play out grandmothers',
grandfathers' merry dance. Keep on surging
down the river, floating, floating, washed up
with all the other debris, the plasma, green slime
on the shore. The essential building blocks of life.*

Algae of generations.

Maybe the sun will dry it to a dry paper.

*Do you know, Lucy, that a bit of yeast taken
from this morning's baking, kept in the fridge,
will yield enough raising agent for the whole
month's allotment of bread? It will feed an
entire village one night in May, celebrating
the birth of a new baby.*

I love you

a red letter day

'I have to go,' I say to Keith, my first boyfriend. 'It's my father. It is also my sister's birthday.'

'I'll walk with you.'

We walk up to the boarding house. It is a hot day. The heat lingers long after sunset on days such as this. It is murderous playing sport these afternoons. We drip with sweat. I am conscious of my ruddy face, my wet tennis dress as Keith walks close enough for our hands and arms to keep brushing against one another. We walk slowly, up around the rugby fields. The long way around. He stops at the cricket nets.

'*The Seekers* are coming to town next month. They are playing at the town hall.'

'Uh huh.' I wait for the next sentence, heart thumping.

'Will you come with me?'

I feel my cheeks grow even hotter. 'Yes.'

Papa is in the foyer. He sits with his head in his hands. My sister sits on a chair next to him. She is staring at the floor.

'What's the matter?' I ask her. She shrugs.

'Hello, Papa.' He gets up slowly, hugs me.

'Hello, darling.' His face seems more lined than I remember. Deep furrows gauge his forehead. 'Get your things.'

'I need a shower first.'

Lucy sits in the chair. A birthday present lies unopened on the floor next to her.

'Aren't you going to open it?' I wonder what is happening. Lucy just looks at me with eyes that are shadowed.

'Pa, what's the matter? Can't she open her present?'

He takes a long time. When he moves his head, it is with a huge effort.

'Oh, yes. Open it.'

I look at her, my eyes instructing her to obey. She shakes her head.

'I want to be with Mommy when I open it.'

'We will meet her later. Open it.'

She just sits there.

'Open it! Damn it!' He yells at her. I jump.

'What's the matter with you?' he demands.

Lucy begins to cry. She sits in her chair in the school foyer. The foyer seems a huge cave, a cave of red face-brick. The high steel windows are covered with thick grey curtains. Cold grey slate floors, brown wooden chairs and table echo the bleak government-issue materials used for all schools, hospitals and magistrates courts. I look over to the office behind us. Mrs. Buys is sitting behind the glass partition watching us. The big clock on the wall ticks loudly. It is past four-thirty. I can smell the cabbage and potatoes that the others will be having for supper. We are lucky to be going out. My parents have got special permission to take us out for Lucy's birthday. We go upstairs to change for dinner. Lucy brings her present, puts it unopened into her cupboard. I look at her. She is thirteen today. This should be happening differently.

When I come from showering, Petula Clark is singing on the radio. *Puppet on a String*. I hum along, singing as I dress. It is my favourite song, top of the pops.

'We mustn't forget to listen to the Top Twenty on Friday,' I say to Lucy. A radio is one of the privileges we are allowed in our room.

'I don't care,' Lucy pouts.

'Well you should! You're a teenager now.' I pull on my blue hipsters. Powder blue. It is the latest colour. They are cut low and have bell-bottom legs. I will wear my pink and blue striped tank top. Lucy is still wearing dresses but not me. I like my hipsters. We are not allowed to wear pants for school functions but as we are going out with our parents I reckon it is okay. Lucy walks out of the room.

'I am going down,' she says.

'I'm coming! Be right behind you!'

She is still out of sorts. What was it? Pa is being mean. I wonder at it for an instant. Then I smear on a light touch of lipstick. 'Ice pink' the label says. I touch my lashes with mascara. *The Beatles* are playing on the radio now. Papa will also be angry if he notices the make-up but I take the chance. I put the mascara and lipstick into my bag. My hair is a mess. There isn't time to dry it into the sleek straight lines I like. I comb it back; slide an alic band onto my head. Another favourite song is playing. *Pretty Flamingo*. I am a blue flamingo. I sway to the music. Suddenly the music stops and the radio announcer says:

Here is a special report. The assassination of Dr Verwoerd yesterday has brought the nation into mourning. Telegrams are pouring in from all over the world, the President's office announced today. Dimitri Tsafendas, the man who killed Dr Verwoerd, will appear in court tomorrow. Funeral announcements will be made later tonight.

I switch the radio off, dash out of the room. I catch up with Lucy as she approaches my father. He still has his head in his hands. He does not look up as we arrive.

'OK. Can we go now?'

He sighs, gets up slowly. I see Mrs. Buys watching us from behind her typewriter.

'What is it, Pa?' I ask again

'Dr Verwoerd was killed. Don't you know?'

'Yes. But that was yesterday.'

'It is the greatest tragedy this country has ever known.'

'Why?' I ask.

'Why? Why?' He looks at me with such pain. I cannot bear it. Lucy is crying again.

'Look. It is Lucy's birthday and we are going out for dinner. Can't you just be okay for her?'

'He was our leader, our prophet, our messiah,' my father goes on and on. Mrs. Buys' hands are in mid air, her typing forgotten.

'I want Mommy!' Lucy is crying loudly now.

'Let's go.'

I want the other children, who I know will be watching from their dorm windows, to see my new blue hipsters, not my father saying weird stuff or my sister crying. Most especially I want Keith to be watching me.

University of Cape Town

mealtimes

Mealtimes in our house are dramas. Mostly we eat in the kitchen with Sarah, the maid, but when we sit together it is as a family around the dining-room table. We are reprimanded for talking and shouted at for swinging on chairs. I think only three chairs survived unbroken.

Papa carves the roast chicken. The children's chorus: 'I want a wing!' Two wings, three children, so we have to take turns.

Papa says, 'If they would only invent chickens with six wings!' Those were the days when we ate farm-reared chickens. Chicken pieces, ready bought, came later. He wasn't around anymore when we begin buying packs of wings and never have to fight again over too few wings. Chickens also tasted differently then. Not fishy.

Luckily my sisters like white meat.

We are chastised for not using the cutlery properly or failing to use our serviettes or reaching too far for the salt.

Father Leo Alexander, from the Anglican Church, comes for lunch one Sunday after church. He is a tall, jolly priest, somewhat handsome with dark hair and eyes and black-framed glasses.

I like Father Leo. On Wednesdays Mom takes us to his children's afternoons. He reads to us. Mother is ever so proud of having the head of the local parish around. I think they are good friends. She is fond of him. She goes to church on Wednesdays too. Years later she only gets to hear him on the radio.

All the family silver is out. On each side of my plate are three knives, three forks, a soup spoon, as well as a long, narrow spoon.

'What's this?' I hold up the long spoon. 'What's this funny spoon?'

My mother flashes her eyes at me. Father Leo smiles.

'I think it's for ice-cream,' he says.

Mother tries to recover from her shame.

'You'd think they would know better after all the training I give them.'

'But we never ...' I begin.

'Keep quiet and behave yourself.' Her eyes flash again.

Sarah, dressed especially for the day, places the hors-d'oeuvre in front of us. She is smart in a new black uniform with a white apron trimmed with lace. The head scarf matches - black with white lace edging

'Why has Sarah got a black dress?' asks Lucy

'Keep quiet now, children, and eat your food.' Papa's voice is stern. He is taking no nonsense although I get the feeling he enjoys

my mother's embarrassment. He is sharp with Father Leo too. I wonder why he doesn't like him. Is it because he is from the English church?

'I don't like fish!' Meggie squeaks and spits out her crayfish cocktail. Mother hisses under her breath.

'What is this for?' I hold up another utensil - a long fork. My mother sighs, looks at Leo.

'They like to show me up.'

My father has a funny smile. He is enjoying this. He doesn't like the Anglican Church. He says they are communists. Later I hear him arguing with Father Leo in the lounge when they have coffee. He shouts about red priests. I want to see a red priest. Father Leo only wears black. I wonder if they are like the red knights in the stories I read. They are shouting about Father Huddleston and his red brothers. Red brothers? I go and play in the garden.

Papa pretends to choke at Christmas dinner. We have eaten the turkey with onion and sage stuffing, the sweet pumpkin with cinnamon, the green beans, golden roasted potatoes. Mom always glazes the ham. But first she scores the fat into diamonds and studs each corner with a clove. Then she rubs the top with apricot jam and brown sugar. She lays pineapple rings over the jam and sugar and secures them with a toothpick stuck through a cherry. The ham has to have apple sauce and the turkey, cranberry sauce.

Where she found cranberries in the sixties is a mystery. They are American. Stuffed and sweating with mid-summer heat, we wait for her to bring in the plum pudding, flaming with the brandy she lit in the kitchen. She places plastic holly on top and carries it through with triumph. Nobody likes plum pudding much, especially after all the food, but she has stuck it with coins which she has boiled on the stove to disinfect. It does not take Pa long to begin.

'Ahhh!' He grabs at his throat, spluttering, red in the face.

'He's swallowed a sixpence!' I scream.

'Uggg!' He coughs up a sixpence, covered in cooked pudding.

'Pa, you're joking, aren't you?'

We break open our portions of pudding with our spoons, search for tickies and sixpences.

The dining table is a round oak table Ma has got from Oupa's auction room. The table and ten chairs. They do not match. The chairs were from the Boer War but they are English. Oak, the dark patina is almost 100 years old. There are two captain's chairs, and eight officers' chairs. The captain's chairs have turned back-bars and legs, armrests on either side. The officer's chairs are ordinary ladder-back uprights. Mom keeps the chairs after she sells the

table and uses them as occasional chairs around the house. She buys a new dining room suite. It is a reproduction, a Chippendale-style table with ten chairs and matching sideboard. She really likes the English style and buys a canteen side-cabinet to house her new collection of silver. And a coffee table to match. Pa is irritated with her new need for antique-style furniture.

'*Die donnerse Engelse tafel,*' but she silences him. 'The oak chairs are English too,' she reminds him. Sunday roasts are served at the table, especially in winter. Roast chicken and legs of lamb. The Kings pattern silver is used at the table and linen serviettes, but for braais she uses the 'everyday' silverware, with bone handles and paper napkins.

Pa begins to say *grace* in English, 'For what we are about to receive, may the Lord make us truly thankful'. The children chorus a 'thank you' and begin to eat. At the end of the meal, if Oupa is there, Pa asks him to say end-grace, but if not, Pa just slaps his belly and says, *Ich bin voll ja*. Then Ma rings the electric bell hanging above the table to summon Sarah to fetch the plates.

The annual agricultural show is on. The show brings everyone to town, the entire farming district — Sannieshof, Orkney, Coligny, Hartebeesfontein, Ottosdal, Wolmaransstad. The show grounds are just outside the town, we drive past them on the way to school. We open the window and sniff the air. There is a fairground with a *Big Wheel*. Mom says it is called a Ferris Wheel. The red dust, the bales of hay, the cattle droppings and urine blend with the sweet caramel smell of candyfloss and toffee apples. In the background the strain of an organ. Lucy and I like going to look at the bulls

waiting in the stalls for their parade. The huge testicles hang to the ground. But today we are having a lunch party, a braai at home. There is a warm wind, not as hot as February but laden with pollens from the acacias and the hot greasy smells of lamb chops grilling alongside boerewors and huge side of steak. The vetkoek frying in the pan and the sweet aroma of cinnamon-sugar and Lyle's golden Syrup. The smoke from the braais snakes high, wrapping itself around the midday sun. Yellow pom-poms from the kameeldorings float like parachutes to the kikuyu lawn. Lucy and I seize them and knot them into necklaces. Other children arrive, the Jooste boys. We race them up and down the acre of lawn, then jump into the blue swimming pool. We climb the fig tree and eat fruit until our mouths drip with purple ripeness. Then we are called to lunch. The adults sit on garden chairs under the kameeldoring trees. The Snymans have arrived too with their three children, and the Dreyers. Sarah and Petrus carry trays of salad and homemade baked bread, farm butter to the already laden tables. More servants stir three-legged iron pots over open fires. Smells of white *putu-pap* and red tomato and onion sauce mingle. Chunks of *spanspek* and boat-shaped wedges of watermelon rock on cubes of ice. The blue-checkered tablecloth has become an ocean. Scamp, the dog, licks his pink lips and lies low under the table, fearing the wooden spoon he knows will come if he ventures too near to the master turning meat on the half-barrel braai.

castings

It is the early 1960s and my parents are feathering their nest. Papa goes to Johannesburg on a medical conference and comes home with art or furniture. Today he has bought a bust of Nefertiti. It is white, fine porcelain from Sheppard and Barker in Eloff Street, Johannesburg. He places her on a pedestal in our lounge and says she is the most beautiful woman in the world. He says I am like her, that I am his Nefertiti.

Beautiful women come and go to his surgery. They too want him to say they are his Nefertiti.



Papa's consulting rooms are another world he goes to each day. Sometime we visit if we are going to the dentist down the hall, or just shopping with Mom in town. On Sundays, we sometimes go with him to the hospital where he has to check up on his patients.

He takes calls a home at all hours. I hate the calls; they are about blood. He asks how much she has bled; 'What's a lot? A spoonful, a cup full?' He wants to know what colour it is; 'is it red, fresh red?' or 'Is it brown?' or 'Black? Clots?'

I hate these bleeding women.

In the consulting rooms his large black desk spreads an acre separating him from the two white leather chairs on the other side. Like two thrones, women sit in them like queens, telling him their unspeakable problems. Around him his degrees and diplomas hang like medals on the wall. A plastic pelvis swivels on the corner of the desk. The examination room is through a door behind the white chairs. They have to go in there. There they are dethroned with a green cotton gown that doesn't button all the way down. The scale humiliates them in their gluttony. But it is the lamp. Each time I go to visit him in the rooms, it is the lamp at the end of the examination table that holds my horrified attention. The rectangular steel box that boils instruments, the instruments themselves (where does that long-nosed, that duck-billed thing go? The one with the handles, and the row of steel syringes and long needles?)

But I come back to the lamp, the lamp at the end of the bed. He has a kind of hat, too, with a mirror on it.

Men like to go into dark places. What drives them to open every hole, explore every crevice? Headlights shine onto grottos, they spread away the tangle of bush and go in, shine their lights. Every cavity, spider hole, snake tunnel. Nothing is spared. They seek the secrets of the earth, cast beams into the hidden corners banned from human eyes, buried deep in places not meant to be seen. The light on the end of their heads, speculums and spelunks. Nothing is sacred, no earth secret safe. They collect specimens for their microscopes and magnifying glasses. The deeps of the sea are not secure, the furtive fish and anemones. The light at the end of table, he's a voyeur into caves and crevices. Spelunks. Speculare, specimen, looking, looking glass, frame, under glass, force, forceps, open up, look, have a look, lie down, let me see, let him have a look, a look at you. I don't want to hurt you.

diamantés

Things are hotting up. Mom is having a dinner party. She is in a state, shouting at Sarah to set the table with the white linen and silver. She wants the Rosenthal plates. Black under-plates, the white fluted ones on top. The soup stands on black under-plates too, as big as side-plates. White soup bowls with lids. Four plates one on top of another. The side-plates are white though, with damask serviettes pulled up and fanned out through silver rings. Then the silverware - Kings pattern. Two forks on the left and three knives on the right. Above the dessert spoon and fork. A soup spoon on the right. There are butter knives and serving spoons. I love the little silver branches on which the carving knife and fork rest. Mom shouts about the candlesticks that have not been polished for months, 'what do they do all day?' The Rosenthal glassware - large red wine glasses and shorter ones for white wine.

She picks roses for the middle to be put into the rose bowl, the silver one with mesh to hold each stem. She leaves them to stand in iced water waiting to be arranged.

For hors-d'œuvres, she makes asparagus and fresh mayonnaise. The soup is a beef consommé with homemade bread rolls. She'd spent the morning making the soup. Sarah made the rolls. Sarah also did the roast. She had to watch it carefully. It was a roasted leg of lamb. 'Done in the French style. You can't fail with a roast. Everyone likes it,' Mom says. It is studded with garlic and rosemary from the garden. Sarah knows to put the potatoes in exactly one hour before they are due to eat. Lucy, Meg and I love

the excitement. We eat early in the kitchen, just Vienna sausages and tomato sauce. Then we know where to hide to watch the guests arrive. Under the *Fatsia Japonica* where no-one can see us. But first what dress will Mommy wear? She has laid it out on the bed, her turquoise shantung silk, sleeveless, darted at the bust. It comes just onto her knee, 'A woman's worst feature.'

She has a bolero jacket to match but has not decided if she will wear it tonight. It has a diamanté clasp. She has matching shoes, especially covered by the shoe shop in Johannesburg in the same fabric. She will wear her diamanté earrings, the ones with a pearl in the middle.

Father Leo Alexander, black cassocked and bespectacled does not come to these dinner parties. Only Sunday lunch. Then he brings chocolates. The talk becomes more and more political. I remember swear words; *damned communists* becoming *bloody communists* and something about *situational ethics*. I become embarrassed when Pa attacks the Anglican Church in front of Father Leo. He says they are Catholics without a Pope. He talks about *die Katolieke Gevaar*. I don't know what he means but Mommy says he doesn't like Catholics. Granny used to say that at least my mother hadn't married a bloody Catholic. I think it is the same as bloody Marys, and I will not drink tomato juice, because it is like blood. My mother loves tomato cocktails and I can never understand it. Why would she want Pa to think she was a Catholic?

Father Alexander is good natured. He laughs when Pa gets red-faced. He says it doesn't matter what church you belong to, it is what is in your heart. But Pa is becoming more angry by the day. We hear about *verraaiers*, and *that bloody Bram Fischer* who

should be hanged for the traitor dog he is. It is very confusing, especially when the book I have on English history shows people having their heads chopped off, even a queen, and others are hanged up on high gallows for being traitors. Will they chop off Bram Fischer's head? Mommy says the Queen is the head of the church. Will she have her head chopped off like Mary, Queen of Scots? Pa says some Afrikaners and the *donnerse Jode* are *die Katolieke Gevaar*.

I just cannot get my head around politics. But I like Father Leo. On Wednesday afternoons we sit on the carpet in his study and he reads *Pilgrim's Progress*. I remember Christian and his high, narrow road. I want to take the high road and see the golden city of light. But then Father Leo never comes again. I think it is because Papa shouted. After that my mother is forbidden to go to the Anglican Church any more.

Following that Sunday lunch we have to go to the Dutch Reformed Church with hats on. We have to sit and listen to the dominee who stands up very high near the roof. I don't like it because we have to go into the big church first, before Sunday school and we have to wear hats. I know it won't last long because Papa has to take us and fetch us. It is not like when we went to the English church and Mommy came too. Now Mom stays at home. She smells of wine when we get back.

I want to change to the Methodist church where all my friends go. It does not take much to persuade Papa.

I learn sign language early. Lucy and I teach it to one another. It is our secret language. We make up our own set of signals, a code only we can understand. She's home already when I come riding up Hertenberg Road on my bicycle, late after hockey practice. Long before I get there, a few hundred meters down the road, I look at her. She has already found me and looks into my eye. She will shake her head at the unspoken question, a shake or a nod. I look for the signal. I draw up to the curb before the garage, if there are others around, we begin the secret language. A fist, two fists, two closed fists, one fist hit the other fist. 'Boxing?' if an aloud question is permitted. A nod. A hand open out, held to the side, another question, an answer in a thumb or a forefinger. A confirmation in three fingers up or a denial in two down.

Boxing. Boxing days. Not for giving gifts to the poor but for days when Mom and Pa are fighting and Lucy and I take Meggie into the garden and hide under the *fatsia japonica*. We tell her we are going to Japan.

'Why Japan?'

'Just because.'

I know the names of many plants. Mom dug up the garden when we moved in. She used prisoners from the local jail. They came with a warder who carried a big knobkierie and a silver whistle. If anyone ran away, he'd blow on the whistle. If he caught them, he'd hit them over the head with the knobkierie. Lucy and I

sit there watching them work. They have to dig deep 'double-dug' beds. Mom knows what she is doing, she has learned it from Nanette, a friend who is a landscape architect. 'Double-dug' beds mean that the topsoil is dug out and laid to one side. Then compost and manure is dug in before the topsoil is replaced. The convicts dig up the soil with picks because it is very hard. They work in a long line, in unison. Lifting the picks and dropping them with a thud into the red soil. The lead convict begins a chant, *Shosholoza, Shosholoza, Kulezo ntaba, stimela zase South Africa.*

Lucy and I sit rocking to the rhythm. We ask Sarah and she tells us it means, 'Move fast on those mountains, train from South Africa. You are running away on those mountains, train from South Africa.'

It is a song of the miners to help carry them through long hours of hard work. The convicts are 'cheap labour'. Mom pays fifty cents a day. She has to provide food. At lunchtime they sit around the big pot of samp mielies in the lapa outside Sarah's room. Some days she brings them a large tin of boiled meat. The samp; white mielie pits, look like hundreds of teeth, like the big white teeth in the convicts' black faces. Lucy and I like samp and pap. We take some pap from a convict and roll it into a ball. Mom does not know we are here but Sarah watches over us. She shouts as soon as we are out of line, *Klago betsa wena!*

Mom's double dug beds flourish. She plants, or has the convicts plant, deep shrubberies and herbaceous borders. Eugenias with red fruit that can be made into a jelly, and pittosporums; I call them 'spit-o-sporums'. In the top corner she plants acanthus and ajuga. In spring snowdrops and daffodils. That summer Pa has a

borehole sunk and the garden put under sprinklers. The tall drill comes and parks on the corner of the plot. It hammers its long drill bit into the earth. Each day there is thump, thump, thump as the drill enters the earth. Water spouts around the opening to cool the metal bit. Long plugs of rock lie on the driveway as Pa discusses how deep the hole is. At last water. Then a pump and a tap with clear water from the bowels of the earth. Pa says it is very old water, fossil water, but it tastes very new to us.

Mealtimes get worse. I have turned thirteen and my body is changing. I swell out in odd places. My breasts, which I badly want to grow, evade me. My hips round, my belly sticks out. My legs, which have been long and skinny, suddenly seem shorter. From being a tawny gazelle I am looking like some sort of bug — a rounded body with limbs stuck on it at angles. My body has a life of its own. Worse are the spots that appear. I look like a ladybug.

I think it is difficult for my father to see his firstborn daughter transmogrify into an insect. If only my breasts would appear, I wish. I buy a bra and wear it with great discomfort. It cuts into me under my arm, constricts breathing. I feel it pull on my shoulders, scratch my back. I persist. I pad the cups with cotton wool. Swimming one day, one of the lumps of cotton wool finds its way out and floats on top of the water. I grab it and quickly swim to the other side to jump out in my rush to rid myself of the damning evidence.

My greatest unhappiness, though, is at mealtimes. Papa criticises me for gaining weight. Every mouth of food I take becomes a confrontation. My mother persecutes me by giving me

two or three chips with my steak and salad while the others get as much as they like. I complain bitterly at the unfairness. Papa says how fat I will get if I eat all the chips. He tells me that soon I will look like a circus lady. He calls fat women '*Sous tannies*'.

He loves to tell how fat a *sous tannie* can be — so fat that her fat rolls around her stomach and hangs down hiding bats in the folds. '*As sy opstaan, oplig, dan vlieg die vlermuise uit van onder die vet!*'

He finds the story very funny. He also refuses to operate on his fat patients, demands they lose weight. He forces women to lose twenty or thirty pounds — or they must go and find another doctor. But they lose the weight, they do not want another doctor.

Vlermuis Huis is where the fat lady lives. *Vlermuis Huis* — the bat house. Dark and dank under large black trees that stand tall, arms reaching out to tangle the other trees until they block out all the light. The bat lady lives in *Vlermuis Huis* up against the mountain. She is dark, has long black strands of hair with streaks of grey. From her forehead a wide streak of dirty grey hair hangs in a dank, dark curtain across her small black eyes, little stones in her face. Her pointed head, sharp at the chin, is small above her rounded body. She wears a grey cloak and grey suede boots. She is often in the garden, under the monkey-puzzle trees. When people walk past, they don't at first notice her.

'What do you want?' she demands, swooping at them near the wall, surprising them or frightening them.

Her voice is a high squeak. She is very fat. Her grey cloak hides most of her huge mass under the folds of grey cloth; her stomach itself folds into many layers. It is said her stomach hangs onto her knees. In between the folds of her dank, pink sweaty skin, live rows and rows of bats. It is their warm, pink cave. They are her pets. Only once a year, at midnight, on the darkest night when the moon is furthestmost from the earth, does she let them out? She stands on top of her house by the turret. Then she drops her grey cape, lifts her long black blouse, undoes her layered skirts and stretches to the solid darkness about her. She reaches high and wide. The huge folds of skin lift and shudder. Suddenly there is a flurry of wind and thousands of bat wings beat to the darkness of night as they take wing and lift themselves from under the pink folds and into the night. The bat lady twirls three or four times to free any bats caught deep in her skin. She then stands astride and bathes in the blackness of night.

On nights such as these she has a lover. A dark lover, in draped cloaks, with fangs comes to her when she is alone and naked on the roof, at night, on the blackest night on earth. Her lover comes and he descends from the turret of the tower where he has been waiting. Waiting and watching all year. He descends and takes her with a swoop. On nights such as this there is a high-pitched whine and the trees sigh although there is no wind.

kitchen shades

Papa shouts at Meggie for not eating her beans, chases her to the kitchen to eat with Sarah. Worse than eating with Sarah, is eating with the dogs.

Each time I put anything into my mouth I feel guilty. Each forkful is watched, commented upon. It is hard enough balancing peas on the end of my fork as my mother insists. At least that way I don't get accused of shovelling it in.

My first memory of Mom's drinking occurs here, at this table. She begins to slur, her knife slips as she cuts into the chicken, shooting peas, potato across the table. Her fork drops heavily onto her plate or she misses her mouth and the food brushes her ear. Papa glares at her. Lucy and I giggle helplessly. Soon all hell breaks loose. Usually it takes one more small mishap. Meg swings back on her chair, Lucy and I eye each other, and Mom drops beetroot onto the white tablecloth.

'That's it! I've had enough!' My father fumes as he reaches for the bell button dangling on a cord above him. It has been placed there for convenience like the one next to their bed to call Sarah for their early morning tea. Sarah arrives in the dining room, summonsed by the bell in the scullery. She carries the large tray.

'We have finished! Take the food away.' His parting shots for Mom are:

'You're not far from the gutter!'

Mom's drinking worsens. Mealtimes at the table are abandoned unless we have visitors on Sundays. Ouma and Oupa come less often. There are 'talks' in the lounge. Mom staggers to her bed most nights. Papa sleeps in the study more often. The scraping of her hand along the passage wall as she guides herself to bed, and wakes me up. This soon becomes a sound of terror.

One night I wake up with a start. It is very late. Everything is in darkness. Then I hear them. They are arguing. No it is worse. There is shouting a long way off. Lucy has also woken. Meggie is still fast asleep though. We creep along the passage to the study on the other side of the house. We creep past the kitchen in darkness, through the dining room, in darkness. When we reach the hallway, the light from the study illuminates the night. Mom is lying on the divan, warding off Papa standing above her, his fist raised. With her one hand she holds her bleeding, broken nose. Her eyes are bloodshot with broken veins, her face red with blood.

A few days later Papa shows me the booklet that describes the descent of an alcoholic.

'She is one step from the bottom and then it's the gutter.'

Red Poem

here a red poem
a red desert –
a hot sand poem
a red and banished poem –

to a queen
who lost her heart
and her head –
a blue crowned head

a queen plagued
by shadows –
forces I dare not speak

a red poem
a red oxide poem
for a blue queen

University of Cape Town

christmas dress

How was I to know he would be dead in six weeks? It is my fourteenth birthday. The year has been gloomy enough with Papa sick. We haven't had a holiday to the seaside. We are home for Christmas. December is extra hot. Christmas day a nightmare. Ouma and Oupa arrive after church for lunch. Mom drives us to church, sits with us in the back row. We leave as the last hymn is sung. Papa is still in bed when we get home. The Christmas wrappings are strewn around the lounge, the tree lights off. There are not many presents this year, just a few cheap things. I do not get the orange sandals I want, nor a record player.



From the kitchen the familiar smells of roasting chicken and lamb. No turkey this year. It will be like an ordinary Sunday lunch. We spend the day swimming in the pool at the top of the garden. All our friends are away at the seaside. Lucy and Meggie bounce in

the water on an inflatable plastic horse and a lilo, I get clothes. Too old for plastic horses or horseplay for that matter. I sit in the sun rubbing tanning oil on my legs. No money for a record player. My birthday is on Saturday. I do not appreciate being born right after our lord. No one is around even when we are at home. Even more, I hate getting combined presents. It isn't fair, I declare. Everyone else gets two presents -- one at birthday time and one at Christmas. But I get only one. No one has even asked me what I want.

On Friday night I ask Mom about my birthday present.

'We'll go shopping tomorrow. You must understand. There is no money now.'

Of course I do not understand. What did they expect? I need new clothes and a record player. I am sure my friend, Cheryl, will get a record player. What will I say? We go shopping in the morning. It is very hot. Mom is in a foul mood just getting parking.

'Where are you going?' I say. She is parking at the old end of town near the Indian shops.

'We will look here for a dress for you.'

'Are you mad? Here? I won't wear anything from the coolie-shop!'

It is dark inside. Smells of cheap poplin and plastic shoes waft among the incense. Mr Naidoo is over-polite, I can see he doesn't expect us to shop here. We look through blouses and shorts. The dresses are bright, mostly out of fashion, too gaudy. Mr Naidoo brings some more from the back. They have plastic covers over them to protect them.

'These are latest fashion. I give you a nice discount.'

One dress has lace around the collar; the other has silver zips sewn onto all the pockets.

'Very fashionable, just special for a doctor's daughter.'

I won't try them on. My mother stomps out of the shop. I follow mutely. The heat makes me perspire. Her hair is flopping, sticking to her scalp, the way she hates it.

'They know exactly who we are,' she says.

We walk the length of Church Street to Truworths. It is air-conditioned but that does little to settle my red cheeks. Mom sits mutely on a chair. I pick through dresses on a rail, take two or three down.

'This one.'

Mom pays for it with cash. She never uses cash, always her chequebook. It is strange. My dress is a tent dress. Cut away at

the shoulders, from armpit to neck. It flares out in a circle from the turtleneck. It is all the rage. Bright red flowers against the blue ground. I know it will fit me. I also know I will never wear it.

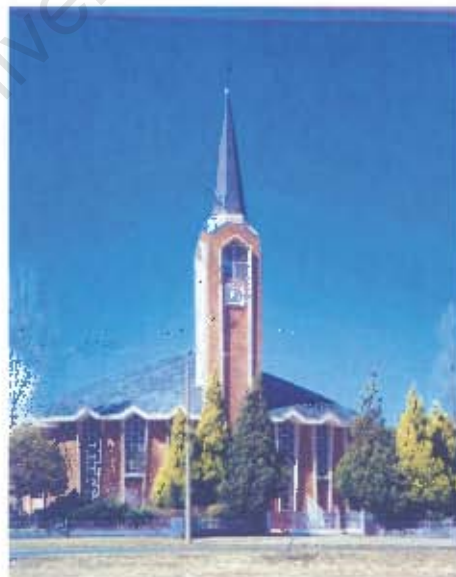
The next dress I get is for my father's funeral. It has to have sleeves.

University of Cape Town

skande

The day when the cuckoo called, it was Papa's funeral. It was there, at Mom's funeral, in the same cemetery, twenty years later. I wore a green dress. I should be wearing black out of respect.

The day is hot. It is February. Thirty-five, forty degrees easily. The flies always buzz louder on hot days. People gathered. There were arguments, as always when religion came into it. The dominee did not want to bury Papa from his church. It was a *skande*. The family considered the Methodist church where I had been since I was ten. The minister, Rev Hittler, was prepared to take the service. Then the dominee relented on the condition the coffin stayed outside the church. Rev. Hittler would conduct part of the service, for the children, we are told. I wonder where Father Leo is, why can't he come?



We sit in the chamber-like church, the dominee up high in heaven, Rev Hittler next to him. The dominee does not say much, just that we must learn to forgive. Then Rev Hittler speaks. He says that when something like this happens in a small community, everyone has to take a look in the mirror, a long look at themselves. I wonder who some of them would be. They look at me all day. I hold my head up. I am proud that I am the only one of the family to stand and sing in church. I want to show every one how brave I am. I imagine people saying afterwards, Catrina is so brave. She stood and sang while her mother sat. She is strong. She bears her suffering well.

University of Cape Town

guns and roses

Catrina continued her letters to Lucy but she wrote her memories too, her stories in long chapters that she hid in the night. She thought of Flame as the stories gathered themselves together and began to call her. 'I want guns,' Catrina's story seemed to say to her. 'You need to bring in the guns.'

Guns abounded in the story. Yet they were absent from the one Catrina was telling. 'Look at Oupa cleaning his gun and how he tells the story of his father who shoots off his finger with a canon gun. What about your father's guns and the gun cupboard?' the story seemed to ask. 'What about his safe and his cache of ammunition?' She remembered how she had shot at cans when she was twelve and how she went on a boat trip with him. That was a time of roses, wasn't it? She needed to write of that rose time, the roses of twelve, how she danced with him at the captain's dinner and the white dress she snuck into her suitcase, and the white leather suitcase he had bought for her mother, a "sorry" present. How she learned to say "sorry" too, by sending flowers, how she went to the florist with five rand and sent her mother flowers. How she found that card all those years later in the white suitcase. Tucked away in a pocket in the lining. And the .22 and 303 calibre guns, and the guns and roses of his death.

The police come to the house this morning. Sarah is running down the passage to Mom's room. Mommy is still in her pyjamas, lying staring into the garden through the window. 'It the *poelisie*, Madam. Madam must come quick!'

Mommy gets to the front door, the police are emptying out the cupboard in the hallway. 'What are you doing? How dare you!'

'We have a warrant, Ma'am.'

They take all the guns: the shot gun, the pellet guns for shooting birds, the .22 and the 303. Mom has to show them where the revolver is kept; in Papa's cupboard.

'It's for your own safety, Ma'am. We don't want any accidents.'

I thought Papa was going to jail, but later that afternoon I heard Mommy telling Aunty Shirley that it was an order. 'They think he will kill us all.'

Papa loves us, I know he does. Why would he want to kill us?

the shape of shadows

Catrina's story was like the open plains of the Karoo, a horse riding along the foot of a line of koppies. It was a white horse, she could just see it. Its tail like white smoke out behind it or was it dust from the road? All along the top of the koppie-ridge was a white line. It ran along in a quartzite seam, echoing the white horse below. All across the landscape, scattered wide were the litterings of stone. Eons and eons of weathering. Each stone was like the words of her story. She imagined gathering them in lines, in words to spell her story in stone. Her book was the gathering of stories into stone piles. Cairns to mark the chapters of her life. The shape of her story was stone. The shape of stone and the shape of shadows. An "S" shape, a meandering serpentine, it was a story of snakes and rivers, the shape of a river with S bends, turns and twists. It was the shape of a pile of stones, a burial heap, stones piled over a grave in the desert. It was round too, a circle. It went round in circles, circles that were feminine. Her journey had come full circle and was contained in a circle. It was the shape of an African hut, and not the shape of ordinary houses, houses that are square with a pyramid for the roof.

She wrote about lilac and purple and lavender roads and purple places. Of a witch and her little black dog and douches and purple flies and long forgotten places. She found it in a corner of her mind, far from childhood and wondered if it were really there or if she'd made it all up. Who was the old witch who lived on the corner with her dog; a witch's dog with pointed ears and sharp red eyes? Was she Ouma's friend or foe? Three Sundays ago she went there to the purple place, the place from so long ago. She found it easily. Ouma's house at number six. She stood at the gate and saw the path with its little bridge over the *leiwater*, where she had floated leaves and paper boats. She looked at the pathway and the front door and then she looked down the road to the corner, to Mimosa Road and the lilac trees that lined the road. She who dreams lilac took the walk from number six to the end of the road.

She followed the trees, now as tall as telegraph poles, lilac lampposts to the corner and she turned. The trees dropped a purple trail and she followed it to the corner house, the purple poo house, the witch's house, the little black dog's house. She who sometimes dreams purple, stood there and looked at the house and the sign that read *Comelia's Flats*.

She who sometimes loved purple now looked at the lilac trees, the lavender carpets underneath and up into the purple sky filling with big purple clouds. She who loved lilac and lavender pulled into her purple dreams, pulled far into them and drew out a branch of lavender to wipe away the shapes that cloud memory. She looked up at the trees that lined the purple avenues, their outlines against the sky. They had grown so tall.

University of Cape Town

mourning shade

Papa once told me I would die young. 'Beautiful people always do,' he said. Other people's father's told them not to pick their noses or to be home by suppertime. He also tells me I am his Nefertiti. Then I found out that he tells every woman in town that too. It is at his funeral I find out. He is the one to die young, not me. I am standing behind the table eating a scone with strawberry jam. A lot of people have come to Ouma's house. Her friends from the church have baked cakes and made sandwiches and chicken pies. I know I shouldn't be so hungry but it is long past lunchtime. It has been a long time since the church service in the morning, and then we drove the sixty miles to Parys and to the cemetery. The minister took longer because his car had a flat. We buried Papa under bluegums and cypress trees. I heard the cuckoo.

I try to hide my hunger. I stand behind the table near the curtain. That's when I hear Auntie Wilma say, 'He always said I was beautiful, that I was his Nefertiti.'

She is an ugly woman with black hair and a pointed chin. She is a liar. I want to get out from behind the table, from Wilma and her lies. Wilma, the vomity vegetable. How can she be Nefertiti? She is dark. He liked blondes. Like Mommy, like me. I once asked him what he preferred. He always called me his 'witkoppie', but that day he said, 'Brunettes. Brunettes with blue eyes'. Like Mrs Boshoff, his receptionist. I knew he meant her. I'd heard Mommy scream at her down the phone, 'Tell me, who is the father of your children?'

Was Mrs Boshoff his Nefertiti too?

The pines stand in mourning around the cemetery. Mommy calls them graveyard trees, and chincherinchees are funeral flowers. I liked chincherinchees before she said that. She also hates red and white flowers together. She is particularly superstitious about red and white. There are some red and white flowers for the graveside and chincherinchees. I see how she looks at them. I wonder what goes through her mind or if she is so dulled by shock that she is miming everything. Now the minister is saying something over the coffin and it is being lowered into the ground. I throw a handful of red earth onto the lid. A cuckoo calls in the pines. It is calling for a mate in deep summer, her heart's tearing.

The tea afterwards. A party after a funeral. People have come from far and need refreshment. A couple come up to me, family friends. She, wife of my father's colleague says, 'If you need a daddy...'

I know I will never see them again.

brown road

Nefertiti had her own pedestal across the lounge from the bronze bushman mounted on the wall. She was pure white, a Rosenthal. Pure white porcelain. Skin like porcelain, like Princess Grace. He'd also told me that I was his Princess Grace. She died young.

So did Nefertiti.

The scones and jam. The redness of the jam is like blood. I feel sick. I turn and walk down the red steps, down the path to the gate and into the street. I run out from the funeral tea as the first large raindrops fell. They plop onto the red earth of Ouma's garden, lifting the dust smells and mixing them with the electric air. I hurry to the gate, pull it open and run down the road. The lilac blossoms of the Pride of India make a carpet; purple clouds overhead discharge their cargo. I know it isn't safe under trees so I go down to the river. There a willow hides me. At the bridge, I climb down the granite steps and go and stand under the bridge. The rain is falling fast. I see a giant heron on a rock. It gives up on fishing and lifts its great wings. Starlings and doves, in anticipation of night, have already gathered under the girders. I am not alone.

I sit, staring at the river. It flows quickly today. Brown mud solid in dullness. It is a long brown road. I can walk on it if I wanted. I wait to step onto the road and walk its long walk. I sit staring unable to move. The willow - she strokes my face. Her hair green falls in long tresses across my shoulders. Her back brown bark. I stretch my drooping arms and reach out. The river gives me water to drink. I am tall and stooped. Long green tresses hang over the face that no one can see.

blue towel

A blue towel hangs in his bathroom behind the door. After he died I find it. I see it hanging there, just like he had left it after he had showered that Saturday morning when he left home and went into town and never came home.

I find it a week or two later. I look at it with shock as if he had just dried himself off and gone to work. I stand and look, uncertain of the action I want to take. Then I take it - take the towel and bury my nose into it.

When a person dies, long after he dies, his smell stays in his bath towel. A dead man whose towel has the smell that stays alive. Alive, like now, my head buried in the blue. I sniff him. His wet smell, his soapy smell, his aftershave, his smell. His alive smell, his father smell, his Papa smell, his shaved, bathed, his ready-for-life smell.

When we put him into the ground and covered the red earth over him, all trace is erased, there is nothing left of him.

But his smell. I have it in the towel.

I don't want it to be washed; to have his smell cleaned out, tumbled with all the alive smells of the family in Omo or Surf, rinsed and scented, softened.

I want his smell in his bathroom towel, so I hide it. I take it out and bury my head in it. How long I do this, I don't know.

Now the towel is gone. I can hardly remember it, it is so long.

But when I think of the door behind which the towel hung I can sometimes smell him.

Just sometimes.

umsipani

That night Catrina dreams a dream that changes the course of things. Outside, where things originate, are the open grasslands. Seed scatters far. When she feels exposed she goes to the ground. On the earth, she scratches the sand. Suddenly it gives way. Catrina notices a hollow, a small tunnel burrowing deep. There is a muddled nest of sticks and grass. A movement and she sees some spotted fur and a loaf of bread. It is a wild cat. This is its nest, she thinks. Is it wild? Is it bigger than she thought? Is it a leopard? The spotted fur moves, the loaf of bread crumbles. The earth begins to give way. Suddenly Catrina realizes it is much bigger than she thought. The tunnel is a burrow running deep into the earth. The cat and the bread were just blocking the entrance to a bigger cave.

Catrina slowly edges away, but it's too late. The sticks and grass move. As the nest of twigs shifts, she sees a hand, then another. The skin is dark, the nails long. She sees that the hole from which this creature emerges is much bigger than she realized. A whole being is rising slowly from the ground. She cannot move. She leans back in her effort to escape, but she is mesmerized by what is coming up to meet her. The grass falls away. Sticks churn, dirt caves down the tunnel as an arm, then a shoulder, a strong back, a neck, torso, and a head slowly expose themselves in parts. Catrina stumbles in her haste to leave, her breathing hard and loud. Too loud. She is afraid. She turns back to see what is after her. The bushes on the surface tremble as they part slowly. Then a tall black woman arises. She looks at Catrina, jet and flame and asks,

'Why have you woken me?'

A branch of umsipani – the woman holds it out, an offering. Sometimes, she thinks, I feel that I have to tolerate God, have to search for the willingness to be here. Now I stand, branch in hand and whisper, I am here for me.

white nights

The first fires of summer were burning the mountain as Catrina flew into Cape Town. She saw the thick smoke hanging across Devil's Peak and all along to Constantiaberg. Helicopters ferried buckets of water from the sea to drop it over the flames.

Joe was alone at the airport. Sam was at school. She saw him through the glass doors. He looked tired. His hair had grown long, over his collar. He wore a pair of baggy jeans and a cream shirt. She could see his brown eyes although he could not see her. The eyes that held all the feelings he found so hard to show. She felt herself soften. She hoped things would be easier for them. He looked up as she pushed her bags through the door. His eyes smiled before his mouth.

'I am so pleased you are here,' she said. He squeezed her to his chest. The pain of loving him welled up and she began to cry.

'It's been too long, Catrina. You must not do that again.'

'I'm sorry, Joe.'

When they arrived at the house, Joe carried Catrina's bags and allowed her to open the door. The house was filled with the heady perfume of flowers she did not recognise.

'Tuberoses,' he told her. Lucy had been and brought the flowers. Lucy here? She did not know she was in the country, let alone here in her home.

'Where is she now?' Catrina asked. She had gone to their Aunt Polly.

The atmosphere was thick. Joe and Catrina were distant, strangers again in the house that held them at bay. He told her that Lucy had been staying with him. Sam was at boarding school and he and Lucy had spent a lot of time alone. She had come and was gone before Catrina returned, and so was the bushman. Lucy had decided it was her turn to have him and so had taken him with her. She had also found all their mother's old photographs and taken them.

'When you are away from your nest a cuckoo comes. All your energy for someone else's spawn. They just kill what's yours.'

'Catrina, she hasn't killed anything. She's just taken those old photos. You never looked at them anyhow.'

From the inside it was painful. She felt the loss like the side of a mountain that has been blasted away in an eruption. Like Mount St Helens. From the outside she felt she was judged for having left her husband and child behind. Cracks had appeared. Joe and Catrina had been apart for a long time and sand had got into the spaces. The spaces, the gaps left by a childhood that could not be filled by a husband.

Under the eaves two red-wing starlings had been building a nest for the past few days. She could see them from the kitchen window when she made tea. Long strands of grass and twine hung and blew in the breeze.

Telling stories about the past, their past, she thought. Ouma's whisperings had taken her back. The shadows of the red curtains. Catrina had lived to tell the tale, answer the questions. Stories – the shaping of ourselves, moments when memory came flooding in, filling basement areas forgotten.

Lucy was a dog with a bone. They argued about the photographs. 'Have the photographs,' she told Lucy at last. She had phoned her at Aunt Polly's. 'Have them and the bushman. Keep it all for as long as you need to.'

This month, this month of February was the death month. When it was over they would talk. She did not warn her though, that he, the bushman, came with a curse. A curse or a blessing. It was Lucy's choice.

It wasn't about the photographs, of course. It was about what they had both lost. Who owned the images, the symbols of their past, was not the problem. It takes a lifetime to recover from childhood. The rivalry of who had most of father's love, who had mother's love. It perpetuates war. Their growth had been cut short by his suicide. They were frozen in time like bog children, two adolescents wanting the prince to ask them to dance. She'd been to Ouma, unearthed her story, and exhumed the bones of family fables as Ouma whispered. Ouma had told her through their shared genes. Their shared genes, and their dreams. How does one tell another's life? She had imagined Ouma's story as well as she could. But what had Ouma left out? How could she tell the objective truth of anyone's life, of her own even? But she needed Ouma's to find her own. She needed a story to live by. In unearthing stories lived in borderlands and on borderlines, she had given Ouma a voice and maybe Ouma has helped her find her's. But what was she pointing her to?

University of Cape Town

Lucy,

*Do you remember the shell Mom had
and the gold rock of Papa's?*

They are here.

Papa got his rock from his father.

*They had found it on the farm and
had thought they had struck gold.*

And Mommy's shell, a spotted cowry.

*It comes from the mouth of the Kei river,
near where she was born*

Her mother, Granny used it to darn socks.

*She gave it to her, and then Mommy gave
it to me.*

'Ouma, tell me again about this gold rock. Oupa found it, didn't he?' The velvet curtains between them, she unfocused her eyes.

They had found it one Saturday. Lalie was there. He had come over to the farm to tell of a meeting. The men got together for a meeting at the Muller farm. They made tea and hovered around the door. After a lot of excited talking and some loud shouting, the men let the younger ones join them to talk about their decision.

Catrina walked over to the mantelpiece. A rock and a shell speckled brown that she once held as a child. The rock fitted into her hand now, it had glittered

big gold to her child's eye. The shell, a cowry, convoluted – sounds the ocean, darns socks.

She remembered picking up a smaller piece of iron pyrite. The road outside the house was being tarred. All day the men worked up and down, laying the gravel. A glint of something. She picked it up. In her hand was a perfect square one-inch on all sides. She was rich! This was a lot of gold. Rushing inside she almost knocked over her mother. Irritated she asked what was the hurry. Seeing her find, she dismissed her dream, 'Fool's Gold'. Catrina wonder when her mother's last dream had been shattered. On the mantelpiece she positioned the rock right of the clock, in the place of their father – origin, ancient witness, a touchstone. On the left she placed the shell for their mother, a womb, an ear to mend the broken. She stood on the threshold of the past. Two shapes. Which one should she keep? Rock or shell?

There was murder in the high skies. Catrina heard screaming and squawking and ran to the kitchen to see the two starlings dived-bombing a crow. The female had laid eggs and both parents were defending their future with everything they had. The day was warm and clear. The starlings were good parents. She wondered how she and Joe were faring with Sam. She found a photograph that day that must have fallen out of the box Lucy took. It was taken the same day as the photograph of the family gathered under the kameeldoring trees. This time she was smiling and happy. Lucy was sitting in a chair staring down at her feet. She had been crying. The younger children were scattered around playing. So why did they choose the proof where she was feeling so bad she could not look up at the camera? It had shaken her memories and perspective, her ideas about the family.

What goes into bringing secrets to light? Family myths, secrets and lies that are perpetuated from one generation to another. She needed to go back.

'Ouma are you there?' The velvet curtains.

cadmium red

Catrina had a flashback that was like a dimly lit shack in the forest. She was in the bathroom changing, because all the cousins were in her room. She looked up and there was an old man looking at her through the bathroom window. She was naked. She just turned away, embarrassed. Hid behind the door. He went when she saw him.

The air hung heavy, dank with the smell of tuberoses. She knew she would never like tuberoses again. She drove up *Die Ou Kaapse Weg*, The Old Cape Way, now a moonscape. All the fynbos had burned. She could not believe it would ever be the same again. But already it was restoring itself. A haemotopia unfurled red fingers. A flame lily. You would never have seen that without a fire. She thought of Flame and wondered how she was doing. The heat dazed the mountain, oak leaves brown before autumn. It had sent some mad. Baboons were blamed for the fires. The mountain was still burning. People continued to throw out cigarette butts from car windows. Helicopters hovered with huge buckets of water. *The Cape Times* quoted a biologist who said that fires were a natural occurrence. Proteas needed fire for germination. Some species would never flower if not for fires. Without fires there is a little sex but no babies, he said. After fires lots of sex and lots of babies.

She walked on the mountain, saw the hard saucers of burnt out proteas. Now blackened, splayed fingers had thrown the seeds far. The ashes would provide early nutrients, but the tortoise skeleton nearby would not have babies. It's the way of nature. To burn to live.

The starlings were making a nest. Busy all day, up and down from the fields below the house. Then, after sitting on eggs, she must have tired and flown out to feed. A green cuckoo came while she was gone and laid a speckled egg next to the two starling eggs.

The curse was still there. She was dusting the lounge and knocked over the bust of Nefertiti, intact all these years, now she was broken. Then Lucy and she had a row again.

'What's it going to be?' Catrina asked when Lucy went silent again.
'Holding onto what's not yours alone or letting go of the past?'



Nefertiti

Nefertiti was
a queen of hearts –
desert dry and
red hearts –
a queen of
lost hearts –
stolen misplaced
and broken
hearts

the sunflower opens
its eye
to a blue sky –
each day
a beginning

I wish old hearts
could be born
anew

my khaki father

Lucy – Catrina does not ask her if she remembers the road from Botswana when Pa made them get out and walk because they were quarrelling in the car.

He stops near a kameeldoring and says, 'Get out.' They will not, so he gets out, opens the back door and drags them out by their arms.

'Now you can walk home.'

He drives off. She feels her face redden with shame and anger. Meggie peers back at them through the rear window. Lucy stands crying. Tears run down her cheeks and pee down her legs. Her legs look like two nails. *Spyker*, Uncle Jan calls her. Her knobbly knees knock together. She stands in the wet puddle as Pa drives away.

This is it, she thinks. This time he means it. He won't stop. She is worried, more about Lucy. She is thin and small. She won't make it, not in this heat. She can't carry her. Her throat is tight and dry. She can feel her heart racing.

'What are we going to do?' Lucy snivels. It irritates her. Why does she always have to look after her? Lucy always gets her into trouble. She started the fight anyway and now Catrina has to look after her. She is worried. Pa has gone. She imagines a car stopping and giving them a lift to

Mafeking, the driver disgusted that they are so naughty that their father had abandoned them.

She turns. A car is coming from behind. It is still too far off to say if it is Pa. But Pa must have seen the car and turned around because, over the hill, she can see his car speeding towards them. He overtakes the car ahead of him and stops alongside.

'Get in.'

The other car is slowing down. The people inside look at them. She doesn't want them to stop.

As she gets in, her eyes flash at Pa.

'Don't ever do that again,' she says.

Kalahari heart

The heart of the Kalahari
is a kameeldoring tree
with grey seed pods
like the velvet grey
of rabbit ears. They
fall to the ground
in long listening
for rain.

The heart longs
for rain long after
ears stop listening,
the heart hears
the thunder.

the shape of silence

Dying in February. All the men in the family. Ouma died in June – on Children's Day. June 16th. She had made a hundred and two, but her childhood was shot away like the children of Soweto, by the ancestors of the policemen who held guns against children. When you can't even think without wanting to cry, you need to get away. Catrina wanted the silence of mountains. Things would never smooth out with Lucy. And there were issues with Joe; trust had been broken. She could not stay at home with him so she went to the mountains, as she often did when she was lost. She wanted to go back to the Free State to the farm on the border, near Clarens, where Sarah was buried and where Ouma had walked down the dark passage. Flame had phoned. She would meet her.

The return was easier than Catrina anticipated. She drove to Clarens along the old road. It was one those perfect days. The sky clear and dark blue. The gums were peeling long strips of bark. She stood to take a photograph.

She went to find Sarah's grave. It was set far to one side of all the other graves. She had nothing to do with the soldiers who fought in the Anglo Boer War, the Jewish graves, or even the suicides that face east, not west. Why was she buried here in this white cemetery from which her husband had been excluded? Many of the houses in town were Victorian and late-Victorian sandstone. She stayed at a guesthouse called *Uitsig*, run by Carli and Ben Lange. Carli was a great-granddaughter of President Brand of the former Orange Free State. She asked her directions to the Anglican Church. It was an imposing sandstone building with a tall bell tower.

She got onto her knees to pray. The stone floor was covered with a tapestry rug. She felt self-conscious at first, but kept her eyes closed. She asked for mercy but also for love. Mercy and love. She also asked for guidance. She knew it was going to be hard to go back but she knew it was no good running away again. It always came down to the same thing. She opened her eyes. She

was alone now so she carried on with the meditation. She asked for a blessing – one for her mother, another for her grandmother. She stayed for a long time. Then she felt a touch on her foot. Someone was standing behind her. She did not look. She stayed quiet. She would be ready. 'Ask whatever you want and I will do it,' she whispered. She heard the voice, an echo from a deep chamber. When she opened her eyes again, no one was there. The candles flickered and she stood. She bowed her head to the statue and looked around the old church.

She found Flame kneeling in the corner of the room. She knelt down beside her. Her forehead was in her hands, she sat deep in thought. She wasn't used to seeing her pray. She stayed a while then, feeling that she was disturbing her, she got up and walked to the lounge to wait for her. Flame took a long time. Eventually she stood in the doorway.

'Would you like some tea?' she asked.

They went to the house where she was staying, and made tea. They took it on the stoep and sat in the afternoon sun. It was warm and they drank quietly without saying anything. She watched an olive thrush hop around under the broom and a fiscal shrike dart down to catch an insect.

'They used to call them butcherbirds or Jackie Hangers, remember?'

They talked of Flame's work and the continued counselling that had to be given to the victims of the past. She was tired and had come home to restore herself, but she still had time to listen. This woman with the capacity for love like an ocean.

'I knew I needed to find you. I wanted to tell you something, something you don't know. I am very young. My mother has to leave me at home; she is going out with my grandmother. Someone is taking care of me. I am crawling in a lounge, the carpet is light green. Then he picks me up. We are walking out of the lounge. We go past the kitchen. I can see Sarah cooking lunch. I want to go to her but he carries me past the kitchen and down the passage. Then he opens the

door to the spare room. He puts me down on the bed. The bed cover is soft. It feels silky against my cheek, there are small red roses embroidered onto it. He gets a nappy to change me. I lie looking at the roses. I don't like what he is doing. I cry, and then I scream. Sarah comes. She says she will change me. He says I am a difficult child. He's angry and walks out of the room. Sarah changes me and takes me to the kitchen. It is warm there and she gives me sweet tea in a bottle.'

'Who was the man?' Flame asked.

'I have tried to bring his face to mind but I cannot. I can only see his hands holding me. His big fat fingers.'

'Do you know him? Try and look up into his face. '

'Maybe it was an uncle. My parents had a friend called Oupa Bach. He had an auctioneering business and lived in town. He sometimes came for tea. '

'Was it him, is the face you see his face?'

'No, I don't know.'

Darkened windows banged open, tin horns were added to the noise in her head. She hated lies and lies had been told. Everyone was implicated. She heard the noise get louder and the thunder behind her ears. She turned away. The walk back, the excitement of meeting Flame again, the shock of the revelation. She walked away, up the hill and to the other side. The grasslands became a thicket and she had to make her way around bushes and trees. She walked by along the ridge of Surrender Hill and could see the Generaal's Kop in the distant. She picked up a gnarled stick and used it to prod the grass ahead. It was probably a wise thing to do. Someone had once told her to scan the metre or so ahead in the veld.

'Is this why those painting of Tintoretto disturbed you?' Flame asked her.

'Yes,' answered Catrina. 'It must be. I hated the old man looking at Susannah, hated it with more hate than I imagined I had, but I did not have the words to say it.'

University of Cape Town

night is in my throat

Catrina had always known deep inside that what had happened to her was not as bad as what her father had done to himself. It was going back to that day that had held her in an icy grip.

He had woken, let her mother take the children to school. When she returned she found he had left his leather pocket diary on the table next to him. She was reading the note when the telephone rang. It was the police. There had been an accident. She read the note again;

My darling This is the only way. I love you. Sorrels

It was early. He watched the sun brighten the garden as it could not brighten his mind. He felt strangely calm, as if he knew he had to do surgery that morning. He had focus, more so than he had been for many months. The racing thoughts, the thunder behind his ears was still. He waited for her to take the children to the athletic meeting. Then he rose, showered, dried himself, carefully hanging up the towel behind the bathroom door. He shaved, sprinkled Old Spice on his face, deodorant. He took a white shirt from his wardrobe. He had not noticed the frayed edge to the collar before. It horrified him and he threw it to the ground. He took another; it had a button missing from the sleeve. He felt the pressure rise but he stopped it, breathing deeply and took a third shirt. He put it on, fastened the tie in a Windsor knot. Then he took his charcoal suit and a white handkerchief. His shoes were polished and he only needed to give them a quick brush.

He parked his black Mercedes in his usual spot in the medical building where his rooms were in Anderson Street and walked up to the ground level. Instead of getting into the lift, he walked outside onto the pavement. It was the

beginning of the month and town was busy. The shop next to entrance of his building was open. Des Fontaine Gun and Sports Shop. He walked in, the owner greeted him. He lived in the same street although they only knew each other from the shop; he'd bought his guns here and his bullets. 'Des, I'd like to see a revolver, the same model as I bought.'

'Ok.' Des unlocked the glass cabinet and took the gun from the shelf. 'Here we are. It's a newer model but all the specs are the same as yours.'

He took the gun, with familiar ease he unhitched the back clip. Des was watching this so he did not notice the cartridge of bullets in the other hand. Deftly he slipped the cartridge into its chamber, and flipped up the safety lock.

'What are you doing?' Des said, as panic struck him.

He just looked at Des and pulled the trigger.

University of Cape Town

a sufferer of shadows

After Catrina left Flame, she drove back home the long way. Across the Karoo towards the west coast. She drove down the escarpment and along the Cederberg wilderness area. As her car struggled up the gravel road, she wondered what she was doing. She saw booted eagles circle in thermals below. They rose in the warm flow. The landscape startled her. This was very different to the yellow plains of the Free State and the floral kingdom of the peninsula. Over two thousand species of *fynbos* grew here – proteas, heather and grasses – on the stretching sandy flats. The road climbed quickly at Wuppertal. In the distance were the beginnings of the mountains – Bushman's Kloof, God's Finger, the Maltese Cross and *Stadsaal*. As her car headed up the steep Pakhuis Pass, she looked down on the Oliphant's River winding along the flat coastal plain. Elephants roamed here three hundred years ago, before the settlers shot them for ivory. The road rose a thousand feet. The rocks began to buckle and bulge into monster shapes. When the continents split apart, Africa remained in the same place. It just slipped south, the other landmasses drifted off to the east and west and north. Africa, heart-shaped. The rocks were carved continually by wind and rain. Some looked like the dinosaurs that had roamed here, other like sabre-toothed tigers. Leopards and lynx still lived in the upper reaches. Most farmers had given up the struggle to grow maize and potatoes and resorted to harvesting the natural *rooibos* for herbal tea. Others had re-introduced the zebra, springbok, wildebeest, and eland. She stopped at the top of the pass, got out and stood on a glacier bed. Striated grooves and rounded boulders proved it. She picked up a pebble. It had lines cut into it. What was it about these rocks that sang to her? She remembered a poem she learned at school:

*'n Handvol gruis uit die Hantam –
My liewe, lekker Hantam-wyk!
'n Handvol gruis en gedroogde blare,
Waboom-blare, gnarrabos-blare!
Arm was ek gister, en nou is ek ryk.*

She had remembered an Afrikaans poem. She had not spoken the language for many years. It was her father's language and she had rejected it, forgotten it. His language and his politics. What was it about these rocks that coiled her mind into memory? This landscape spoke, it uttered cellular phrases. She was a sufferer of shadows she did not know how to access.

People had inhabited the wilderness area and its craggy cliffs and ravines for thousands of years. She drove to *Grootwinterhoek* farm. Mrs Olivier greeted her and offered farm boerewors and milk. She said she wanted to spend some time alone. The Oliviers, there for three generations, had given up growing maize and potatoes. *Grootwinterhoek*. 'Great Winter-corner'. The name the original inhabitants gave this place was lost, but they had left their marks on the walls of caves and their humming spirits drift on the evening breezes.

Catrina chose a large ficus tree under which to set up a camp. Then she went for a swim in the deep rock pools. Cape clawless otters hid in the rocks, all she saw were crushed crab shells they left on the riverbank after their meals. She let the water cleanse her of the city and the stress. She slept out on a flat rock under the stars. Leopards lived in the higher reaches but she was not afraid. She watched two klipspringers, jumping the high onion-shaped rocks. Russet from iron, the boulders peeled in layers. Other rocks resembled dinosaurs.

The cave paintings up at Drum Rock were well preserved. Red ochre and yellow had lasted well. The white limestone, which usually fades, was clear on the wall of the cave. These paintings were not as old as the paintings she had seen at Bushman's Kloof. She saw an ox wagon and men on horseback shooting with long rifles. One rider on a white horse wore a hat. This placed them in the colonial era somewhere between the mid 1700s and late 1800s.

The bushmen had been a hunter/gatherer community for thousands of years. Then men with sticks that shot fire came. The Bushmen were hunted as well as captured. The most ancient humans, these small, wrinkled brown people who had never gone against another in anger.

She sat for a long time in the cave. She could almost hear whispers about her. She noticed something she had not seen before. Up against the roof of the cave and against the sidewall were little painted figures. They looked as if they were swimming in a current of water, mermaids swimming in rock.

The hill across the valley looked like a stack of pancakes. Each white layer was the residue of what was once a great delta. Rivers ran from south to north. At lunchtime she stopped at a stream for a picnic. Willows and pepper trees provided shady comfort. As she paddled in the water she noticed a ripple moving along the edge. She went closer and saw a small red and black snake. At dawn she walked. Black eagles and jackal buzzards needed the air to warm before lifting on thermals. She saw a flock of *rooibekkies* in the riverside grass. A *bokmakierie* whistled from a thorn bush. She was going to explore the caves along the Boontjies River. The caves overhung the river.

Eland and giraffe danced on the cave wall. Drawings of human figures had a distinctive style. The buttocks enlarged and the legs were lengthened. Some figures carried quivers with arrows and they held bows. Others had stamping sticks. Elephants and small mice were depicted in red and yellow ochre, mixed with blood.

Entering the cave, the cave above the river, she was at home. The graffiti rocks and midden floor surrounded her meditation. The light began to dim and she realised the lateness of the hour. The tall tower of rock across the valley stood like a teacher, mortarboard on head. The sky burned red as the sun set. Venus. She would see it as soon as it darkened. She looked down at her ankle. It bled. A *haakdoring* had scratched her as she climbed. She thought of the Van Wouw bushman and how it had always scratched her and her sisters. Blood trickled onto the sand. Red drops in the sand reminded her of the red blood spots and the bloodlines on the wall of the cave. These lines were what the shaman saw in trance or maybe the answer was as simple as the liquid substance offered up in antiquity.

She poured water from her water bottle and climbed out onto a ledge above the cave. The west was dark crimson now. In the east the mountains were catching the last light. She sat for a long time, watched the shadows creep up the

mountain until they disappeared. Outside the cave mouth blackness hung like a curtain. Her small candle flickered, casting shadows. Hookheads, hunters, women with stamping sticks joined the fire flames. Ghostly *quagga* and eland muffled a stampede.

A rope of sand dangled umbilically from the cave roof. She wondered how it held, thought it must be a wasp's nest hanging from a thread.

It's the colours one chooses that make a difference. She had come to the cave to be alone, to think about the question Flame had asked.

And then the motions – what she did with one hand she did with the other. So symmetrical, her left hand is dominated, intimidated by her right hand.

She saw music on the left – a crotchet and a quaver, notes played unheard. On the right a hen-like shape, not heavy but square and a face – a man with a hat. In between a fish swam, a whale breached.

'What do you most love?' Flame had asked her.

The open and fearless, the underlying capacity for joy, and the way her body stretched to music. The brush with death had come, whispered in her ear and she turned away. She did not want to engage with it. She turned away but the night was hot, restless. She couldn't sleep. The cave floor was hard, the blackness a curtain. She turned again.

She had another strange dream that night. She dreamed she was in the cave. She had built a fire and was sitting next to it.

A very old bushman sits and tells stories. She understands his every word. This does not seem strange until she realizes he is talking in! Xam clicks. She awakes. At the end of her bed sits the small bushman. He just smiles and clicks quietly under his tongue. She goes back to sleep.



Currency

The shaman lifts his head
night wind blows in
foreign pollens.

It is my father's wind,
he waits for the moon's return.

This man will carry you,
he will put n/um into you.
He takes hold of my feet
and makes me sit up – but I
am under the water
gasping.

The silver crescent grows,
night egg draws in the tide,
ash sprinkles the heavens.

I am a trembling duiker
then I think a jackal.

I can see my long tail,
touch my wild ears.

The chill in my bones
is not warmed by morning.

In the sand I find
an ostrich-egg bead –
take it home to use
as currency.

the shape of a shot

She had not spoken his language for a long time. She thought she did not remember it well. It was a surprise to remember the poem. Death returned her to Joe. When she called him, he said that a dear friend had died. She drove back along the sea to Cape Town. It was the funeral the next day. She had not been to many funerals; her father's was the last. Now she was as old as he was when he died. Their friend who had died was young, too, forty-four. A father and husband, he had left a daughter of sixteen. At his graveside she threw red soil into the hole and cried. It welled up and overflowed like a river. She didn't know anymore who she was or what she was doing. An emptiness echoed all around. She had lost something and she did not know where to find it.

Sam's school athletic meeting was on Saturday. Catrina and Joe drove out to the school to watch him run in the 800m and 1500m race. Catrina sat high on the stand looking out towards the Helderberg. The Hottentot's Holland mountains stretched towards Hermanus. She longed to drive up over the pass and down to the sea. Her mind wandered along the long beach, Grotto with its little cave and white sands. Whales were mating in the bay, blowing the familiar V-shaped spout. She wondered if she would ever see a calf being born. It was possible from the cliffs at Siever's Punt. It was so close to the whales. A shot rang out and Catrina jumped, her heart beat very fast.

Behind the red brick classrooms are the sports fields. The grandstand is made of iron scaffolding. Long planks fixed down in two strips on each step form the seats. How many blisters are in my bum from all the meetings where we sit and cheer or wait for our race? Below the stadium to the south are the rugby fields. To the west, the open veld. Soon a new housing estate will border the school property. The sky is clear, the acacias spread

umbrellas of shade. The cone-shaped koppie is scattered with rocks. I gaze at it as we sing the national anthem.

A shot rings out. The starter's gun. The race begins. All around me, on the grandstand, the girls and boys scream. It's the most exciting race of the day - the 800 metres. The favourite is Derrick and he will win again. The boys are stamping on the planks, girls jumping up. The whole structure vibrates. The cheerleaders in blue and red wave batons and lead the repetitious scream, *Derrick, Derrick, Derrick!*

Far below someone has entered the stand, is trying to get attention. No one is listening. The crowd roars, the stand trembles. It is the last round and there is a contender for the crown. Dougie is breathing down Derrick's neck. He passes. The school goes wild. Derrick is red-faced, puffing. He puts in a last spurt and overtakes Dougie. Derrick has won! Cheers, streamers are thrown and draw lines in the sky.

The woman at the bottom manages to get hold of a young girl. She speaks urgently into her ear, pulling at her arm. The girl looks up into the crowd. The cheerleaders swing their arms and begin a new chant,

Who are we? Who are we? We are, we are - can't you see!

K-I-N-G-S-M-E-A-D KINGSMEAD!

The blue house, my house are winners! Our score goes up on the board and we are new leaders by five. The blue house roars!

Look! Look! And what do you see?

KINGSMEAD! The best of the three!

The girl at the bottom of the stand climbs up to the first row. She asks another girl a question. They both turn and look up into the top benches. Then they point.

Another shot is fired. The next race has begun. It's the 1500 meter race. All the best matric boys are competing. Neil Perrins, Ron Nicholas, Dave Gravett. The favourite is Keith Davey. The girls are screaming. Unless you stand and jump, you see nothing. The girl on the first step gives up trying to get someone to call the person she is pointing at. She climbs up but it is difficult, she is almost knocked off the stadium. She waits. The race is long, the first lap is done. Dave takes the lead; Neil is right behind him, Keith in a good position in third. The girl turns to watch the final lap. Keith moves to second place, the crowd is chanting its different colours. On the blue stand the shout *Keith, Keith, Keith!* The red stand calls *Neil, Neil, Neil!* And the green stand *Ron, Ron, Ron!*

Keith pushes past Neil and Neil stumbles. Ron takes the advantage and moves to second place but Keith speeds up. He breaks the ribbon, his arms out wide in victory! The blue stand jump and stamp until the bars of the iron scaffolding vibrate across the whole structure.

As the excited spectators begin to sit, the girl moves up steadily to the higher rows. When she gets to where I sit she pulls at my arm and points down.

'Me? You were calling me?'

'Yes. There is someone who wants to see you and it's urgent.'

Slowly I make my way down the high stand. I am afraid that those below me will look up my shorter-than-regulation school dress. The younger boys don't miss the opportunity.

'Hey! Cat. What you going to give Keith as a victory prize?'

'Shuddup.'

When I get down, I see the secretary of the school standing anxiously amid the noise and chaos. Dust flies from the dry earth underneath the stands. The February grass is almost dead. She takes my hand and leads me away towards the classrooms. I see Lucy standing near the bicycle sheds, not with our mother but with Cheryl's mother.

'What's the matter?'

'You must come home. I'll take you.'

'Why? Is it my mother?'

'No, dear. It's your Daddy. He's very sick.'

Lucy and I get into the car. We say nothing, don't ask any questions. We sit silently as she drives us home. But we don't go home; we go to the neighbour's house, Aunt Shirley. Shirley is my favourite grown-up. She looks strange.

'What is it?' I ask.

'Lucy, come with me.' She takes Lucy's hand. 'Catrina, Sue will tell you.'

Sue takes me into Shirley's bedroom. She tells me that Papa has shot himself in the head.

I cannot remember if I said good-bye to him that morning before I went to school.

University of Cape Town

I am at home in kitchens. As much as I am familiar with my mother's kitchen, I know Aunt Shirley's kitchen.

'Would you mind if I made some fudge?' I ask her.

Shirley loves sewing more than cooking, so as I make fudge for her three boys, she works up in her turret sewing room. Shirley is making me a dress, a red dress for a party. It is winter and we shop for the fabric together. Corduroy is the height of fashion and I choose Santa Claus-red. Shirley delights in making dresses. She has little opportunity for creative sewing with her boys. My mother has too many girls. Shirley helps me choose a pattern - a red shift dress which I will wear over a white frilly blouse and white stockings.

The butter is melting in the pot; I add the sugar, a quarter cup at a time. Then the vanilla essence and Lyle's Golden syrup. I know it will be a lot of stirring. I have to beat the mixture until it has a dull look. Then it is ready to set.

At the hospital, the nurse is offering me something. I suddenly realise it as my eyes align and I see the small plastic cup she holds. 'Here, dear. Drink this.' The cup contains a milky fluid. The nurse murmurs in calming tones. 'Drink it. It will make you feel better.'

I see the nurse has three more cups on the tray. I do not need to feel better. I feel fine. I just want to know where my father is. Across the room Meggie and Lucy take their drinks without resistance.

'Drink it quickly, it helps with the shock,' said the nurse.

It burns my eyes even before it touches my mouth. As it goes down my throat it also rushes up my nostrils and stings my eyes again from the inside. I gasp. My head swims and my eyes blur with tears. I throw the cup down. My head spins. What shock? 'I want to see my father,' I shout.

I stagger towards the single ward. The nurse comes swiftly behind me. The door is ajar. My mother comes out as I push it. The nurse changes direction and takes my mother's arm. 'Come Mrs, Doctor Muller. Come over here.'

There, on a bed, with his head swaddled in bandages, lies my father. I walk to him and take his hand.

'Papa?'

He just lies there. His eyes closed, mouth slightly open, he snores gently.

Crying was like a river. It took her to a far shore. She looked up and, overhanging the beach, was a palm tree. Straggling fronds drooped over her in sympathy. The sky was blue and dry. The river had run into the sea and she had been swept down into the depths. She had to find her way to firm land or perish. She understood, that if she was strong enough, she was being offered a second chance at her history. She could choose to succumb to the power of memory or to transform it.

rivers

Once in a lifetime something comes your way that is unique, an opportunity to take a step into a new world. It takes clarity or focus, an intuition that is practised and polished. It is a gateway that is opened for a moment. A goatherd stumbles on a stone, picks it up because it shines. It is the Cullinan Diamond. An archaeologist works on the same dig for twenty years, scratching, chopping, and lifting out rocks. Suddenly there it is – a skull buried for three million years.

Catrina returned to Joe. She needed him more than she had ever known. Joe and Sam. It was Sam's school break so Joe and she decided to go to Hermanus where they could spend time with him. Sam loved the beaches and sailing up the Kleinrivier. They enjoyed the fishing village, the walks on the beaches, watching the great southern-right whales that came up from the Antarctic to mate and calve each year. She could sit for hours at Sievers Punt and watch them lolling in the breakers. Occasionally an energetic burst and one breached.

The bookshops in Hermanus are a mix of new and second-hand. The village square held a market on Saturdays and she had spent the morning browsing. Opposite the market was a shop that had two signs – *Madhatter's* and *Hemmingway's*. Like an old curiosity shop, it had leaded windows and was stuffed with old books and papers on shelves beyond the level anyone could reach. Colin Marsden wore a large spotted bowtie and top-hat. Noel and Beth Hunt were partners in the shop with Colin. *Madhatter's* began to transform itself into a second-hand and vintage bookshop. Blood-red Venetian glasses were the last of the bric-a-brac and some blue onion-pattern dinnerware. Colin had brought in twenty boxes for books from an auction. Simplicity was the goal. He wanted the confusion cleared, the focus to be books. Beth wanted to offer some bric-a-brac so they decided to divide the shop in two: the main area for books. Colin created a South African section along the back wall. The centenary of the South African War had created interest. Up the wall Colin hung more shelves and

brought in books on South African history. The few remaining bric-a-brac items went to the right side of the shop. Beth placed two old soft couches in the corner and people came in for coffee. The old *Madhatter's* sign was painted and moved over to the right window next to the entrance. They added the name *Hemmingway's* and left the *Madhatter's* sign with its white rabbit. She was attracted to the smell of coffee on Saturday morning, and tired of market shopping, she stepped inside the shop.

She saw Colin near the back of the shop. His outrageous tie and hat as he balanced on a small step ladder. A sign hung above him that read *Books on The Boer War*. She walked over. There were a few books on the subject. One was new; Karel Schoeman's *Witness to War*. She opened, thumbed through it. On page 131 was a photograph of Lieutenants Muller and O'Reilly of the Free State Artillery and the *agterryer*. It was dated January, 1901, *The Cape Times*. She looked at the man on the left, the man with the same name as her father. If she covered his moustache, he looked like her father, even her son. Next to him was his white horse. She bought the book.



St. Louis Muller and O'Reilly, Free State Artillery, who are still fighting in the Colony. The photograph shows two members of a Free State commando with their *blacks* after riding was taken at Van Rhyning in January 1901, shortly after the arrival of the Cape Colony. *Evening Cape Times*, Week 26, 1901.

shaped by rivers

Joe, Sam and Catrina walked on the beach for hours talking. Grotto beach stretched for miles towards Gansbaai. They walked a few kilometres to the cave that hid a German spy during the Second World War. Then they turned and walked back and along the lagoon. They needed to find each other again. The lagoon was a feeding ground for waders. Grey herons stood one-legged, black oystercatchers screamed, Caspian terns dived into the streams.

The Kleinrivier had breached early and all the dammed-up water from the winter rains flushed out to sea. It flowed furiously washing out the silt, all the muck, and the river scum. Sam and Catrina walked along the edge. A yellow stone shone clearly from the sand below.

'Let's float down the river,' she said to Sam.

She stripped down to her bathing costume and stepped into the water, catching her breath. It was cold. She plunged in, dipping and diving. Then she turned onto her back and stretched out. She floated downstream, towards the opening. The river was flowing fast. She sped around the corner, the current spun her around and now her head was moving to the mouth. She looked back towards the mountain. She could see new growth on Aasvoëklip after the fires.

She was carried along by a river. It took her back, back along the streams her father swam, far back to when his father fished as a boy and his grandfather watered his horse. Forgiving, she thought, is *for giving*. She needed to give them back what she was holding onto. This was her life now, not theirs. She needed to let go of what she held on to, of her longings, of what could never be. She held up the Schoeman book and looked at the photograph again. She noticed, for the first time, how finely arched Lieutenant Muller's eyebrows were. He was a man with purpose. She could see he knew who he was and what he was about. She

was lost because of his son and his grandson, but he could show her a way back. He was pointing.

She had to stop the legacy of sibling rivalry. There is enough love for all. It's like doing pioneering work. She sought what belonged to her in truth. Love was her heritage, not pain.

She bent down as if to pick up all the pain of the generations, she imagined how she bundled it up and threw it into the river. She watched it float away; away from her and away from her children. She threw whatever residue of past relationships remained. She thought of Ouma and Ouma's dead husband and how that had closed her to new love. How her little son had lost a father and how the intruder stole his birthright.

Her own sister Lucy, what pain did she, Catrina, hold? She threw away whatever was her part in it. Then she thought of Joe; how all this had been a barrier to loving him. Afternoons without him were tedious and yet she knew that when he was there she built walls. She threw those bricks away into the river.

sound of boxes

'Don't be hard on yourself,' Ouma whispered. Catrina was standing, lost in thought. The voice brought her back and she saw she was staring at the wooden kist she had had since she was ten. It had been there all the time, so familiar it was invisible. It had been protected by many coats of paint. She remembered painting it herself when she was young. White, then, when Sam was born, she covered it with a nursery patterned sticky paper. When he was thirteen, she had it professionally restored. White paint, green paint, dark brown. The layers of generations stripped away. Brown was the original colour. The restorer said it was a military kit-box. Oupa's name was burned inside the lid –

C.P. MULLER.

Catrina recalled the story he told of how his father went to a military auction when the British packed up to leave Bloemfontein after the war. It was a hundred years ago. He bought seven boxes – one for each of his sons. Her father used it as a child, later as a toolbox. Inside it now were all the old documents and cuttings her father left, amongst Sam's old soft toys. There were newspaper cuttings and family documents. She looked through them and saw the biographical sketch written by Oupa of his father's life. His father, a captain in the Boer War. Captain W.H. Muller.

Catrina's excitement was a surprise to her. She phoned Auntie Polly and set up a time to see her. She was, after all, the only living relative to have known the Captain. It was Thursday before she could see her. Lucy had left to go to Meggie. Auntie Polly was warm, welcoming as always. Still tall and lovely for her seventy or so years, she hugged her, felt her cells recognize Ouma. The sea

sparkled as they looked down across Fish Hoek bay from her balcony. She offered tea and cheese scones. She took out the book, opened it to the photograph of Captain Muller and said,

'Do you recognize the man in this photograph?' She was enjoying the joke, the sense of being a detective in search of evidence to convict a criminal. She looked at it.

'That's Oupa Muller!'

She could see the resemblance to her father, the same sticking-out ears, the handsome face, and the steady gaze. Her aunt took out four boxes of photographs and memorabilia. In the box was a photograph of two old people sitting outside a building. Catrina compared the photograph to the one in the book. It was the same man. They were sitting outside a rondavel. 'It was about 1945,' said Aunt Polly. She opened up her memory file and out poured stories Catrina had never heard.

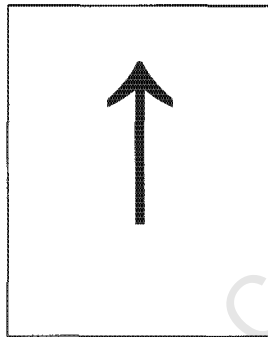
They spent the afternoon sorting out, reminiscing. Catrina asked her about a photograph, Aunt Polly told her a story.

People who go on long journeys to far places come back disorientated. They are like aliens from space, dislocated. They stare out at the old world like it is another planet. She felt like that after seeing the photograph of the captain, W. H. Muller and the white horse. W. H.

She just sat in her chair staring at him for a long time. Ouma was close by; she could feel it in the soft velvet. She looked at the Captain. He really was on a mission. The chair she was sitting on creaked. The chair, one of ten oak chairs she'd acquired from her mother. The chairs had been in her life since she was born. They, too, were so familiar she hardly thought of them. Eight straight, ladder-backs. The dark patina, layer upon layer of beeswax. Two captain's chairs. Oupa had given them to her mother when she married her Papa. They

were bought at the same auction where Oupa's father, the captain, had bought the kit-boxes. Delivering the goods Great-Oupa bought from the military supplies auction in Bloemfontein, he brought the chairs to his own house and gave the kit-boxes to his sons.

Catrina turned the chair. The arrow insignia of the British army was on the back –



She looked at the **M** that was carved into the back on one of the uprights. All her childhood, she had thought it stood for her mother, Margaret. They had been with her all these years; the connections to Great-Oupa. Time does not set limits, it only deepens things.

Great-Oupa Willem Hendrik – her father was named for him. Ouma Martha had a big kitchen, her aunt had told her. She wondered was she fussy, *vol fiemies*, like Ouma? Did she get up early in the mornings and give orders to the maids? She began to get a sense of her. She would prepare a huge breakfast. Oupa always sat at the head of the table and before he ate, he insisted on a jug of boiling water to be brought to the table. He'd then dip his cutlery into the hot water before he'd eat a thing. He worked in the outside rondavel. How distressed Ouma Martha must have felt. He treated the home like a hotel. He had come home after being out in the veld all day for three years. She had held home and hearth together. He'd spend his time in the rondavel. Some days he'd call the children, allow them to visit him and carve them slices of biltong. The rondavel had bookshelves on the walls. Great-Oupa was a self-taught man, a student all his life. 'You could ask him anything and he knew the answer, the capital of any country, the leader of any place,' Aunt Polly had said.

But his wife was in a concentration camp. Ouma Martha and the kids. Yes. Oupa had told her about learning to read. So Oupa had learned to read in the camp and then he went to Grey College, Bloemfontein. Ouma went to Eunice. She wondered when things in the town settled enough, after the British left, for a normal society to function. She wondered what they farmed right after the war. Sand. They sold sand from the river. The farm was on the Modder River. Later they grew vegetables. A truck going into town to the market with all the vegetables.

Now Catrina felt she could continue with her book She had needed to know these answers, if she ever got back to writing it. Ouma's character. She was pleased. She had some data from life. Now she knew what happened when they returned from exile to the farm. But things did not work like that. She could not get away from the great-grandfather. 'Why your in-laws Ouma? Why not *your* family?' she asked. But Ouma nudged her in another direction. A genealogist said the archives was a good place to begin. She should look up the death notices of ancestors and record them. They would give details of three generations.

Ouma's name on the death certificate – the surviving spouse, expecting a baby. Her signature on the will of her first husband, the familiar flourish, the lingering loops. It was her signature:

C. M. Muller

University of Cape Town

Haley's Comet, 1910

Why had she led her all this way back? Her young husband, having survived the concentration camp, had died of the Spanish 'flu. And Lalie? You loved him, Ouma. Pregnant and widowed, she was taken in by the Captain and Ouma Martha. A full circle had been made since she last called her to the red curtain.

'Slow down,' Catrina heard the whisper across the old gold plains of the Free State, over the Karoo as it picked up pollens. The berg wind lifted it over the Hex River mountains and brought it home. 'Why, Ouma, did you marry his brother? Were you made to?'

Ouma was still a girl as she watched Haley's Comet. It stretched across the sky. It was a new beginning, a new age. 'Did you hope for love, Ouma?' She wondered if she had dreamed of going to university. 'Did you want to be a teacher?' Did she dream of going to Paris or London? She married young and was widowed within a year. Pregnant and in the care of her in-laws, was she a burden? The death certificate was signed by the Captain. He took the new baby, Hens, under his wing. He and Ouma Martha. He treated the young boy as his own. His will showed he left him an equal share to that of his own children.

'Do you want me to understand what happened down that dark passage?'

She asked her questions that a hundred or more years had not answered. She had protected Ouma, listened to her secrets but now this betrayal. Or was Ouma betraying her, leading her to unravel her own secrets? She was spirit after all, had the hindsight of death. Could she see something Catrina could not? Catrina followed her promptings. She was writing her life, trying to make sense of it all. One day Ouma would simply be there, whispering in Catrina's ear, another she'd just walk away.

Now she leaves little Hens standing there at the gate of the Captain's house and she goes to look for Lalie. Did they condemn her for looking for love? And when she came home pregnant with another man's child, what did they say? Was Oupa called in to do his duty?

It's a heart-wound, it's genetic. A stab through the heart by the blade of an arrow carried by a bushman. It happened hundreds of years ago to an ancestor hunting bushmen in the Grootwinterhoek mountains. The curse Josiah spoke of – compensation only after seven generations of men. The women will carry the name.

Catrina got up, treading very lightly. The red velvet fell away from her knees and she could feel the feathers of Ouma's breath.

A change of direction Ouma had said. 'Follow the white horse'.

Follow the white horse.

'I write a white horse.' Great-Oupa had been born in Pietermaritzburg on a farm where his father bred horses. His ancestors had come from Swellendam it was said in the records. It also showed, bequeathed to the archives, were two volumes of his memoirs.

Joe and Catrina drove away from Cape Town on a Friday. They were going to Bloemfontein to the archives. The afternoon was clear and as soon as they crossed the mountains, the country stretched ahead in a long flat line. She drove for two hours and then Joe took a turn. They stopped at Colesberg for petrol and a rest. Look at the hill up ahead, Joe said as they approached town. On the koppie ahead was a horse, depicted in white stones.

'There are a lot of stud farms around here,' Joe said.

They decided to stay the night on the banks of the Orange River. The last time she was there it was called the Verwoerd Dam and she had missed the turnoff. They laughed and told one another stories of how, because it was so cold last night, the dam iced over. All the Egyptian geese sleeping on the surface froze too. When the sun rose, they were warmed and lifted and flew, carrying it away with them.

She turned the car around and they re-traced their path. The dam was now called the *Gariiep* and they took the turnoff to Bethulie. 'There was a concentration camp here during the Anglo-Boer War,' she told Joe. 'It's called the South African War now,' he said. How their land and history had changed. They were happy and laughed at some of the memories.

University of Cape Town

an Englishman's war

Die Vroue Monument on a hill on the south side of Bloemfontein, just on the edge. Joe parked the car under a flowering jacaranda. The day was quiet. Only a cuckoo called. It was a Diederick's Cuckoo, brilliant emerald green hiding in the thorn tree. They walked up the long brick pathway. *Die Vroue Monument* up at the top. All along, on either side of the wide path, were bronze plaques laid like graves, engraved with names of the towns from which the women and children came – those who died in the camps. It begins at A.

Aliwal North	705 women
	93 children
	798 Total
Bothaville	1569 women
	873 children
	2442 Total
Bloemfontein	2021 women
	989 children
	3010 Total
Christiana	1934 women
	877 children
	2811 Total

Carltonville 879 women

485 children

1364 Total

Delarayville 923 women

727 children

1650 Total

The names go on ... Ellisras, Ficksburg, Glen, Hopetown, Johannesburg, Klerksdorp, Krugersdorp, Lichtenburg, Middleburg, Moiriver, Noupoort, Odendalrus, Ottosdal ...

The numbers – a running total in her spinning head.





Further on another bronze. Boer prisoners of war stood at the railings of a ship. A Boer man with a young fighter, no more than eleven or twelve years old. They were being taken to one of the far-flung territories of the Empire. Beneath the statue were more plaques depicting the places to which they were sent:

St Helena, Ceylon, India, Bermuda, Barbados, also Portugal.

The statue is called *Die Banneling* – the exile.

She stood and stared at the names and numbers again. There were so many more.

some other place

The archives are in a typical government-built building – yellow face brick and a tin roof. The legacy of white South Africans. Black South Africans remember through stories.

There were two volumes; two black exercise books with green cloth binding just like the exercise books she used for writing. Except the cloth binding was now red. His writing was faint mostly, the ink faded. The first volume was full, cover to cover. The second about half full. On the outside, on the black cover was the acquisition number A 419.

She opened it slowly. The title page was in cursive script:

Herinneringe Van Die

Anglo-Boere Oorlog

van

1899 – 1902

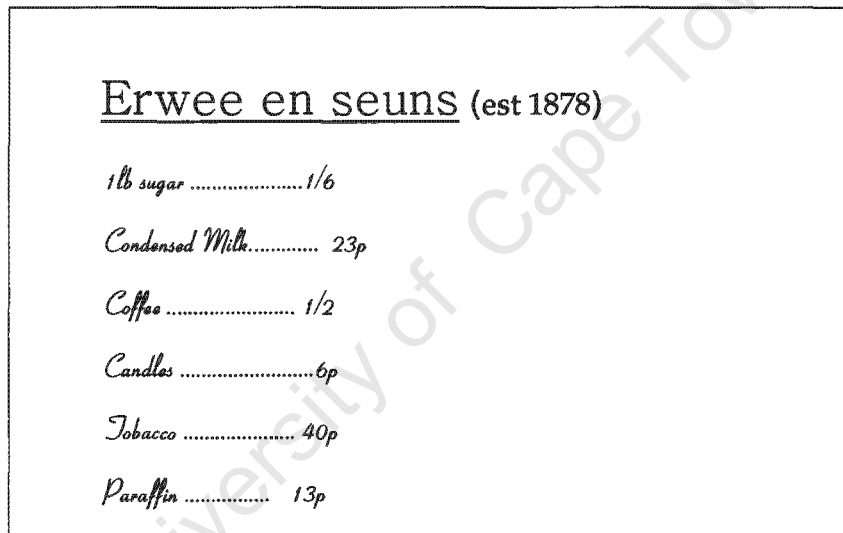
deur

Kpt W.H. Muller

At first glance it looked difficult to read. It was written in a more formal, an old style of Afrikaans. She struggled to understand it, both the handwriting and the language. Yet the opening charmed her. It was a good beginning.

I was a "boer-seun" on the farm of my father, 'Uitzoek', District Harrismith, when the Artillery came to Harrismith in 1882 for a weapon show. They spent two days on my father's farm and this is how I came to fall in love with the Military. And so, in 1883 I talked my parents into letting me go, with some ox wagons that were going to Bloemfontein, to join the Artillery.

Amongst the pages she found a slip. It was a receipt from a shop, for groceries.



Erwee en seuns (est 1878)

1lb sugar	1/6
Condensed Milk.....	23p
Coffee	1/2
Candles	6p
Tobacco	40p
Paraffin	13p

On the back the author had drawn a map. It was of Sannaspos, a diagram of the positions.

Joe and Catrina drove to Olievenhout, the large Cape Dutch house that was once the residency of the administrator of the old Orange Free State. Nowadays it's an art museum and public garden. There was a wedding and they got caught up in it.

'He left me without a paddle,' she said to Joe. 'My father. He left me on the river without a paddle.'

They had gone fishing and boating. She was about ten and allowed to go but her sisters stayed at home. Oupa had a small boat that he sometimes took, although he mostly fished from the shore. Bored with pulling up barbel, her father put her in the boat and pushed it out.

'What are you doing? I thought you were coming too, to fish from the boat.'

'No,' he said. 'You are going to see how good your survival skills are. I'm going to swim.'

He followed her for a few hundred yards. Suddenly the water began to flow fast. She could hear the rapids. The boat turned and moved sideways. She screamed and he just laughed.

yellow ochre

When Catrina first came to the Free State the silence was like a deep chamber. It frightened her. She was so used to noise filling up every thought. Looking out into this void, the vastness of the platteland became challenging.

Catrina and Joe stayed at Glen Country Lodge, on the banks of the Modder River. The thatched cottage was surrounded by soetdoring and willow, close to the river. She slowly began to realize that they were in the place where he wrote the journals. It was the exact day of the battle for which he was honoured. They cracked a bottle of champagne and she poured some to the ground, libations to the ancestors. They sat under the stars and got a little drunk. They toasted Lucy, Ouma and white horses.

She sat under a willow on the banks of the river and began to read the journals. The owner of the lodge, Manie van Tonder, brought cold wine. The generosity of the Free Staters. 'Dragonflies have returned,' said Manie. 'Ever since they've cleaned out the wattle. It used to choke the river higher up but now they have people cutting it. Work for water. They sell the wood for fires or braais and get paid for cutting it and collecting it.' A rare dragonfly – not seen for over twenty years – had made its appearance. He signalled for another glass to be brought to the table. It was in moments like these that she appreciated country people. All the time in the world – or so he made her feel. He poured the cold white wine.

Joe and Catrina walked along the river bank later that afternoon. This water, too, had the greyness of the Vaal. Mud of Modder.

'I'd like to canoe down it,' Catrina said to Joe.

'What about rapids?' He did not believe her. Rapids and snakes.

viridian

The last time great-Oupa was here was before she was born. He died in February 1948, just months before the Nationalists came to power. The irony did not escape her. There was, as far as she could tell, no change here. His house, the rondavel in the backyard, must be as it was then. She had a photograph. Besides his memoirs, she had his death certificate and his will. She also had a recipe for a remedy. It was addressed to her father, his grandson who was a medical student in Cape Town.

They arrived at Glen Station, found it on an afternoon in the middle of the simmering heat of the Free State. The house was empty. Like Ouma's house, it had a padlock on the gate. She climbed over the fence where it was easy to push down. Someone had been here before. She walked up the ruined path to the front door. It was locked. The windows all shut. Around the back was the rondavel. It had been plastered. Today was breathless. The grass had grown high, up to mid-calf, the plentiful rain kept it lush. It had invaded the slasto, crazing it further. There was a presence, as old as the river. She could hear gurgling in the distance. His blood coursed through her veins.

This was his home. He would have sat here in the shade of this gum tree. He would have carved his biltong here, his sharp knife cutting a thin slice, dragging the knife across the top of the dried meat. He would have brought it to his rondavel from the garage where he hung it to dry in winter. He would have stored it in a wooden larder with air holes, wrapped it in muslin. Sometimes he'd use his knife to cut a quince switch or to peel an apple, long rounds of skin like snakes, all in one movement. She turned. Was that a shadow on the white wall, a dancing tree?

The long barracks her aunt had spoken of were now a cow shed. Vegetables grew alongside. Being there, near him, the river, the mallards, she felt the connection she once had with her father. How, for the short years, he passed on his love of nature. She learned the names of the rivers, the birds – *kwikstertjie*, *kiewiet*, *meitjie*. The reed cormorant disappeared under the water.

When it bobbed up again, her father said, 'Look! There's our friend.' For a long time she thought its name was 'our friend'. The turtle dove called *god sorge*, *god sorge* – God cares. She called them *god-sorge* birds. Oupa shared little but fishing. For forty years he was the town clerk of Parys, afterwards he gave up politics and went into the antique business. Once he pulled out a few treasures to show her. A statuette of a tall, sway-backed woman, superbly glazed in greens, a small tortoise-shell tea caddy, both from the estate of an old Jewish woman. There were few treasures in Parys. The old Jew's parents had brought these from Eastern Europe. He, the old Jew Mr Drotsky, lent her father the money he needed to study medicine at the University of Cape Town.



shape and shadow

When people emigrate they often become interested in their genealogy. It's a way of holding onto the past. Even after five or six generations, when they should feel at home, they hanker after the histories of their grandparents. Catrina had lived near Ouma all her life and never really needed to know about her roots. Ouma told her a snippet, a snitch of information along with morning tea. She and her sisters travelled by ox-wagon to escape the Boer War. She teased Oupa about his people coming from Genadendal. When Catrina asked her what she meant, she just smiled and said that her people were from a good family near Swellendam. My mother explained that Genadendal was a mission station and to say his people were from Genadendal was an insult.

'I'm going back generations,' she said to herself. Sixteen in all and she settled on the third before her.

Morning mist occurs in low-lying areas around streams and lakes. It really does pay to get up a little early in the heat. She walked by the river. The birds were awake. Already *rooibekkie*s were flitting in swarms from the reeds to shallow pools. The darters had begun the day's fishing. She wondered if he enjoyed fishing. She wondered if he enjoyed it like his son enjoyed it. He never mentioned it, the self-taught teacher, documenter of his three years on horseback – a simple man, a man of his time. She had invented him, created him in many ways. She could not make him a lover. She felt a crush of disappointment at her lot. That, after all, the man on the white horse was not a knight. She had longed for the romance. But this was an ordinary man, an old man in an ordinary life. A veld man, a soldier. She would have him something else, his journal something else, a find, a remarkable story. But she had to satisfy herself with this.

There was a rustle and she turned to see a snake watching her from the water's edge. Had she invented this too? The eye watched her, grey green like its scales. Then it turned and disappeared into the reeds. Further on some trees

grew into the river. It had widened here and the trees bent over to the reflections. Poplars gold and green – the colours of the land. The gun-metal grey of the rocks, the cattle-red of mud and the white horses that galloped on the surface of the rapids. From between the rocks and grass the snake peered at her, a creature living in the intersection, in the space between the two circles of light and dark, shape and shadow. Truth and lies.

She heard the plaintiff cry of a cuckoo – *meidjie, meidjie*, recognised it as a Klaas's cuckoo. Then the metallic flash of green feathers.

On the banks of the Modder River she read in the journals that it was exactly one hundred years ago last night that he fought in the battle. She was here in the same place quite by coincidence. A Diederik's cuckoo cocked a red eye, a mallard swam by. In the morning a tapping at the window. She dragged herself from dreams, drew the curtain. A little white-eye was tapping its beak on the reflection. It was time to rise. She sat in the morning's warmth. The farm cat blinked as two peacocks strolled by. With two chicks and a guinea fowl that might have been raised alongside.

The journals were an immediate recollection of his experiences on Commando. They were full of description and anecdote. It was a valuable document of life on commando as well as a history of the war. Here a ridge, a white spine running along the top of the koppies. It held him. Catrina noticed the ridge of moon hair – *maanhaarand*. Is this his place of becoming or mine? she wondered. On a personal note he gave details of his own life and work. He wrote these right here, where she was staying.

I was born in Pietermaritzburg, Natal on 26 May 1864. My father had a wagon-transport business in Pietermaritzburg. Later he also bought a farm named "Bellevue" where I was born. They moved from Harrismith sometime later and bought another farm. It was named Uitsoek. (This was 29 December 1869). I lived there until I was 18 years old and signed up with the artillery. I could not get work. Eventually my wife's uncle got me work with a farmer near Bultfontein for £4/10 a month. For this I had to teach school for 12 hours a

day. I was also the Catechism teacher and general letter-writer, will-maker etc. I was also general hottentot. Later I taught school again for a Mr. Van Niekerk and then for a Mr. Carl Pretorius of Klipfontein, where the Glen Agricultural College stands today. Both Mr. van Niekerk and Mr. Pretorius treated me very well. When I taught school in 1892 for a Mr. Dr. Klaars, the old man would not let me go. He sponsored me to buy a shop at Glen Station and here I am still to this day – April 1943!

She had not spoken Afrikaans since her father had died. She had tried to tear it from her tongue. She had carried her pain in secret, wrapped it in dark colours. She had given up on her father, she had outlived him. She was older than he was when he died, she found herself at the road that led him to the river. She had found it across the other side. February need no longer be a month of death. She unwrapped her sadness, took it out from under the stones hidden in the night.

Before they left, she sat by the river that ran through Oupa's property and wrote a letter to Flame.

Dear Flame

*A sense of recognition that first day when I came
to your flat, you stood at basement gate waiting.
As I walked towards you, you smiled. I almost
reached out and hugged you. Something in
me leapt in recognition but I pulled back.
We talked. I told you. All the tears fell into
buckets on the floor. You listened.
Outside I noticed the urns of water
under the trees, you have little fish swimming
around in them. Later I placed stones
into pots under my trees and filled them with water.*

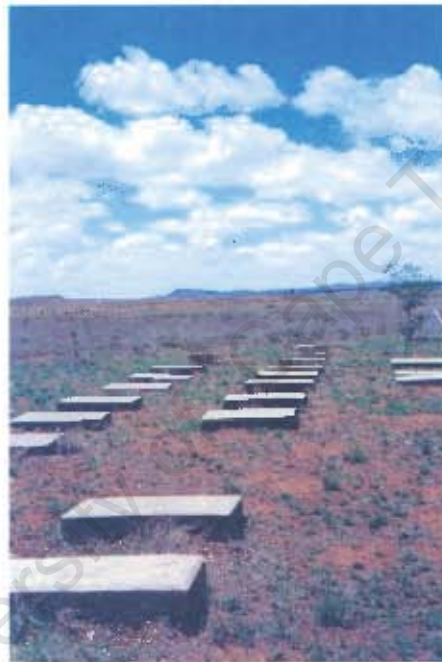
*I always knew there was a knight on a
white horse waiting for me. I did not know
he would be over a hundred and fifty years old.
I saw the table at which my grandfather
tried to negotiate peace with Lord Milner
and Abraham Fischer. Later, under the soetdorings,
yellow pom-poms falling, I gathered and
tied a chain for you, like we did as children.
On the banks of the Modder River.
I've been reading his journals.
It was exactly one hundred years ago,
last night, he fought in the battle.
I am here in the same place quite by co-incidence.*

*Dear Flame, thank you for showing me the
road back. For loving enough to help me.*

Catrina

maroon bruises

On the journey back to Cape Town, Joe and Catrina stopped at Springfontein to visit the concentration camp site and cemetery.



The station at Springfontein was like a Victorian country station. Broekie lace and corrugated iron painted maroon. Looking out at the lonely station platform, her eyes met those of a street hawker selling mealies and oranges. The trains carrying the women and children stopped here – cattle carts.

'Cattle carts, trenches and concentration camps – the gift of the English to the world,' said Joe.

Springfontein. The flatness of the Free State plateau, made it hot and windy in summer and icy cold in winter. The winter of 1900 was particularly cold. It snowed widely. Most days the water froze.

The wait in cattle carts was endless; they mostly had to march to the camps from the station. White tents in rows on the dust.

The camp graves at Springfontein in a dry, hot cemetery. An unknown English soldier lies next to a cross as tall as a shoe box.

Christina Maria

beloved daughter
of Margaretha and Willem

b. 30 Dec 1901

d. 3 March 1902

There were twenty-seven thousand more names engraved into black marble. Far across town, in another graveyard, lay the unbaptised babies. Heading for Colesberg, so many twists and turns. Pay homage to a broken past. It's quite a story.

A person can start all over again. Groot-Oupa had and so had Nella when she rebuilt the farmhouse destroyed by Lord Kitchener.

She knew it was hard.

porcupine quills

She sensed he wanted his book brought to light. She should do it for him, but she was not writing a biography, not his story. It was hers. She could not get her story written until she had written his. She could not go on with living her life until she'd restored the historical link. This then is the purpose of history – it pressed people into service to make meaning of their lives.

He penned the story of three years on horseback, fighting the great English queen's army. Catrina had the hindsight of history. What about his wife? His children? There was no mention of them. She sensed a break, the sharpening of his pencil, when he stopped to fill his ink well. He was writing for what purpose? To tell his story, his version? To set the record straight? For grandchildren? She would bring his work to the light of day. She must restore the broken connection, not for his sake but for her own.

So here she was, returned to the family farm as he returned so many years ago. Like him she would set out on the road, travelling north.

She lay there looking at the stars. Orion was back after hunting all winter and Taurus with his red eye. She wondered if he knew the night sky, did he know the Dog Star, the Southern Cross? Did he know the giant eagle owl that hoots at night, the barn owl, *nonnetjie*, the little nun?

Where was Ouma Martha while he sat by the plopping of the *moer koffie* pot on the fire? Did she learn how to boil the leaves of the *wahout-boom* together with a rusty nail for ink? Did she strain it through muslin and store it in a bottle? Did she pick up the porcupine quills and write her dreams and hide them under a pillow? What was she doing as Jan, his helper, brushed the white horse with no name? Did Oupa ever talk to Jan, his *agterryer*, the one who rode behind? Did Jan tell him to write his story as Flame had told her to?

There's no one left now. No Ouma, no Mom, no Papa, Oupa, Granny. She was here. She alone left to tell it.

Accepting pain allows guidance, Catrina observed. She took direction from her soul, en route to her other home. That part behind her, she crossed thresholds, turned at crossroads. Outside was too much exposure so she remembered the story of the Waratah. She looked for the red flame – the flower waiting in faithful love for the return and knowing it was partly to herself. She crossed the desert and then the plains. The grassland glowed gold, the sky a thunderous blue. There were all kinds of surprises – the journals, two slaves. She and Joe had got caught in an African wedding, could not move for hours so watched the fashions. She had seen the table at which her grandfather tried to negotiate peace. Later, under the soetdoring, a sweet thorn tree, yellow pom-poms falling, she gathered and tied a chain.

Flame, having received Catrina's letter, called. Catrina told her where she was and what was happening. Did Groot-Oupa tried to call her and she was closed to the voice of a grandfather? When he was here, the English still held sway over South Africa. Afrikaner Nationalism was on the rise, but they had not yet taken power.

'It's ironic, isn't it?' she said to Flame. 'I wonder what he'd make of the new South Africa and our friendship. Do you think he tried to call me and I was closed, shut down to his history and the language. Is that why Ouma acted as mediator? She knew the cleft, the severance of the river diverted. She knew where to lead me – down to the river. The few stones I took from the waters, they unblocked it.'

'It's as if you are writing this for your father, like a love letter to him,' Flame suggested.

'No. It's not to my father. It is for me. I am not Plath or Nin. It's not that pathological. I'm not dying to have him back.'

'The fathers did a lot of damage,' she said.

'Yes,' Catrina agreed. 'They hurt us all – sons and daughters alike.'

She nodded. 'Our fathers never loved us enough.'

'No, and I am not following him to a watery grave. Thank God for Joe. He keeps me in the present.'

'Yes. Thanks for Joe.'

Catrina looked out of the window where she stood. A black-shouldered kite was hovering over the grassy verge. He kept her close to the ground. 'My father – he flew too high. I have to fly low over the earth, for the sake of my child. Joe and Sam keep me anchored and I survive.'

University of Capetown

When Catrina saw Flame again, she told her of another dream she'd had. It was Ouma's farewell to her, her parting gift.

I dream of Ouma. I am at home. Her house is filled with lots of children visiting and Ouma has come to stay. She is 94 years old, frail but still active. I am so busy, rushing around with the children, doing chores. Ouma has to keep up with me. I can see she is tired, struggling but I know I cannot help what I am doing and she has to just keep going. She is doing fine, except that I can see she is worn out. The house is full. There is chaos with things lying everywhere. I have to go out, do the shopping, and see people. We are in a shopping centre, interesting art shops. I am busy looking at things, buying things and dragging the children around with her. When they get home, it is very late and the children are hungry. It is 10 o'clock at night and the chicken is still not cooked. I try and get it into the oven quickly. No one helps me. It has been two or three days now and I am overwrought, feel like screaming.

Ouma is lying on her bed but needs something to drink and eat. I know I am hungry and very thirsty but in trying to get meals done, I neglect mine. Eventually I go and get her a drink in a lovely, tall frosted glass. I take it to her. I know she is very weak. I know she is dying. I give her the drink; tell her I will bring her something to eat soon. I lie down next to her and put my arm around her. I tell her I know she is dying and that it is OK. My sisters and their children come in. I shout at them to go away and leave us. Can't they see that Ouma is fragile?

I speak softly to her; tell her that she is going, that I know and that it is fine. Suddenly we both lift off the bed. We are flying through the night sky. We are going on a cosmic ride together. As we hold on to one another, the whole universe tunnels around us and spins in a kaleidoscope of colour. Then, just as suddenly, she is gone and I am back at home. I am standing next to her bed. It is empty, the bedclothes are pulled down. The bottom sheet is crumpled where she lay.

A tooth, old and ivory, lies in her bed.

beehive

Catrina's story continued back in Cape Town, her shapes and shadows. Sam was busy at school and she was making up the time she had lost. Groot-Oupa's journals were left packed away. Lucy had returned to her home and things were back to the familiar silence between them. She was not sure if she would do anything further with the journals or her own writing. It seemed as if a lifetime had passed since Ouma stood looking over her shoulder.

Then she was invited by her longstanding friend, Judes, to her farm in the Magaliesberg for a weekend break. The road through Breedtsnek was not the usual route to the Magaliesberg. They lived to the west of the dam, Judes explained, so they took this route. They stopped at the top of the pass, the highest point. The rocks here reminded her of the Cedarberg. *Olifantsnek*, the sign had read earlier, and another, *Oortogskloof*. She opened the map. Little cannons marked where battle sites were. *Marbella Rantjies* was along the next cutting.

'This time of the year the bees are slow. You should hear the humming in summer,' Judes was pointing to her husband Oliver's hives under the boekenhout. The trees stood proud of the sugarbush proteas, *suikerbossies* that lined the hills. A bee, laden with late pollen, landed on her shoulder. Judes wiped it away.

'See,' she said. 'They are still working, they never stop.'

'Who taught him about bees?' Catrina asked. Oliver had been a businessman for most of his life. 'Old Maxie,' Judes said and pointed towards the shed. A very old man sat relaxing under a boekenhout tree, enjoying a cigarette. They walked over to him. He must have been over a hundred. His blue eyes squinted in the afternoon sun.

'What are two beautiful girls doing visiting an old man like me?'

'Oom Maxie, this is Catrina. She wanted to meet you, to hear about the bees.'

'Well, I am nearly a museum. People come to study me,' said Maxie. 'Me and my bees. But we'll be around for a few more seasons yet. Well, young lady, let me show you.'

They followed him to behind the shed where a miniature mud hut stood. It was a strange shape, conical, with a tall pointed roof. He pointed to it. 'The traditional way of keeping bees here amongst the Tswana people was a possessive link to the natural hive but I've adapted it somewhat,' Maxie said. 'The hive is made of mud and straw. The same material the houses here were made of originally. Keeps you cool in summer and warm in winter. That's why it's good for bees too. But people don't want mud houses anymore. Everyone wants a house of bricks in the city. A house that leaks and is cold.'

The bees entered through the tiny openings in front, constructing their honeycombs lengthwise. The elders discouraged the harvesting of honey in summer. Once a year, on exactly the same day in winter, Maxie hauled his heavy leather coat from the case under his bed and donned his beekeeping hood and gloves. He then removed the clay plug from the back of the hive, and smoked out the bees. He gauged how much honey to leave for their bees' winter food, and he collected his harvest. Then he suspended the combs in a basket over a copper pan. The honey dripped through the weave of the basket, leaving a waxy residue. To goad the last of the honey from the comb, he used a large white feather from a Cape vulture.

He offered some honey, thick molten gold. It was a dark smoky explosion of sweetness, a taste that conjured up bushveld and proteas and spoke of the yellow pom-pom flowers of kameeldoring and waxy ericas. The memories of the sweetness of youth, of wild sage and pine, of sweet thorn and biessiebos.

'You like my honey?' Maxie watched her as if he knew secrets.

'It is like gold from the gods,' she said.

'The people here say bees are the spirits of the ancestors, honey a gift from the gods.'

Catrina could not sleep that night. It was warm and so she took a walk. She saw the shed, it glowed in the dark and she walked towards it.

Maxie was sitting in the dark stable at a table lit by an oil lamp. Straw lay at his feet. He was bent over a book. His glasses were at the end of his nose, his grey hair falling across his forehead as he frowned in concentration. He was sewing a leather cover onto a book. He pushed the long needle through. The leather was hard and he had to use some effort. Beads of sweat formed on his forehead and he stopped to wipe it with the back of his sleeve. He removed his silver-rimmed glasses and put them on to the table for a moment and bent down to scratch his ankle. Some straw had got into his boot. He put his glasses back on and returned to his book. He pushed the needle through the folio and through the leather again. He pulled the thread tight. It had to be looped under the top stitch now. He turned the book around. It was heavy, the pages pulled against the stitches threatening to tear. The light flickered, cold air rushed in. He looked up. Someone had opened the door. He covered the book with some canvas and picked up the oil lamp to go and see who it was. The door was ajar, more so than he had left it. There was no one, outside the yard was empty. The night was clear. It was warmer than he would have expected. He had been sitting too long. His feet were cold blocks in his boots. He walked over to the fence and lit up a fag. The moon was barely visible, it was so thin. He stood in the dark, smoking slowly, allowing his shoulders to relax. He felt the knot between the blades, just below his head. That's where his muscles tensed when he sewed the leather. How long would it still take, he wondered. He stubbed the end out and walked back to the stable. His brother hated him. He knew that but he did not

know why. He was fixing the old family Bible. What was the use of it after all these years? Could it fix sibling rivalry?

Catrina knocked gently on the door. Maxie looked up.

'I thought I heard someone earlier,' he said. 'Come in.'

She spoke of her grandfather and his journals, her resistance to working on his book at the cost of her own. She spoke about Lucy, her aggression, her resistance. He told her about honey.

'The cells never forget. Each drop of honey knows how to make itself. The bees just bring the pollen. It's like that with our cells too. They contain the memory of generations. We go on living in our cells. Look at the bees. If some die or don't return, other bees step in and do it. It is just the cycle of life. Do his book and then write your own. He will help you.'

University of Cape Town

passing through

Back at home Catrina avoided her task and took to redecorating the house. She'd work for a few hours and then stare out at the sea, at the edge. The seamless place where sea and sky meet. She watched as the silver danced; the sea as cold as glass, the early clouds that stretched along the horizon. The sky quickened as the sun drew up the day. Watching and waiting, the seam began to split, orange light wanting to be born. Behind her the house. She tugged at the old door rusted with sea spray. Paint peeled like snakes. Over the threshold the kitchen was a dark, distant cave. She looked around. The hearth still had a grate, even some wood in it. The diamond window on the sidewall threw a blue light across the floor. Someone had patched the leaded light, adding a small piece of red glass. The dark cavern opened as she moved around. An enamel bowl under the sink was chipped. She ran her hand across the blue delft tiles on the wall. Windmills and sailing boats and women in clogs. The linoleum underfoot had bare patches like paws where a fridge once stood. Patterns of red roses in blue squares were torn and peeling. She stooped, pulled a corner. It lifted easily. The floor underneath was lined with old newspapers. She lifted one up. It was dated November 21, 1901. *The Cape Times*. She sat and leaned against the grate. The warmth of a forgotten place held her.

'Can you remember the promise you made before you came?' A voice, it sounded like Flame.

She spread the newspapers on the floor. The pages were whole if yellowed. The first few were classifieds – adverts, articles on farms and property for sale. It read

'The red heifer left on the field
of Mssrs. H.N. Brown and sons
will be sold to defray expenses
if not collected by 30 Nov. 1901.'

Another newspaper had photographs of soldiers in the fields, bandolier Boers; rough, rugged men. The caption read: *The Rag-Tag Army*. Under it a photograph of a railway carriage filled with soldiers being transported to Simonstown. Where the railway track met the shore, her eye stopped. She recognised the scene. It was the same place where she now stood. Outside the track was visible from the window. The same track that still led to Simonstown. She thought how strange to be standing here exactly one hundred years later. On the next page was a photograph of two soldiers and their horses. The caption read *Captains Muller and O'Reilly, Free State Artillery*.

The headlines in the next newspaper, *The Cape Times* for 12 December 1899, read;

Boer Victory at Stormberg, the first defeat of the empire at a railway siding in the desert.

Where the railway meets the shore; tracks leading to her own biography, here on the floor of this beach house. Catrina looked at the yellowed photograph. It had crept back into her life. She knew the Captain, his familiar face, the eyes, the ears, and the tall forehead. It was her father's face in the photograph, her father's face in the face of her great-grandfather.

A blast on a whistle. A train hissed, squealed to a stop. A railway carriage of English soldiers brought to fight on foreign soil had brought him back to meet her at this shore, her shore. She rose, turned towards the peeling door, ajar in the morning light. Outside she heard shouts, orders being thrown about. She opened the door. The beach was crowded with khaki-clad soldiers, some clamouring onto the train, other picking up packs, boxes, loading wagons. A whistle blown; a regiment at the double came to a salute halt. That place where sea and sky met had burst open. Out of it flew a huge white horse. The armies of the Empire gathered along the length of the beach. The train lurched forward. Tommies

clutched kit bags, waved goodbye. The horse burst billows of fumes and lifted angry hooves.

She stood, newspaper in hand, watching the Empire set off to meet her grandfather, the bombardier she had read about in *The Cape Times* that morning. The spat that had routed this army a night or so ago on a railway track on a sandy, desert shore. Inside the warmth that had held her in a forgotten place was gone. She stood shivering.

How could she remember the promise she made? The question pounded her head. She walked to the window set diagonally in the east wall, its red glass glowing. She looked out to the beach, deserted now. Outside the day brightened to a clear, crisp blue. The sea shimmered. A gull called. A long empty beach and a question that kept echoing.

Catrina looked at the cutting, contemplated the insight. She would write his story and the story of how she came to find his journals, the piecing together of a broken past. A century of angst ...

of children told to be mothers,
of hinterland and concentration camps,
of a father's khaki glance,
a grandfather mending by moonlight his gun, night in his throat
of a mother's British heritage,
and an Englishman's war.

She would write the story, for her child, and for her sisters and their children.

collecting stones

Why had Ouma brought her to this? She was being asked to go on a journey with an old man, a great-grandfather, into a world where the language and subject matter was of little interest to her. More than that, she was afraid to go anywhere with an Afrikaans patriarch in search of a history she had rejected.

'Sometimes it is better to let sleeping dogs lie,' Catrina said after telling Flame the story.

'But he's on a white horse,' Flame said. 'The knight you have been waiting for.'

She read his journals, and then she began to turn his words towards her language. It was a struggle. She had to stretch her ears towards understanding; she had not spoken this language for many years. She was rustier than she realised. His handwriting, too, was difficult. Copperplate capitals and the scrawl of an old man. When Lucy heard about it, she immediately wanted Catrina to translate the journals for her to read.

'*Re ntse ka kwno*,' the ancestors seemed to say, 'Come to our table, sit this side with us.'

A thousand miles and more she marched behind him as she followed him into the veld. He took her back down roads she had forgotten. He led her to the river where her father had swum. Some days he took her to his bosom. He began to give her back her father.

It is easy to brush over things. Her father had been upset that he was the last in his line to carry his name. He had no heir. She was the eldest of the three daughters. No boys. They would marry his name away. A thousand hours spent in sleeper carriages on winter nights had carried

her around Europe in a maze. She had got to the centre of the labyrinth and now she was on a journey home.

A new country as she discovered the old and a new language, a language of love. The black fathers of the land had said that they loved her, Tutu and Mandela. Now love from the white fathers was possible. As she made herself at home with the translation, she remembered it was the year of the Monkey and, as someone born under that animal, she knew it would be a good year. She needed a good year, a year of healing and health. A local legend says that those who pay homage to the ancestors will bring healing to the family line. For the ancestors call to each new birth, will this be the one? Will this be the one? They are around us, always willing us to health. They benefit because they live within us, in our genes.

'When I thought of fathers and grandfathers,' Catrina said, 'I thought I'd die, but Ouma knew I had to go back and face them, tell the truth about them.'

'The ancestors whisper all around us, the dreams come,' said Flame. 'You have to grasp your impressions quickly because if you come back in a week or a month, it will all look different again. They give up and look for someone more willing.'

Catrina read the opening of the journals to Flame;

Ek was 'n boer seun op die plaas van my vader, Uitsoek, district Harrismith ...

shadows of the earth

The story itself was charming, an account of three years on horseback riding across the width and length of the country. It began and ended in Glen, Bloemfontein where she and Joe had stayed.

In 1899, when President Kruger arrived the morning of the negotiations, the train stopped at Glen Station. He and friends of his stood on the platform. We held a long sheet of Horrocks Linen. We stretched it between two poles. On the sheet were black letters two foot high –

GOD GUIDE YOUR NEGOTIATIONS

The President's carriage happened to stop right in front of our linen sheet and the President lowered his window and said, "Thank you! Thank you!"

She was delighted with his account of the simple things – the birds in the veld, the little mice he watched sunning themselves. Some of the language had dated and she struggled to read it. But mesmerized, as waters poured steaming from the shadows of the earth, tiny buds of suspended understanding uncoiled slowly and she began to enter his world.

For the next six months she rewrote his history, translated his words into her language. The first six pages took her three days. Then the next day she translated ten. It was rewarding. Just as Ouma had seemed to talk to her through the red curtains, Groot-Oupa whispered his memoirs through the elegant loops and curls of his pencil. She read sentences with difficulty, then she'd read them again and she knew what he was saying. Her journey, as she followed his, began in pencil strokes. She literally had to trace over his writing to make it more readable. She walked his life in

pencil. Some words were hard to translate and she began to appreciate the language she had thrown away. Like wonderful sweet bread, it melted in her mouth, hung on her ears like seaweed. Ouma Nella must have smiled as she got out the dictionary and reference books.

The journals were the accounts of an ordinary man. He was the bombardier in three important battles of the war, Stormberg, Sannaspos and Roodewal.

On the night of the 9th December, Comm. Olivier gave orders that all burgers were to sleep fully clothed and that the horses must be kept saddled. We were only one and a quarter miles by horse from the English force in Molteno and they might have surprised us during the night. This was to be largely our salvation. The English, under General Gatacre, with six 15-pounder cannons and 5000 men, had placed wet ox-hide belts around the wagon wheels to mask their sound. They moved during the night from east of Molteno so that they could attack us in a surprise attack just before daybreak from the west. It was Sunday 10th December 1899 and it was also the first great battle of the war.

She found a book her father had bought her when she went to high school. *Idiome vir Hoërskool Leerlinge*. How does one translate *vlaktes*, *rantjies* and *kransies*? At night, as she worked, her landscape changed to the plateaux and sunflower plantations of the Free State. In the morning it gave way to the high-rises and breezeblocks of the city. Where she could breathe, could ride all night on a horse, she had to wake to find the names of guns, of cannons. His handwriting caused her to stumble. Was this a gun? A Webley? She had heard of Wesley. What was a Hotchkiss, a Lee-Enfield? She sought out reference books on weapons of the 19th Century, battles of the Boer War. De Wet, Oupa's commander, was widely written about and she found many references and maps of the battles.

Sometimes she wondered if they had met what he would have thought of her; of the one who has taken up his cause; of the fact that the ancestors had chosen her to bring his story to light. One hundred years later an *engelsvrou*, a woman. An English woman, 'n *hanskhaki* he would have thought her. Would he have preferred the journals to stay forever in

the box? Some people cannot let go or shift perspective. His genes had shifted dramatically. What would he have thought of the times in which she lived? The English, about whom he was bitter, had long since left the land. His people, the Afrikaners, came to power three months after he died. They had come and gone. Now the people he never bargained for – the blacks – were the rulers of the land. While he was saddling up for war, Enoch Sontonga was composing the words for *Nkosi sikelel' iAfrika*.

University of Cape Town

footsteps

Catrina and Joe followed Groot-Oupa on weekend breaks whenever Joe could take the time. The journey took them along the roads of South Africa – the ones Rhodes wanted to colour red for Britain and his queen. The story was one of a circular journey that she had not expected, of places that surprised her, of endings that came with sudden and spectacular timing. All around her she recognized names and places that were not on the map of her memory. The re-drawing of political maps plays havoc with roads travelled in childhood. The Western Transvaal, now the Northwest Province, Northern Transvaal, the Northern Province. As Joe drove, she noticed signboards to the very places Oupa traversed on his white horse. He had come down from the Rustenberg/Hartebeespoort area and crossed the Orange River on 16 December, 1900. Here was a mimosa tree, there a *witgatboom*. She looked it up in a reference book, *Trees of South Africa*. It is a shepherd's tree. The roots have purposes.

We came across a small camp of women who were from Krugersdorp. The women were busy beating the roots of a Shepherd's tree (witgatboom) into flour. They were using Jukskeis. When the roots were crushed, follicles appeared which were cut off. All the chipped pieces were then grated, dried, roasted and then ground up for coffee. They gave us some of the grindings to make coffee. We blew up like balloons but otherwise came to no harm ... p95.

He loved the landscape, noticed the trees and the birds. He had a sense of humour. Much of it was a readable, humorous account of the three years on horseback.

They had a large water kettle and early on the morning of the 10th the kettle was on the dung fire to boil for coffee, while the gentlemen were still lying sleeping in their pyjamas. Now their little camp was in a direct line of fire between that 45 pounder Lyddite canon and our canon. All at once the howitzer fired but the bomb went over the top and landed on top of the kettle! It made such a big hole that a horse could have been buried in it! It was worth seeing the gentlemen,

with their bunches of bedclothes, scrambling through the barbed-wire fence and running around the hill. Their horses pulled over the whole fence and galloped away! Of the kettle there was nothing to be found! p40.

She wanted to throw up her hands some days. It was as if she was living his life. When would she write the story she wanted to write? She could almost hear him. He was bitter as he offered the argument he always used: things did not go as badly for him as they would for her if she failed to complete this journey.

Did you ever think of Martha, your wife and the children? She wanted to throw it at him. In one hundred and fifty pages he never mentions the children. He makes a note, an aside, that he married because he could not get a permanent position in the artillery. Then war broke out and his life began. He must have known where they were. He, after all, fought to the end, a *bittereinder*. The photograph she found amongst her aunt's was of him, at the end of his life, his boots hung up. He is sitting outside his rondavel, asleep in a chair. And Martha? She is sitting there with him, shelling peas. A woman's work is never done.



Sometimes she was glad he was not here – neither him nor his sons. She'd rubbed up against enough bitterness. Bitterness at the English stained the fabric of the Afrikaner heart. At the English but also at one another. The war had set families one against another. As the *bittereinders* dragged it into a third year and guerrilla warfare, brothers betrayed one another.

In 1899 the tension between the Transvaal and England worsened. In July President Kruger said he must go to Bloemfontein. There were negotiations in the Commission Hall of the Railway Bureau in Bloemfontein between Lord Milner, President Steyn, President Kruger, Abraham Fischer, etc.

Abraham Fischer, the attorney-general of the Free State. Now the debate raged against his grandson, Bram, at Stellenbosch University. You scratch the surface and underneath it fear of the unknown and betrayal, from one's own kind. They wanted to award him an honorary doctorate, there had been a demonstration and a young lecturer had been hurt, her life threatened. Joe said it was fear. Fear and angst. 'This is mis-directed anger,' he explained. 'They are angry with De Klerk for the betrayal of the Afrikaner nation but cannot express it. He's left them in the lurch. They fear the blacks, are angry they have control but it is not politically correct to say openly that they hate them. So it is directed at Fischer, the one who betrayed them before. These are the ones left with unresolved anger, not able to come to terms with it now.'

As she and Joe drove the highways and byways of her land, she wondered how the bombardier had endured the vast spaces, the heat. At the Gariep, he had turned west, riding along a road that ran along the base of a hill. He leaned into the contours of the slope. The veld was scattered with low-growing bushes and the road littered with small stones. Dongas cut across his path regularly and he took his horse off the road when it stumbled over the stones.

All along the route she could mark his tracks – Sandrift, Strydenberg, Vosberg, Philipstown, Petrusville, Houwater. Here the world was neglected as if by God. Fences sagged, posts fell over. He followed the wagon road next to the railway line. The few sheep there were, had

gone to feed the army. Here was *Rhenosterbult*, a ridge of rhino, resembling a rhino. A *diep vlakke*, a *rantjie*. In the Waterberg he reported trouble with baboons:

VanVuurenskloof was a typical Transvaal farm where a dozen or more families lived in a group because of the water there. As the burghers trekked alongside the Vaal River, amongst the thorn trees, the English shot at them from across the river with their Lyddite canons. The ridge's rocky ledges had lots of baboons (a very inquisitive animal!). The English took the baboons for Boere and fired mightily with Lyddite as the Boere moved along the river unhindered! We were told how, all along the ridges, the baboons stood upright. As soon as the Lyddite bombs burst, they all disappeared. To the English it seemed as soon as the bombs burst the Boers were gone, only to appear a moment later, standing upright a little way along the ridge, until the next bomb burst! And so it went "ad finitum!" The enemy wasted many bombs there! p79

When he crossed the Karoo to the Northern Cape, he came across a terrible sight. A baboon was hung on a gate post, spread-eagled. It was a warning to the troop. When he was here it was winter – colder than usual. Snow falls were reported across the Northern Cape and Free State, places that did not usually get snow. She wondered when he learnt of his wife and children being sent to the concentration camp at Norval's Punt. He doesn't say. On August 16th they got to *Donkerhoek*. It was deserted but for a few local peasant farmers. The next day there was no food. They reached a rocky ledge where there was a stone house. It was, but for a sheep and two piglets, empty. The soldiers had been the week before, the headman told them. He was enraged. The English had burned the huts and slaughtered the animals. All of them except three. They had escaped.

He wrote in his journal, 'This is what the so-called civilised English do. The upholders of the faith, the leaders of the Christian world.'

koppies and sphinxes

Joe and Catrina headed to Calvinia along the line he described from Kimberley to De Aar. The landscape changed and there were pointed koppies. As they drew closer, the koppies changed into a huge sphinx looking west. His descriptions of the veld still held:

In that part of the Karoo, the road was lovely but always gravel (like finely ground disintegrated stone). The banks of the roads were covered with little bushes (or shrubs) which they call a three-thorn bush. These little three-thorn bushes grow together in clumps and between them the ground is bare. When you leave the road and ride through these bushes, your horse continually stumbles and trips as the whole place is tunnelled by mice ... p104.



They drove along in that clear light that is so distinctive of a late Karoo afternoon, honeyed so that they, too, looked sweet. She read the journal out loud,

Our Commando got to Calvinia which lies to the south of a long mountain, a bit like Naval Hill, but higher.



Calvinia is typical of the Hantam towns with the distinctive towering white Dutch Reformed Church and Victorian stoeps with people sitting in the afternoon sun.

Here they met a man, a Baster, named Abram Esau, who had a saddle-making business. He was the only one who kicked up a great fuss about the Boere commando. He was taken into custody. A patrol took him away on the order of Faan van der Merwe, who was appointed by Hertzog as Landdrost of Calvinia. On the way, Abram tried to escape and was shot dead by the bodyguard. This is one of the matters that Lord Kitchener held over to have Landdrost Faan van der Merwe appear before court charged with murder ... p106

The Hantam Hotel was down the road. It was once called the Royal Hotel. Ron, a Yorkshireman, was watching rugby. As they walked into the red and wood-panelled room, her eye followed the light to the arches across the other end. Through the arches the room opened to another – a billiard room. A moment ago she was reading from a document, words written 100 years ago. She was enquiring about a place she had no idea

about. The next she was in the very room her ancestor had described. Ron poured her a sherry.

*We stayed in Calvinia for three days. Here something else happened that I want to mention. The hotelier was a man name Walters. He had a bar filled with all kinds of strong drink. Now Corrm. Nieuwoudt reckoned that, any group of commandos would have some men amongst them who long for a sip or more of drink. p107. It would be advisable to get rid of the strong drink. He then thought up a plan. He would have the whole cornmando stand in a single line. Then they would move, one by one, through the room past the opening that was between the bar and the billiard saloon. They would each get a glass of drink. If, when everyone had gone through, there was still drink remaining, they would repeat the process. There was a colossal fellow who said that he had not yet had his drink ... Corrm. Nieuwoudt stood there with his revolver and told the man to just drink wine as by then he could no longer differentiate. He refused, so Nieuwoudt held his revolver to the man. The man said "O! *****" and swallowed all the wine. By that afternoon one could get only lime juice ... p109.*

Out the back an elongated building stood in the shade of two old pepper trees. They were so huge, they could easily be a hundred years old. It was obvious. This was a stable. It was long with five openings; the middle door had a gable. On each end of the building was a matching gable. This was where the horses would have been stabled along with Jan and the other groomsman. Oupa and the burghers had stayed inside the Royal Hotel.



gun-metal silence

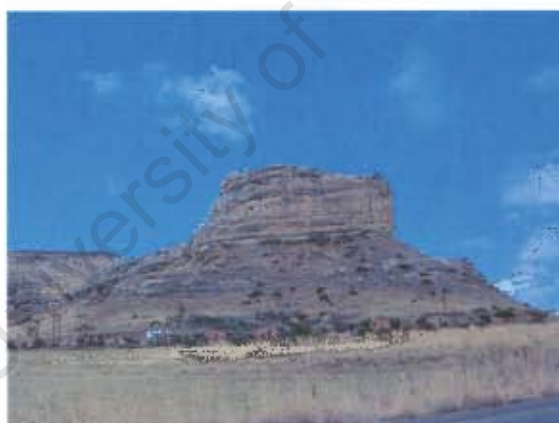
Joe and Catrina went on to the Brandwater Basin to stay at a guest-farm near Fouriesburg. The last time her grandfather was here was over a century ago. How much, she wondered, had it changed.

They went for a walk. It was early and cold. Winter had rushed in to taunt the early spring. They walked alongside the orchards of apples and peaches. A few blossoms pushed brave pink faces into the chill. They walked through the farm-school playground and through a gate on the far side. A track followed the curve of the ridge down towards the river. She jumped across boulders and hopped down. The river was silent and cold. A copse of silver poplars stood in gun-metal silence. Only the willows were in early leaf. Nothing moved, and then she saw a spotted prinia dart up onto a reed. It blew an alarm and flicked off clicking loudly. She thought of a favourite poet, Mary Oliver, and why she wakes early. This was a place, like Hermanus, to wake early, to beauty. Back at the farmhouse she had heard the rooster crow before sunrise and then afterwards the canaries in the top of the bluegum trees. The hadedas with their haunting cry.



Had he tried to call her and her ears were closed to the voices of grandfathers, shut to the language? Is that why Ouma acted as intermediary? She knew the cleft – the severance of the stream, where the river was diverted. She knew to lead her there, to take her to the river and point out the blockage, the damming up. Together they beheld the spillage together, the wasted fields.

The highway between Clarens and Fouriesburg is called *God's Highway*. Sandstone cliffs glowed. Bewitching hour, said Joe. There's a *Pierneef* wherever you look. They stopped at a sentinel called *The General* for a photograph. Jacob Hendrik Pierneef was born in Pretoria in 1886, the son of a poor builder and not well educated. During the Boer war, his family returned to Holland where he began painting. He came into contact with the old Dutch masters, and he returned to South Africa to become a full time painter. Ouma and her family had also fled the Boer War, but were too far removed from their Dutch roots to go to Holland. They sought shelter here in the foothills of the Maluti Mountains.



They missed the turn-off to Carolina Lodge and found themselves at the border post, Caledonspoort. The Lodge was closer to Fouriesburg than they'd realised. They turned around. The mountains looked like furnaces fired for the night. They glowed over the pink grass of the *hoogland* as they drove the car down the road to the farmhouse. A rhebuck stuck its head up from the long *rooigras*.

The maize grew on the right and the sunflowers on the left. In the morning warmth, they were like a thousand eyes. She felt self-conscious. Each dark-lashed eye stood, a mute observer to her journey, like ancestors standing up from their graves. What was she to do with this history that pressed down on her? She wanted to turn back. The thought of the Free State, the culture, and the language bore down heavily.

In the morning she walked alone in the dry red grass. It swished. The farm dogs followed, happy for a walk. Jock, the bull terrier-cross, leapt clear of the grass to see where she was. She laughed. He seemed to have the blood of the springbuck that grazed on the open lands. As he jumped his way across the grass, she reflected on the leaders of the so-called civilised world one hundred years later. What would the Captain say now about Iraq and Afghanistan, about the so-called leaders of the Christian world?

During the day she wrote. She'd meet Joe later for dinner. A group of Sotho children, playing blind-man's-bluff in the park at night, magically lit by the glow of an orange burner. She stood and watched for a minute and thought of what Flame had told her of her childhood.

'When I was growing up,' she had said, 'I never met a white person who was nice. They never said anything nice to me, except bark orders or ask what I was doing there.'

Joe was waiting at the little restaurant. Clarens had many to choose from – more coffee and art shops than homes, it seemed. It was their last evening. They would return home the next day and she would continue with the book.

Sometimes as she worked she could not make out a word. *BRILLA D* – was it a cleaning agent? What was it that the doctor used to medicate his eye? She gave up. Then she heard Ouma's whisper, '*Hou 'it my liefde skat.*'

She continued to follow the white horse.

Alison's is a quaint flower and coffee shop in a small Tudor building in Kenilworth. She went in one day, a break from the book, and ordered coffee and a toasted sandwich. The shop was filled with Victorian clutter, retro objects and country furniture. Colleen was making up a vase of Chinese-pink roses. Above her, on a high shelf, was an old wooden box. Inked letters on the side read MRS JONES' HOME REMEDIES. she asked if she knew anything about home remedies, recipes for eye ailments. William did. She called him from the back where he was unpacking boxes of other people's cast-offs. He combed the countryside for them. He listened to her and then fetched a home-remedy bible. *Belladonna*, deadly nightshade, (*Atropa belladonna* LINN.) – *a most valuable plant in the treatment of the eye.*

BELLA DONNA is what Oupa had written.

Finally she knew she could leave him. She had done him justice. She understood; it was her work to bring him to light. The ancestors had chosen her to do the work and she had been faithful. She had a sense of the gift his book had been. After all it had brought her back to Papa and to his line, his language. Now he and they would let her go to get on with her own work.

a stone and a skull

Catrina found a face – or a stone that looked like a face as she walked along the beach. Could it be Ouma's? A stone and a little skull. The skull was another stone that was like a skull. She was finding ghosts. On Saturday she found another white stone the shape of a horse's head. Sometimes she wondered if he ever read his world like she did. Did he stop and pick up stones? Did he look up at the fine line of quartzite along the top of the ridge? Would he see a crocodile spine? When he travelled under cumulus clouds, did he ever look up and see his dear wife's face?

Did he get to a place and say, yes, this is a good place. This is where we will stop for the night. Or stop and say no, this place has the smell of nightmares. We must go on. What was she looking for as she traced his lines of ink? Did she want him to love her? She knew she wanted faith – faith to follow his line, to trace it. She kept her pen working across the script. She returned to Ouma for reassurance. Did she have the faith to trace this story?

Her own notebook had blank pages, his were lined. Would it have served her to have a lined book? Something to follow? The blank pages – nothing – she had to make meaning of nothing. On her wall hung the photographs of unknown ancestors. She had bought them at a junk shop for the frames. Nineteenth-century tortoise-shell frames, and one made of walnut. When she got home she just hung them up on the wall. They might as well be her ancestors, she had thought. My father left me with nothing.

Now on a dog-star night, she looked up at the millions of pricks of light, all the ancestors of the heavens. They seemed to be urging her on. To forget one's ancestors is to be a brook without a source, a tree without roots. It reminded her of Eugene Marais and she began to remember poetry her father read to her.

*O, koud is die windjie
en skraal.
En blink in die dof-lig
en kaal,
so wyd as die Heer se genade,
lê die velde in sterlig en skade.*

She could still recite it from memory. She had forgotten how she had loved Eugene Marais.

Finally she knew she could leave the Captain, her Groot-Oupa. She had done him justice. She understood. Her first task was to bring his book to light. Now he would let her get on with hers.

University of Cape Town

weaving

Across the lagoon at Bot River the fields were a violet-blue like the lavender fields of Provence. The flowers belonged to a weed, *Patterson's Curse*. It was brought over from South America in bundles of horse fodder imported during the Boer War for the horses. Cosmos arrive in the same way.

The war had killed all the horses, almost all of them. It is strange what people counted at times. Many people had died during the war. The statistics showed 30,000 soldiers – the British soldiers. And the Boers? Another book said 10,000 men. The women and children? 27,000. Only recently another statistic; the blacks who died in concentration camps. 25,000.

What about the horses?

A shrike was calling to the wind. She watched it.

Catrina decided to give copies of the journal to Lucy and Meggie. It was Lucy's birthday in July. She would make the translation into a book. Finalising it took a few more weeks. Then she began making a book. She tore the copies of his pages so the edges were rough. She made a parallel text, his words on the left, and her translation on the right. The art work took time. She found a map and enlarged it. Then she enlarged it again and again, until the boundary lines blurred and formed part of the texture and pattern of the page. She found illustrations of soldiers' uniforms and guns, stamps and ration tickets.

Making the book was great fun, too. Joe and Sam helped her. It brought them together close again after all that had happened, a gift from the ancestors. They sleuthed through junk shops. She found coins and stamps and army uniform buttons. Joe helped her photograph and copy everything. She decided to make the book by hand on recycled paper. She bought paper called Desert Storm, 118g. It was the colour of veld before the rain. She did not know what she was doing but it worked out. She got special cotton to sew it, thick brown cotton. Maxie had given her a lump of bees' wax. She pulled the cotton through the lump to make it stronger. She carefully cut the skin. It took hours to sew the pages onto the leather cover. She used a thimble but her fingers were raw.

Joe and Sam had gone with her to Mossop's Tannery outside Wellington. She had needed leather for the cover. The tannery had piles of skins. She looked amongst the rejects and found a skin wrinkled like elephant skin. Sam said it was the one to cover the book. It was half the price of the others. She bought the whole thing. She had to make a copy for each sister, although Lucy's would be first.

In her studio, Catrina measured the leather for the size of the book and then another third for a wrap-around, a flap. Also a long thin strip for a strap. Her box cutter slid through the leather like honey wax.

flame lily

That month Catrina met Flame again. She was in Cape Town to wrap up the last bit of business with the TRC. They met at the Mount Nelson Hotel. She arrived late. Flame was standing on the edge of the terrace. The late light still strong so that her thin dress shone with the orange glow of evening. Her hair was soft and wavy and she looked like an African princess, loosely clad in a flowing gown. Catrina remembered their first meeting in London, at the exhibition. Flame stood there lost in thought or the beauty of the evening. She seemed suspended in time, but then Flame must have heard her, for she turned and smiled. She held out her hand.

'Look, I brought you some flowers.'

The bouquet was brilliant in reds and oranges. The cannas strong, the strelitzias wanting to fly. She took the bunch. The red of her head scarf matching the hues of the flowers. 'A flame lily. Just for you.' The honeyed light, a thread holding them together. They spoke until it cooled.

'Who would have thought we would have come so far?' Flame said.

The afternoon high tea had been cleared away. They ordered gin and tonics.

'The TRC is over,' Flame told her. 'I have put my notebook away.' She spoke for a long time, then Catrina showed her the book she had made.

'This is not just some bizarre co-incidence,' said Flame. 'This is what happens when you are in line with your life. You have done a beautiful job. This is a work of love and compassion. Your family must be proud.'

'They haven't seen it yet. I will give this one to Lucy when she comes in July. I will wrap up all the love and healing our relationship deserves and give it to her.'

'It is a very big gift,' Flame said, 'for a worthy recipient.'

'And you,' Catrina asked Flame, 'what are you going to do now?'

'I am going away for a while – to ride trains again.'

They smiled at one another.

'I have a book planned,' she said, 'but first I need a holiday. I am going to write of my experiences with the general. I need to tell the story to move away from it.'

Joe, Sam and Catrina drove to *Lemoensfontein*, a farm in the Karoo for a weekend. Their lives were entangled with their city activities, trappings of their own making. By the time they left they were tired, overwrought, full of emotion. She had spent the last four months making the book for Lucy's birthday. It had so completely possessed her that she was drained. All the way to Beaufort West she let it go. So much was built into the action of doing, of making the book. The research, the gathering, the allowing, the seeding, the brewing, the birthing, translating, reading, finding, pasting, copying, typing, printing, sewing, cutting, painting, drawing, writing. Endless handwork. It was a gift – to herself, to Lucy, to their family. But it had cost a lot. Time away from the family, bad moods and time spoilt. So much loss, like life she supposed. As they drove through the endless emptiness of the Karoo, she poured it to the wind. 'I am done with the dead, she thought. These are the living years.' In dealing with the dead she had lost so much. But she had also gained. The book, though it had been about the dead, had brought them together, Joe and her. It would bring Lucy and her together too. The paradox. There were always both in life. As she gained so she lost. She emptied into the

vast space that so graciously accepted her pain, her accumulated pressure, her load. She opened the window and, into the dry Karoo air, she flung the gatherings – the trimmings, the scraps the wastes of the past, the paper leftovers, the cut-offs, the detritus of the days. She sent it across the Karoo plains to scatter like ashes on the bossies. Let the sheep eat these and the birds and let them be transformed into something good.

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sterkfontein

It was the 21 March, Human Rights Day. Catrina drove to Pretoria. She wanted to go to the Anton van Wouw Museum but when she got there it was closed, so she drove to the centre of the city, to Church Square. She parked her car, there was little traffic. Walking across the lawns in front of the monument, she stopped and looked at the building that flanked the square. It is surrounded on all sides by red sandstone buildings built in the early 1900s. Herbert Baker designed the square, Dutch gables and Palladian porticoes. Kruger stands smiling benignly over Pretoria, his words etched onto the base alongside Boer soldiers in loose leather shoes and bandoliers and *vel* hats. She looked around her. At her feet lay a cross. She stooped to pick it up. It was made of a palm leaf folded into a cross. She realised that it had been Palm Sunday the day before. She remembered Father Leo Alexander and Palm Sundays in the church in Leask Street, how they went on Wednesdays for stories of Christian and his high road, and on the Wednesday before Palm Sunday, she helped fold palm leaves into crosses. She remembered how her father had brought her to this monument before, when she was very young. She stood and read Kruger's words at the base of the monument;

With confidence we lay our case before the whole world, whether we conquer or whether we die. Freedom shall rise in Africa like the sun from the morning clouds.

He had said it in 1881, eighty years before her father had stood pointing to it, almost twenty years before her great-grandfather had saddled up to fight for Oom Paul. Where were they today, what would they say now that South Africa was truly free?

That day she had brought bags of breadcrumbs and peanuts to feed the fat pigeons on the grass. But the peace was broken and police vans and white police cars screamed past them, sirens blared all the way down Church Street and Schoeman Street. On the drive back, her father put on the radio. Jim Reeves was singing *Vêr in die ou Kalahari*. It was her father's favourite song. She joined in; *rooi Afrikaner osse sien jy om elke draai*. Then the song was interrupted. A news flash. Sixty-nine people had died at a place called Sharpeville. She asked Papa, 'How can freedom rise like the sun?'

He had said something strange, she never knew what he meant but she'd remembered it. 'Freedom is in a man's heart but he has to share it. If not, it rules his head until he climbs up inside there and it then becomes a jail.'

She drove up past Proclamation Hill, out on the west side of the city. In the distance she could see the monument. On the hill the great knob on a rock. She could not peel off the layers that overlay it – the layers of attributed meaning and emotion. For all the years of national gatherings, the promises of God to the volk, the sacrifice on the altar of ego. She had not been here for many, many years. But she had driven past it often on the way to the trout fishing streams of Dullstroom or to the dry mopani thornveld. Once she brought a group of students, but she had fainted in the heat. She discovered later that she was pregnant with Sam. Today she was here to see the Anton van Wouw sculpture. As she climbed the steps to the monument, it faced her. A Boer woman with two children, sculpted when he was already old. It was to remember the sacrifice they made in the big trek north. She stood at the base looking at the sculpture, not unlike the one at the Vroue Monument. Then she looked up at the huge sandstone block. The long lines of parallel windows. The criss-cross pattern like the many Stars of David, but no, not here surely? Up close the pattern was attractive, she could see the glass behind. She walked up to the gigantic doors and into the cool dark interior. The star-patterned granite radiated out from the central cenotaph. The marble slab with the familiar words, *ONS VIR JOU SUID AFRIKA*.

She looked up at the hole in the domed roof; the sun would drop a beam of light onto the words at exactly noon on the 16th December. She'd seen it before, the old, old story.

She climbed the ninety or so stairs to the top and standing out on the balcony, she looked towards the west and the red grass richly waving in the autumnal breeze. She heard a whip crack. A wagon laden with holiday visitors was pulled by eight red oxen yoked together. Women dressed in Voortrekker *kappies* and men in *velskoene* and *vel* hats. She walked down again, down to the lower floor, to the tapestries designed by Coetzer and stitched by guilds of patriotic women. When she went up to the foyer again, she picked up a book on the design of the building. The red granite was from Parys, the marble from the quarries of Italy.

Outside she walked towards the indigenous garden surrounding the monument and, standing next to a kiepersol, she looked back up at the building. The grey sandstone sides sloped inwards to the top. The corners concave to the roof. The bricks patterned, the set of long narrow windows caging the leaded glass. She suddenly saw it. It was as if the building was moving, as if it shrugged off the layers that had given it meaning over the previous decades. It revealed itself for the first time.

It was Art Deco, she realised. It is a design, typical of the thirties. Yes, the lines, the symmetry, even the colour. She matched it to the designs of buildings she knew in Johannesburg, in New York, to the furniture, the decorative objects so popular at the time. She thought of a stylish sugar bowl her grandmother had owned, a mantelpiece clock that held similar lines. In fact, she thought, it is really lovely. She had not seen it this way before; it was stylish, such an antithesis of all it had stood for.

She walked through the gardens of Pelindaba rock, the umbrella kiepersols, the rhus and soetdoring. Little white-eyes swarmed from tree to tree, an olive thrush scratched in the red earth. Through an opening in the branches she looked back up at the monument. Yes, her eyes did not betray her. It was art deco from all sides. A euphorbia stood like a giant candelabra, each branch reaching out in symmetry, a menorah. She was so glad she had come.

On the way home, Catrina went back to *Marbella Rantjies*, to the Magaliesberg, one last time to tell Maxie her story. He wasn't there. She drove back over the ridges and into the Sterkfontein basin. She had not been to Sterkfontein for some years, not since she attended a lecture by a palaeontologist. She wanted to go to Mrs Ples, the oldest Ouma of all. She wanted to look at her ancient skull and tell her the fossils of her story. The cave held the bones of her own story.

She knew she had to go to Sterkfontein – the caves and also the hospital. The caves were on the way to Krugersdorp, over the Witwatersrand hills. Now it was called *The Cradle of Humankind*. She knew she had to go and stand there in the dry dust as old as time, see the plants and trees, the rocks again. She was afraid it had changed: that they'd turned it into a tourist trap, that there were concrete and wooden walkways, and that there was a museum that sold resin skulls and bones. She'd seen the bright bones – a tooth and a toe. The narrow opening was hidden by kiepersol and syringa. Wild olives flourished in limestone, as did the wild currant tree. She'd read Ardrey and Dart; that the entrance was a trap down which animals fell to die on a heap of bones. The other Sterkfontein, too, was a trap. They had called it Groendakkies, for the green tin roof. They took Papa there. Said he was mad. Bi-polar is the modern term. Hitler was the same. A small dose of lithium could have changed history. On the bench, under the little apples of a syringa tree, she had sat with him.

'What men don't understand they call madness,' she had said to him.

She'd read it somewhere. He took her hand. She looked at all the berries, the little syringa apples lying on the ground. He had wanted her to pick them up. If she declined would he be disappointed? She couldn't pick up all the apples, the silver apples of the moon, the golden apples of the sun.

The caves held the bones of her story, just a few little bones and even if she found them all, all she'd have was a bag of old bones. She thought again of Ouma. A tooth and a toe.

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bones

Catrina walked into the sangoma's hut, sat down on the cushion she indicated. The old woman peered out at her from wizened eyes. She took a bag from behind her, a draw-string bag made of a pelt. It looked like civet cat. It was lined with suede. The sangoma held it to her mouth and blew onto it three times, she swung it towards Catrina and back as she chanted. Suddenly she swung it hard again and tapped it against Catrina's one arm and then the other. She pulled it back towards her body and, with the other, stopped it. She pulled the draw-string open and sprinkled the contents on the mat between them.

They both sat in silence for a moment then the old woman began a chant that sounded like a praise poem. Catrina looked at the bones. It was a strange collection. She recognised some to be real bones. There was also an assortment of other strange objects. Four or five flat ivory sticks with lines scratched onto them, a glistening marble, a black round disc, a cowrie shell, a clam shell, some small bones that looked like chicken bones, a coin.

She began to talk to Catrina in Tswana. Then she pointed to a bone, it was shaped like an arrow tip, dark red in colour. 'You must do *kgotla*. Your grandmothers. You must do *kgotla*.'

'What's that?' Catrina asked.

'I will show you.' The old woman moaned over the bones. 'This is the baboon, and this one is ... eh ... for disappointment. This one,' she pointed to the black disc, 'this one is the dark one. Your father. He brought you the blackness.'

'Yes,' said Catrina. 'But you say I must do *kgotla*. Is that for him?'

'No. not for him, for your grandmothers.'

'My grandmothers?'

'Yes. They are neglected. Your power is here.' She pointed to the dark red arrow-like bone. 'Here is your grandmother and look, here is the leg of the hedgehog. It is blocking your grandmother.'

'Does this mean I must write another book, one about my grandmothers?'

'No. You must do *kgotla*. It is honouring them, you show them respect and they help you.'

'And the blackness? My father?'

'He was born with it, he gave it to your mother through intercourse.'

'What can I do?'

'There is something ... eh ... I will tell you later. First grandmothers.'

She looked at Catrina, directly into her eyes.

'You must do *kgotla* for your mother .. eh ...the grandmothers. Your mother, she will help. *Kgotla* is the young maiden, she who is innocent and loved. The ancestors listen to her. You must go to the river with a white cloth and beer. Also you must take tobacco, or snuff. You must clap three times and ask to speak. You must go at the time of the ancestors.'

'The time of the ancestors?'

'Yes, at three o'clock in the morning or at sunrise. It is the time.'

'And my father?'

'Eh ...you must take the black goat.'

'The black goat?'

'Yes, the black goat. You must take it to your father's grave and kill it on top. You must wash in the blood.'

'Wash in the blood?'

'Yes.' The sangoma looked again at Catrina, her eyes two tight raisins in her wrinkled head. 'Or I can give you herbs to take, but first you must make *kgotla*. Then you come back.'

Catrina walked down to the river, the Kleinrivier that had been witness to much of her journey. It was still dark but she could make her way along the sea-grass that grew on the small dunes near the river. The sky had lightened slightly and the river shimmered silver. It lay still and polished in secret silence. She walked along the edge where the green *lappies* of river weed were left daily to bleach white. Her foot sure, she did not want to slip on the weed that had been covered with sand becoming decayed and slippery. She made her way to the first rocks near the edge.

It was so quiet that even the sea seemed to still its breath. She covered her shoulders with the thin white cloth she had brought. She bowed her head and sat on the rock, for a moment self-conscious. Then she opened the little silver disc of snuff she had bought. She took a pinch and sprinkled it on the ground. The sangoma had said bottled beer was good too, *Black Label*, if one couldn't get the traditional *umcombotsi*. She opened the beer and took a deep sip, then she blew in to the sand, as she had been told. She took another sip and another and blew them to the ground in long *whooshes*. She used the three beers the sangoma told her to offer. Then she cupped her hands and clapped them together. She kept her head low for a moment until she felt the need to speak.

The day in the chapel of Mary, at the Duomo, she had felt close to her mother. Then it was a catholic tradition. This was something so much older. She wondered what her mother would have thought of her. Catrina asking her Anglican mother for help. She knew that her mother's roots in Umtata, her childhood on the plains of the Transkei, were part of the texture and fabric of her flesh as much as anything else. She spoke, her heart opened and emptied and when she came to the end of her words, she sat in silence, the white cloth over her head in a marion veil.

A seagull flew low over her and screamed. Six oystercatchers lifted off the water's edge a little way off, and she knew she had done what she needed to do.

Lucy

It was July and Lucy had arrived in Cape Town. She had one day with her, to give her the book. How to do it, she didn't know. Then it dawned. The perfect place, the setting, the history. It was there the English army had set off to stamp out the rag-tag army of the Boers. Lord Kitchener had stayed there. It would be a circle. She told her to get dressed for tea; she would pick her up at three.

As they drove up to the pale pink hotel, the Mount Nelson, the familiar columns, a bizarre sight greeted them. Santa Claus was climbing the pillars. 'What on earth?' Lucy said. The guard at the entrance, dressed in military khaki and pith helmet, explained that it was Christmas in July.

The table was laden. Petit fours and cucumber sandwiches were set out on damask linen, with fruit cakes and koeksisters. Scones, cream and strawberry jam. Indian waiters served tea in solid silverware. She pointed Lucy to a corner of chintz and linen chairs. The walls were lined with Thomas Bowler prints. The waiter took their order, Earl Grey and Lapsing Souchong tea. They were to help themselves to the eats.

At one end of the room a huge oil painting of Lord Kitchener. She thought of the painting Lucy had, the oil her father had bought at Shepherd and Barker's. She had hung it in her dining room. Visitors wanted to know why she had a portrait of Stalin.

At the other end, a loo table with a large arrangement of flowers, strelitzias and flame lilies.

Catrina gave Lucy the book.



Joe and Catrina drove to Hermanus. She rose early, and went for a walk back along the edge of the Kleinrivier lagoon. The first thing she saw was a seedpod, still green. Maybe it was from one of the trees upstream. There were tiny footprints in the sand. She looked back to see where they came from. Footsteps crossed her path, a little hand reached out. There was a child entering her consciousness. It went on all week. She saw a photograph in a magazine of a man's hand holding a tiny baby's hand within it. The caption read *Trust: the firm belief in the reliability or truth or strength of a person or thing*. These lines jumped out: *today he has complete trust in you. Twenty years from now he will know where you placed your trust*.

Trust, the issue. Another soul had entered the space. It was a womb space, the intersection of two circles. The space of two praying hands. The shape made by two intersecting circles is almond-shaped. Mandla, mandala. A footprint in the sand, a knock at the door. She looked at the hushed footprints across the silent beach. She saw him walking into her life, another man.

'Why you?' she asked, 'and why do you enter now?'

There were grains of sand on the beach, as many as stars in a southern sky. The crux lay low; scorpion hid his tail, waited to spring Orion, the hunter's heel. A night owl hooted and a great fish eagle rose, screamed to the distant shore. A whitened branch fingered the black kelp on the sand. She followed the steps and they led to the edge where grey herons stood one-legged in the water waiting for a catch.

Did she pray in gratitude? Somewhere a wave whispered. She did not hear the answer. She opened the seed pod and saw two hands folded in a green prayer. She had travelled, had loved her two men, Joe and Sam and had abandoned them. Yet now she knew, from the bottom of her heart, that this was where she wanted to be, here among the cryptic crosses, these green-encrusted gravestones, the silver streams of the Kleinrivier, Aasvoëlkop. Here with Joe and Sam. She had come, finally, to her true homeland; the one she so long had rejected.

The lagoon at Bot River had swelled from the winter rains. Joe and Catrina drove towards the Houwhoek Pass. The water was the colour of copper when it is burned. Streaked with purple and russet, the waters were a mirror. The wheat in the fields alongside was the luminous green of early growth. She saw a movement. It was the wild horses. They galloped along the shore as if in formation. Two on the inside along the water, and three on the outer side. Then she saw it. A tiny foal. The herd was protecting it as they trotted along the water's edge. The next generation. One hundred years in the wild marshes and they were doing fine.

Joe stopped the car at the edge of the road.

'Listen,' she said. She heard the sounds of the whole world. They vibrated and echoed quietly.

Joe put his arm around her.

'So what about your story?' he asked. She looked at the gold ring he had placed on her hand all those years ago.

'I was hoping it was a love story,' she said, 'but it was a story of an old man. I had to go back to Lucy and settle the waters between us.'

'It is a love story, Catrina. Not what you expected but a story of love. A story to heal.'

'Yes. It has taught me how much I love you.'

'And Lucy. She doesn't mean any harm. She is also in pain,' he said.

'Yes,' she answered. 'And I love her.'

'And your story,' he asked again, 'what about your book?'

'I shall write it some day.' She smiled at him.

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the epigraph: Rilke, Rainer Maria, Letters to a Young Poet, New York: W.W. Norton and Co. Inc, 1934, p102.

page 7: David Koloane quoted in Clementine Delis, Seven Stories about Modern Art in Africa, New York: Flammarion, 1995, p265.

page55: 'how she was loved by a river', Hughes, Ted, Tales by Ovid, London: Faber and Faber, 1997, p68.

page 80: the scene, Measuring Time, was inspired by Antjie Krog's reporting on the TRC, The Weekly Mail, 27 July 1998.

pages 82 and 83: the scene, Orchis Masculina, was inspired by : Forche, Carolyn, The Colonel, in The Country Between Us, New York: Perennial Library, Harper and Row, 1981, p16.

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page 169 from: Schoeman, Karel, Witness to War, Cape Town: Human and Rousseau, 1998, p130.

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page 160

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page 213

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Some of the author's poems and extracts have previously been published in different forms in:

New Contrast (*Currency, The Cave, Measuring Time*)

New Coin (*Currency, Homegrown*)

Writing from Here (*Here, Blue Towel*)

A woman sits down to write (*A Red Letter Day*)

The Short Story Review of SA (*Sterkfontein*)

Paintings:

page 6: Nils Anderson, Cape Scene, (author's own).

page 7: Constance Greaves, Xhosa Woman, (author's own).

page 14: Michaelangelo, *The Creation*, The Sistine Chapel, Rome

page 14: Tintoretto, *Susannah at her Bath*, Louvre, Paris

page 17 Picasso, *Science and Charity*, Museu Picasso, Barcelona

page 22 Blake, *Pity*, Tate Museum, London

page 27 Van Gogh, *Peasant Woman, picking up sheaf*, Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam

page 42 Millet, *l'Angélu*, Musée d'Orsay, Paris

page 56 Botticelli, *Prima Vera*, Uffizi, Florence

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"Making things up and fact are two different things, but you might need some of both to get to the truth." Toni Morrison.

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