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The Last Mentsch

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Towards the end of the very last chapter, I visited Yitzhak in his room behind the shop in Hunter Street, Yeoville. He was shrouded in the smell of Old Man farts, listening to the sound of the labouring Dora Lipschitz, painfully nurdling down the pavement supported by her aluminium walking frame.

Sheet-Pok-Sheet-Pok-Sheet-Pok.

Yitzhak, now well into his eighties, was cocooned in the offï pink wingback chair Leah loved to sit in until she slipped away all those years ago. He had the appearance of an embarrassed, sallow gnome clad in an ancient jersey whose front displayed the carnage of a thousand breakfasts. It was, for Yitzhak a badge of honour ï an emblem of the honestly simple life of a scrawny, limping *alte kokeh.*

His joints were totally shot. The gimbals and wires and servo systems and hydraulics which keep young people smoothing their carefree paths through life were long past their warranty and Yitzhak now required a stick to prop himself up, propel him forward, prevent him from stumbling and collapsing in an untidy clump in the corner.

The walking stick was a chunk of wood with a carved ramôs horn as the handle, and it leaned against the faded pink chair as an exhausted bicycle leans against a wall. The shaft was ornately etched and completed by a rubber tip, which promised debatable traction and safety to crumbling old bones.

óImagine the embarrassment of falling down and having to wait for someone to arrive to pick me up?ô he said when he first acquired the stick. óYou know old age is upon you when you have to plan a strategy for getting out of a bath,ô he had added. Then, being Yitzhak, and therefore an occasional philosopher and fulltime pragmatist, he shrugged, knowing not too many people were likely to arrive and rescue him.

Not anymore.

Not now that the last of the family was gone.

On this the last day of his story, his slippered feet barely scraped over the musty rug that lay on the floor of his room. The right foot slipperôs toe had perished long, long ago.

The entire picture was quintessential Yitzhak (a *tsimble fun fassen,* as he would say in his quaint accent) the ensemble completed by the grungy old jersey, which, Yitzhak explained, Theodore had bought around the turn of the century.

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, Yitzhak used the stick to plock and plod to Leahôs old ttle of *Shabbat* wine. He poured us each a precise tot ï one eye squinched as he ensured neither of us would be short-changed by a single drop of the sweet wine.

The kist was Yitzhakôs Ark. It contained documents, journals, old bits and pieces of newspapers long gone ï information which, revealed piecemeal over the past year, allowed me to make sense of Yitzhakôs life, and that of his father, Theodore.

As we sipped our wine, the walking stick tapped in tune to a Harry James medley playing on an ancient 78RPM gramophone: Harry James as the backing orchestra to a young, up-and-comer called Frank Sinatra.

Before todayôs chapter of the story, ritual pleasantries had to be exchanged.

'Nu, Yitzhak? *Azoy gait es?'*

óFeh,ô he rasped. óAlways the hips! *A farshlepte krenk* é but I have good days and bad. Anyway, thatôs life.ô

He cocked his bald head ever so slightly. óCan you hear what Sinatra is singing? A coincidence! *That's life* é A beautiful piece of writing. By Kay and Gordon. Two nice *Yiddische* boys ï and such beautiful singing.ô

Yitzhak briefly conducted Harry James with a forefinger.

óListen to the phrasing. Like a *goyische* cantor in a Hollywood synagogue, Frank Sinatra was,ô Yitzhak said. óSuch a voice for a gentile, but you canôt blame him for that. Sinatra was real music. Not that modern jazz from Felonious Monk or that blind *schvartzer* pianist ï whatôs his name? Charles Ray? Yes, him.ô

In his quavering vibrato, Yitzhak warbled:

'That's life, that's what people say
You're riding high in April,
shot down in May...'

Yitzhakôs strong accent made the song almost a parody:

'Dot's life, dot's vot pipples tsay ...'

He nodded towards the gramophone. óSo ï about *my* life, the highlight of which is a prostrate the size of an overcooked *kneidl. Oy,* the *tsores* from one single organ.ô Yitzhak briefly eyed me, trying (and failing) to detect undisguised sympathy, before leaning back and humming the last few bars of the song.

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rlier visit when he recalled the final days of his fatherôs
lied ï when his brother passed away ï that his life was effectively over as well.

ôThis is not melodrama. Iôm a worn-out *farschimmelteh* old man. Besides, apart from you and Dora Lipschitz next door, who else do I have in my life? Who else visits? I have no wife, no children. Only my memories, which I told your late father, God bless his wonderful soul and which Iôm now telling you.ô

He shrugged again.

There was a briefly awkward pause as we found ourselves for once struggling to avoid banal chitchat. Neither of us was a banal chit-chatterer. We were both story tellers in our own way, although while mine found eventual internment in the paperôs morgue, Yitzhakôs story, told to me over the year since I first met him, swept across generations and contained characters who sometimes teetered on the edge of burlesque parody and who, in his telling, occasionally fell over.

ôWhen you tell my story,ô Yitzhak made me promise a year ago, ôit should not just be what I tell you, but also the way you interpret it.ô

Of course, I agreed. I always agreed with Yitzhak. In a foolishly exciting life in which I habitually accommodated no one, Yitzhak had become the exception to my rule. When Yitzhak unfolded a history of one of the characters who populated his canvas, it was impossible to hold up my hand and ask him, how can you possibly *know* that?

If Yitzhak said thatôs what happened, then why the hell should I argue?

Yitzhak, you see, felt it was necessary to elaborate his Baron Munchausenesque characters because, as he kept stressing, these were people who didnôt exist any longer.

ôSo whoôs going to sue me?ô he asked rhetorically. ôI make no apology for inventing *bobbeh meissers* about dead people.

ôAnyway, we all have our own versions of the truth. Yes?ô

Those who peopled his life had, like the dying language that was Yiddish, drifted into distant memory in the rampaging face of fast cars and faster food, television and vampire movies.

ôWhat kind of world is this?ô he once asked. ôThere isnôt even a single cafe-bioscope left anymore.ô

My father, Yitzhakôs friend, had as a young man worked as a waiter at a cafe-bioscope (which was a cinema where you could order food and *fress* it as you watched Astaire and Rogers dance in improbable locations). After serving hamburgers and toasted chicken sandwiches to cinema-*fressers*, he would dash across town to a roadhouse called the *Doll's House*, where he served steak and chips (presented in a small basket) and Coke Floats to young people in gigantic Fords and Chevrolets.

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icipal tennis clubs and bought second hand tennis balls,

e who lived in the suburbs and despite being wealthy enough to have their own tennis courts, were too cheap to buy new balls.

This was apart from his day job, which was as a sales representative ï a *schmattes* salesman.

He was an immigrant who had escaped Nazi Germany with nothing. He now had something: a wife and two daughters to feed in the immediate post-war years of the Forties, so he did what he had to so that he could house and feed his family.

Thatôs what family men did back then.

He had been a Captain in the army during the Second World War, and the server of hamburgers and Coke Floats just a few years later.

I had not been born yet. In Yitzhakôs words, I was inconceivable.

My first contact with Yitzhak was the result of a g*ebrenteh tsores* – a time of utter misery.

Yitzhak had, in a cracked voice faltering on the edge of a sob, telephoned to wish me a traditional Long Life after the death of my father. He apologised for missing the funeral and prayers, but explained that he hadnôt left the shop and adjacent house for more than half a century.

He begged my pardon for not visiting the graveside or attending the interminable post-death prayers my father so loathed in life, which antipathy he had successfully bequeathed to me. Of course I forgave the old man, and in that cloying aftermath of the false camaraderie of death, I arranged to meet Yitzhak, after he confided on the telephone that he had a story to tell. He had decided that if ever anyone were to record his story (and that of his father) it would have to be the son of his best and oldest friend.

Yitzhak, my father once told me, was a serial grumbler who was cranky on a good day and donôt ask on a bad one. Highly literate despite being almost completely self-educated, Yitzhak spoke accent without a trace of English ï and carried in his soul the true fire of *mentschkeit.*

A *mentsch* translates literally as ómanô in German although its meaning in Yiddish is that of a person of high morals, a good provider who is kind and generous, a person who values honesty and who will literally and metaphorically give the shirt off his back to anyone who is needy; a worthy person in every sense.

Like Gandhi, but Jewish.

And if my father held anyone to be a real *mentsch,* well then, he just had to be worth meeting. So it was that Yitzhak and I agreed to meet a week later for a drink and a chat.

ôVeôll gat togadder for a *snepps* or two,ô were his words.

Of course, I understood exactly what he had said.

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People who live in this eccentrically eclectic land of multiple languages, dialects, cultures (the whole intercultural *mischpocheh*) learn to ótranslateô words into whichever accent best suits our ear.

As I would discover over the following year, Yitzhak had, despite his idiosyncratic mangling of some aspects of the language, an astonishing grasp of the nuances of English ï and more than a passing knowledge of several other tongues ï and he would happily quote lavishly from Shakespeare to Spike Milligan to ódet udder Irish *faygele*, Yoschke Wildeô.

He had also, to my huge delight, enjoyed a passionate affair with blues, jazz and big band music. His lounge area was a veritable library of books and music, and he adored surprising me with original blues recordings of Billie Holliday, Leadbelly, Big Billy Broonzy, Blind Lemon Jefferson, Little Walter or Robert Johnson, as well as the astonishing talent of local jazz pianist Ralph Baleson. The albums were all in mint condition and safely protected in their quaint thick-spined, hardcover record sets and thus ready to emerge onto the turntable to entertain us at any given moment.

The year before this day, back when I first agreed to meet Yitzhak, I imagined briefly as I hung up the telephone that I had been duped into what amounted to a óguiltô visit to my late fatherôs lonely friend. Guilt is of course one of Judaismôs most enduring inventions (someone has to take the blame) and even Jews-turned-atheist retain the gene devoted to that awful sense of culpability for everything wrong with family, relationships, outbreaks of scrofula and the ills of the world in general.

Even secular Jews cannot help feeling extreme guilty ... for not being pious.

Being a person unconvinced of the existence of an omnipotent power (*show me proof!* I would howl at fundamentalists, echoing, I suppose, my father) I felt even more uncomfortable when I was met at the front door of the house in Hunter Street by the old man who was done up in all the trappings of orthodox Judaism: *yarmulke* on his utterly hairless head, the *tzitzit* ï the ritually knotted fringes which remind the devout of their obligations not only to God, but their fellow man (and sometimes women) ï and with the inevitable *siddur* within easy reach of those seeking a rational Rabbinical explanation to such taxing questions as why *matzos* is flat and *kneidlach* are round and not vice versa.

Everything in Judaism, you see, must have meaning.

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me which were not covered by shelves of books and
h black and white photographs of people on the running boards of a Ford, or frozenly posing under trees. There were also paintings of *Rabbonam,* all possessed of those gigantic white beards I always assumed indicated some sort of hierarchy among the venerable old men, gazing with earnest intent towards some apparently important symbol of the endurance of a religion which has for millennia drawn to it so much hatred and so little love.

Yitzhakôs clear fundamentalist passion for his faith initially confused me. His friendship with my father made little sense. While my father was an extraordinarily knowledgeable student of comparative religions, he was tetchily indisposed to worshipping in what he called ócattle markets disguised as Houses of Godô.

óHow,ô he used to challenge anyone in a voice curdled with biting sarcasm, ócan you stand in a place of worship and pray to God in one breath, and in the next breath enquire of the person next to you how the stock market performed? How can you say, ónext year in Jerusalemôthen rush off and book your holiday to Cape Town? How can you promise in Hebrew to God that you wonôt covet your neighbourôs ass, and meanwhile in English youôre busy coveting your neighbourôs *wife's* ass?ô

At which point my father would triumphantly light up another of the plain cigarettes which would one day kill him, cough defiantly, and stare down anyone who dared contest his contentions.

I seldom did, which is doubtless how my own views on religion were shaped.

Fathers and sons, sons and fathers, Yitzhak used to say.

Yitzhak never attempted to change my views though. Rather, when I guiltily admitted I was not a believer in organised religion ï or indeed anything posing as an omnipotent Creator ï he told me his simple philosophy was that each person was entitled to believe in whatever they wanted.

óIf you find the need to discuss at length how many angels can dance on the head of a pin, then *gey gezunt,*ô he contended. óIf you believe a chorus line of tap-dancing chickens is God, then again*, gey gezunt.* Who am I to criticise?

óListen,ô he explained, leaning forward. óJudaism is the only religion that doesnôt take a missionary position. Why are you smiling? Jews donôt search out of new members. We arenôt a country club. We donôt want interlopers. We do not like people trespassing because they think Judaism is a good place to be because the bible says weôre the Chosen People.

óWhy did *Hashem* choose us? Your father said because God enjoyed the discounts we offer. Maybe he was right. With me, there are no prescriptions. This is why your late father, bless his soul, was such a good friend. We could debate until the cows came home. We both thought we won each argument.

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en though I was always right (Yitzhak grinned) we always shook hands at the end, cursed each other for being, respectively, pagans and barbarians or zealots and fanatics, drank a *schnapps* or two and played a few hands of *klaberjas* before your father drove home to his family.

ôI would always say to him, ôHerbie, *Odem yesode meofe vesofe leofe, beyno – lveyno iz gut a trink bronfn*ôwhich if youôre cultured and understand the beautifully expressive language that is Yiddish, means, óA man comes from the dust and in the dust he will end ï and in the meantime it is good to enjoy a drinkôôô

And so it was that our almost weekly meeting of fathers and sons began, lasting for what turned out to be the final year of Yitzhakôs life.

Now, on this April day in 1985, the day of the last chapter, we both recognised the final piece of the story had to be told today é right now, in this room packed with hundreds of Yitzhakôs beloved books and his assortment of records that would be, along with his tale of two generations buried in the banged up old kist, his sole legacy.

óSo é we need to get to the end of the telling of the last chapter. Yes? It will be like a Harry Houdini magic show ï a big revelation at the end.ô

Yitzhak tented his fingers, as he did when planning his tale of the lifetime of his father.

There was, for a microsecond, no sound at all in the room other than Harry and Frank and the scratching static as the dog on the record label went round and round and round without ever discovering what lay within the record labelôs sound trumpet.

Then, a refrain from the scratched and ancient record jump-started a memory in Yitzhakôs mind, and he remembered with his usual dazzling clarity the people he loved and whom he had watched die in pieces before his eyes. Suddenly and appallingly, amid the clutter and decay of this lonely room, Yitzhak wept uncontrollable old man tears ï not for loves lost, I imagined, but rather in recognition of the looming mortality we both knew would follow the story he was about to complete.

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CHAPTER ONE

'Ven der tati gibt men tsu zun, lachen baiden. Ven der zun gibt men tsu tati, vainen baiden'. When the father gives to his son, both laugh. When the son gives to the father, both cry

Being Yitzhak (even a year before) he needed to set the scene for the tale he was about to tell. A preface of sorts.

ôYou make sure,ô he said wagging a genial finger at me, ôthat you tell the story as I tell you, although I donôt mind if you fix it here and there and put in some fancy words you learned at that newspaper you work for. I sometimes mix things up because I am old, not foolish. You can fix the small mistakes. Yes?ô

ôOf course.ô

ôGood. Because even though this story contains facts ï which I have checked, you should know anyway ï it is also drawn from the stories my father told me in his last weeks of life. The facts you can debate, but my fatherôs stories are not for discussion. The truth you see with your own eyes is your truth. I believe the truth of my father.ô

He paused.

ôAh, the stories fathers tell their sons é ô he said. ô*Nu?* OK? So we can begin.ô

He leaned back in the wingback chair.

'In di alteh guteh tseiten ï pardon me, I forgot youôre almost a *goy* who doesnôt understand Yiddish ï in the good old days, what we now call the Transvaal was nothing like the sprawl that stretches from Soweto to Pretoria, Lenasia to Vereeniging, and just for the hell of it, the East and West Rands,ô said Yitzhak, waving his hands grandiosely to enhance his words. ôOf course, like everything and like everyone, it changed. Not always for the better, but not always for the worse either.ô

Yitzhak, pursed his lips, made what he called a ôchurch roofô with his hands as he gathered his thoughts, then raised an index finger to signal the beginning of his story.

Today this city is a withering salad of a place with Johannesburg like a *latke* in the middle. The city is generally devoid of any charm other than sundry flecks of occasionally imaginative architecture, random graffiti and a zoo filled with dispirited captives with no idea what they did to deserve the ignominy of having tiny little boundaries to frame their sorry lives.

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e nowadays, covering the shame of a place where for over a century men grunted and sweated as they dug their coarse, calloused hands under her pitiful petticoats and tore out the treasures that lay beneath.

It wasnôt always like this. Indeed, there was a time when a man could stride out of the front door of his suburban home in the early days of Johannesburg, snapping his braces as he scanned the horizon for signs of rain.

He might perhaps have sniffed the fresh African air from his country mansion in Parktown, well away from the miners whose sweat built his fabulous affluence.

Of an afternoon he possibly twiddled the waxed tips of a luxuriant moustache and summoned the boy to saddle up a pony. The *boy*, a man in his sixties and no longer capable of heaving a spade around the mine diggings, would shuffle and nod deferentially while examining his own bare and callused feet, then wander off to saddle the horse.

The man ï the boyôs *Master* ï would exchange spats for hand-tooled boots, pop an elegant bush hat atop his head and canter off to enjoy the richness of this dry and dusty place.

If however you were a Jew and somewhat less affluent (yet white, thus still relatively privileged) you might live in a less desirable part of town where the houses were significantly smaller, and featured the high pressed ceilings, leaded windows and a *stoep* with obligatory rocking chair and *riempie stoel*. Sometimes, adjacent to these dwellings were smaller quarters for the servants.

For the fully-grown adult boys and girls.

For these people, there would be a hole in the floor. This hole served as a toilet. There would also be a zinc bath for washing clothes and once every few weeks, weary black bodies.

As a Jew you might be a tailor or a shopkeeper if you lived in this part of town. Perhaps you balanced a ledger or baked bread. Either way, you made ends meet. Made a living, reared a family with love and rules and prayed to your God that life in this new land would be fruitful and safe.

You most assuredly did not belong to the fledgling country club, which already featured the hint of what would one day become the first golf course. As an immigrant Jew living in the poorer quarter of town, you were just a marginal notch up from the blacks working down the mines or the indentured Indian field labourers working the cane fields in Natal.

Ah, but you enjoyed your own unique quality of life, did you not?

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our family and friends ï the handful of Jews who found their way here from such exotic places as the Ukraine and Latvia, Lithuania and Russia ï would be gathering around a piano at someoneôs home to sing songs from the old countries, the strange intonations and tongues, the guttural throatiness and mellifluous pronunciations drifting into the African night.

Such were the tales of the old days, as told to Africa-born sons by their immigrant fathers.

Meanwhile, the frightfully well-to-do in the better half of this brand new town that had grown from a mining camp believed Johannesburg had become absolutely *filthy* with sundry wogs.

There were the local natives of course, and the Indians, some Chinese and of course those damned Jews who infest everywhere on the planet where money is to be made.

Over a glass of port at The Club the Members would rationalise that these people had their uses, tailoring and doing manual labour and artisan things, but surely they shouldnôt hope to, damnit all, integrate?

At least the blacks who lived in the area, they would surmise, seemingly had no great aspirations to become part of this burgeoning society. Knowing their place, you see, having drifted here from the hinterland where the legends of great warriors wielding assegais and hide shields were just the stuff of old fireside stories.

Just like the *Boers* with their Martini Henry rifles whoôd made such a damned nuisance of themselves in recent times.

Thus was Johannesburg a magnet, with all manner of people drawn to it like iron filings. All that differed was the manner in which they had travelled here and the reasons why they came in their ever-increasing numbers, be it the search for wealth, health, greed, criminal intent or a simple flight to freedom.

For Tadorus Ivanchuk, who would become Theodore Isaacs in due course, his departure from Lithuania in 1862 was in the bowels of a ship and had absolutely nothing to do with searches for anything other than survival. His parents had smuggled their son, then aged just twelve, onto a ship to ensure he escaped the many pogroms brewing in Eastern Europe.

It was a somewhat sudden decision.

Tadorusô grandfather, Shmoel Ivanchuk, had been snatched from his tiny home in their *schtetl,* RÎdiģkās ï which was then only a village in the Trakai, some 15km from the city of Vilnius ï and hanged as a horse thief.

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nt that Shmoel could neither ride a horse, nor (thanks to gout and old age) even consider walking more than a few yards at a time without having to sit down to catch his breath. That Shmoel was the *schtetl*'s Rabbi more likely explained the haste with which he had been tried, sentenced and executed, his body left swinging in the Lithuanian breeze as a sign to the local Jewry that while there had been no real pogroms for a few decades in this neck of the *mittel* European woods, history was surely likely to repeat itself.

A few weeks before his execution, Shmoel had warned his congregants of increasing anti-Semitic threats. For most in the village, the memories of the last wave of pogroms were still raw, and they darted fearful looks at each, remembering the horror of their history.

The local minions who had scooped up Shmoel Ivanchuk and executed him had simply applied their own version of justice because Shmoel, as the *schtetl*ôs Rabbi, had the ear of his parishioners and was clearly spreading dissent. This was evidenced by ótheô many obvious secretive meetings the village Jews were havingôthe local magistrate had pontificated.

In the minds of the prejudiced there is nothing more sinister, more treacherous on this planet than three Jewish shopkeepers discussing the quality of their respective mothersô chopped herring.

Tadorusôparents, keening over the body of the old man, decided that despite the few years of relative inactivity against Jews, anti-Semitism would never go away.

Ever.

The old Rabbiôs body was clear proof, despite what some of the more obdurate villagers thought

It was 1862.

As the Rabbi prophesized, the following year Lithuaniaôs infamous January Uprising erupted, with the productive, peaceful Jewish population of Vilnius and its surrounds suddenly confronted by a return to the days of scything anti-Semitism and its conjoined twin, ethnic slaughter.

Under the threat of a return to dreaded pogroms, the Jews of Vilnius opted first to negotiate, then, when it became apparent there is no reasoning with bigotry, decided to fight é after a fashion.

Tadorus, by then, was long gone.

He did not witness how the cityôs cobbled streets and foreboding stone walls briefly rang with the death of Jewish freedom in Vilnius. The short-lived resistance tottered, stumbled and eventually collapsed, stricken as an upended turtle.

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er of note and also the Governor General of Northwestern Krai ï the former Duchy of Lithuania ï gleefully lived up to his feared nickname of The Hangman, ordering over a hundred executions and órésettlingô some 9 000 Jews far, far away from Vilnius where they could not infest his aristocratic nostrils with their pagan stench and bizarre customs.

The January Uprising was history repeated.

Es iz a shandeh far di kinde (Yitzhak said): children have always taken the brunt of prejudice and particularly anti-Semitism through the ages.

Little Tadorus Ivanchuk didnôt see the scandal at all. He had been rushed under cover of night from RÎ digkãs to the coastal port of Klaepeda and hustled on board a freighter just before it set sail for the Indies.

Decades later, even in his old age, Tadorus remembered the wailing of his *mameleh* dissipating into the wind, as she keened, ó*Mein zuninkeh! Mein zuninkeh*!ô ï My son, my son ï while friends and neighbours wept and begged her not to worry and patted her heaving shoulders and wondered if they too shouldnôt hustle their children away from the place of dying that Vilnius had become.

'Zorg zich nit,' they said to Tadorusô mother, over and over again, patting and patting and patting as she became smaller and smaller.

But it would always matter.

At Klaepeda some currency and a ring which had been in the family for centuries changed hands in the moon shadow of the rusting hulk of the berthed freighter. Tadorusô father, Shlomo, traded worldly goods with the boatôs skipper for the possible safety of his only son.

Weeping without restraint, Shlomo Ivanchuk placed his hand on his sonôs head, sobbing as he recited his last-ever blessing in Hebrew over his only son:

Ye'vorech'echo Adonoy ve'yish'merecho.
Yo'er Adonoy ponov eilecho vi-chuneko.
Yiso Adonoy ponov eilecho, ve'yoseim lecho sholom

Carrying a tiny, broken suitcase containing a *siddur,* a comb, two pairs of pants and a spare shirt, a handful of almost worthless coins, and with his fatherôs heartbroken blessing whirling in his head, Tadorus clambered up the gangway and was rushed aft just as the anchor was raised.

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ó I shall fear no evil, for thine art the kingdom and the power and the gloryé I shall fear no evil, for thine art the kingdom and the power and the gloryô Tadorus repeated under his breath as he listened to the clanking of the anchor chain and the yells of the matelots as the ship prepared to pitch and roll away from the chill of Europe and towards Tadorus Ivanchukôs next stop ï the southern tip of Africa and the most beautiful of Capes, featuring a town growing at the base of a flat-topped mountain.

In retrospect, Tadorus recalled many years later, he had felt no overwhelming sorrow at having to flee his home, but rather experienced a growing, numbing coldness deep within himself as he settled uncomfortably into a tiny cubbyhole in the boatôs cargo hold surrounded by the stench of gutted fish and sweat.

He had not turned at the top of the gangway to watch his father disappear, as a small boy might when being ripped from the family embrace. Instead, he simply allowed the rust bucket to swallow him up, suitcase, *siddur* and all.

Nor could he could he picture his mother as anything other than a weeping shape being comforted by village women. He wondered fleetingly why this was, then settled into his quarters, such as they were.

The first few days on board the foul-smelling ship felt to Tadorus like months, as wide-eyed and spewing, he chugged across the Atlantic towards Africa. Until his body became accustomed to the roiling ocean, the unabated retching left Tadorus as drained as a kosher chicken.

After, he guessed, a few weeks at sea a galley boy, on the skipperôs orders, shifted Tadorus and his little suitcase towards the prow of the freighter, where he met the boatôs other young refugee, a boy of fourteen years old, broad-shouldered and with a hawkish, acne-pitted face out of which glared angry eyes.

Warily, the boys sized each other up, as young boys do when first they meet, sniffing out potential danger and considering who would win a fistfight should it come to that.

The older boy brusquely asked Tadorus where his home was.

Tadorus did not understand.

The older boy spoke an unfamiliar language

'Skąd pochodzisz?' the older boy asked.

Tadorus shook his head. ó*Ya ne rozumiyu.'*

Impatiently, ó*Ön Magyar talán?'*

Tadorus wasnôt Hungarian either, so he simply shrugged.

ó*Sprechen sie Deutsch? Oder Jiddisch, vielleicht?'* the older boy snapped peevishly.

And in one word, there was the connection.

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Yes, Tadorus certainly *did* speak Yiddish, that mongrel child of High German intermixed with other European snippets.

Tadorus nodded beaming.

ó*Ja! Jiddisch!'* he cried.

ó*Du siehst aus wie ein Jude – und alle Juden Jiddisch!'* the older boy crowed. A fellow Jew.

ó*Ich spreche ein bisschen Deutsch. Mein vater lehrte mich,'* Tadorus explained in halting German, ó*und noch einige Jiddisch.'*

Common ground.

ó*Wie ist Ihr name?'* the older boy asked.

ó*Tadorus Ivanchuk ... aus Vilnius. Und sie*?ô Tadorus answered.

ó*Jerzy Banaszewki, von Polen. Warschau*.ô

The boys grinned at each other and chatted into the small hours of the morning ï and thereafter every day, in between chores they did for the crew, who slipped the boys scraps of food from the galley.

A day or so before they were due to dock in Cape Town, Jerzy, in his assumed worldly-wise manner, told Tadorus, ówhen we arrive in the harbour, the English will change our names. The first mate told me this when I polished his boots.ô

ówhy are there English in Cape Town? Cape Town is in Africa, surely?ô Tadorus asked.

óIt is part of the British Empire,ô Jerzy said. óDo you not know anything?ô

It was the first time Tadorus had considered the notion of a world totally unlike Vilniusô cold stone walls, exquisitely steepled churches, cobbled streets and a culture which (some said) rivalled Vienna.

Why, he demanded, would anyone want to change a perfectly good name?

Hearsay is frequently the best version of the truth for young boys.

ówhey canôt understand how our names are spoken, the first mate told me,ô Jerzy explained. Our names are too complicated for the British tongue, he said.ô

ôTadorus Ivanchuk is simple enough though, surely?ô The younger boy suggested

óBelieve me, the English will change it to suit themselves. People can do such things when theyôre in charge. It seems like most of the world belongs to the British and they want everyone to be like them. English names, English language. Tadorus Ivanchuk is a very long way from being a typical English name.

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ate Jews,ô Jerzy added, dispelling Tadorusô imagined happy first meeting with these British people who ran the entire world, excluding Lithuania.

ôThey do? Why? I thought only the Lithuanian gentiles did not like us.ô

ôI have no rose-tinted views about how any *goyim* see us,ô said Jerzy. ôListen, Iôm a Jew but Iôm not religious like you. My religion is why Iôm also on this *paskidnye* boat. Difference is, Iôm not escaping from hatred. I am just seeking a new life somewhere. *Abseits des ghettos*. I want to see the world. Or at least another part of the world that isnôt as dismal as that Warsaw *schtetl* where I grew up.ô Tadorus imagined Jerzyôs Warsaw as a place filled with grey buildings and even greyer people.

A place of eternal winters.

Inevitably, when small boys argue philosophy, their standpoints are constructed on reflections of their respective fathersô deep-set attitudes. Such is the framework for the creation of opinions: reworked and occasionally rephrased rhetoric founded on a mishmosh of fable, Talmudic texts and interpretations from sundry *Rabbonam*, anecdotal experience and just-plain *bobba meisers,* the tall-tales told by grannies.

Fathers and sons and, apparently, fathers and grannies too.

ôMy father believes there will be more pogroms in Europe,ô Tadorus began. ôHe says Europe will not be a safe place for Jews very soon.ô

Jerzy nodded sagely, as only fourteen-year-old boys can when discussing politics with twelve-year-olds.

ôJews,ô he agreed sourly, ówill certainly again be the worldôs pariahs. And again, we will run away with our tails between our legs. Threatened by extinction and hiding in corners, just like always.ô

Pogroms are about religious prejudice, Jerzyôs father, a Professor of Mathematics, had explained to him. They were not a nineteenth century creation either, the Jews in Europe having been blamed for most of the ills which had befallen the continent since the beginning of time ï or Christianity. Whichever came first.

ôThe Jews,ô Jerzy added, óare blamed for everything from the Black Death to that Blood Libel nonsense. Jews killed Jesus Christ? What ridiculous rubbish. Why would we murder a teacher? Jesus was a Rabbi, my father said.

óOf course, someone has to take the blame, so it might as well be us. Jews are clearly murderous savages, as you can tell by our habit of carrying daggers between our teeth and pillaging villages for sport. Twice on Tuesdays, but never on *Shabbat*.ô

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r thousands of years, but like so many sceptics, Jerzyôs father believed Polish Jews were a doomed people due, he suggested caustically, to the tribeôs proclivity to either ófight like girls or hike up their skirts and run awayô.

Tadorus ducked his head down, stared at the scuffed toes of his cheap shoes. History suggested the Jews of Europe had not possessed the fire of their earliest forebears, clashing swords with all manner of foe back in the deserts of North Africa millennia before.

óI sometimes wonder why we donôt fight back anymore,ô Tadorus mused. óLike the Maccabees did. Or David who slew Goliath. And all those other heroes from the Torah.ô

óPah,ô Jerzy growled dismissively. óJews havenôt had a real hero for five thousand years. Anyway, the Torah is just childrenôs stories.ô

óThatôs not true ï the Torahôs not nursery rhymes or fairy tales,ô Tadorus argued.

'Vais ich vos!' Jerzy hooted.

óItôs not nonsense!ô

óIt is. Listen to me ï hereôs how my father explained it.ô Jerzy said.

The Torah, Jerzy said (echoing his father), was written more than five thousand years ago. It was filled with tales written to frighten illiterate people into obeying laws.

óJust think ï did your parents ever read you that fairy story to make you stop biting your nails or sucking your thumb when you were little? Itôs the same thing, but with God as the threatener, and not some imaginary nasty little man who creeps into childrenôs bedrooms at night to punish them for this or that ... naughtiness.ô

Struwwelpeter, Heinrich Hoffmanôs depraved horror story had infiltrated the dreams of thousands of European children, including Tadorus, whoôd had his own nightmares about the scissor-wielding creature snipping off his fingers as he slept.

óRemember, centuries and centuries ago people couldnôt read or write. They were é ô Jerzy struggled for the words in Yiddish.

'Niewykształconych chłopów...' he eventually said in Polish, searching for, then unearthing the Yiddish for uneducated peasants who worshipped idols, for Godôs sake,ô Jerzy continued.

óBut when Moses came down from Mount Sinai with the Ten Commandments é ô Tadorus began.

óHah! There we have it. Answer me this, Tadorus: whatôs in the Ten Commandments?ô

õYou know what. The Torah tells us how Moses went up Mount Sinai and was confronted by God, who showed himself to Moses as a burning bush. Every Jew knows that. And *Hashem* created two stone tablets, with Godôs Ten Commandments, which are instructions to all the people of the world to é ô

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y interrupted. óGod is a blazing shrubbery?ô

óWell, that was how *Hashem* showed himself to Moses. He doesnôt have a face like us.ô

óNo joking?ô Jerzy scoffed.

óAnyway, thatôs what my father told me and heôs always right. And my grandfather was the village Rabbi.ô

óAnd where is the good Rabbi now? Hanged by the *antisemitin*, you told me.ô

óYes, but é ô

óForget the óbutsô, Tadorus,ô Jerzy leaned back against the bulkhead. óSo in your reasoning, this bush ï which donôt forget is on fire ï says to Moses, ó*bubbeleh*, have I got some news for you!ô

óYouôre taking Godôs name in vain! Stop it! Youôre mocking *Hashem*!ô Tadorus shouted, but Jerzy was in no mood to be stopped.

óSo God said unto Moses on this *piseleh* hill, 'Moishe,ô he says, óthese are my instructions for you to give to your people.ô And Moses said ó*Danke Gott,* youôre *a Bal Toyreh'"* and God answered óand Moishe, youôre a real *mentsch* tooô and Moses traipsed back down the hill *schlepping* these tablets which, if you think about it, (Jerzy tapped a finger on his temple) contain a set of simple laws for ignorant people who are stuck in the desert and are threatening rebellion, what with their golden calves and loose women all *fressing chazzerai* on *Shabbat* instead of *davening.*

óIn other words, the Ten Commandments, which Moses wrote himself because donôt forget he was an educated man brought up by his *chaver* the Pharaoh, was a means of frightening people who were uneducated peasants! Tadorus, the Hebrews were slaves, not book keepers or teachers or writers. They were peasants, common labourers. People who worked with their hands, not their minds, for centuries to build pyramids.

óPeople who did what they were told.

óThe Commandments were rules designed by Moses to make ignorant people *pisch* their pants under threat from an all-seeing power. Thatôs what God is, Tadorus. Something for people to fear.ô

óMy father said é ô

óAnd just where is your father? Hiding behind his Torah praying and waiting to be killed along with the rest of your family? Where is God now that the Ivanchuk family really needs him?ô

óMy father sacrificed all é ô

óé and your mother will be raped like the Mongols did to our people centuries ago...ô

é ô

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ard this ship é ô

óé yet here you are and where is he? Where is your precious God now when you really need him?ô

Tadorus leaped to his feet, enraged, fists balled.

óThey murdered my *zayder*!ô he screamed. óI saw him hanging from a tree, Jerzy! I could see the hatred in the eyes of the *goyim* as they watched him die!ô

óAnd the friends of the *Rov*? Where were they?ô

And of course, there was no answer. Tadorusô own lived experience was nothing he could ever erase.

He recalled looking dumbly at the Jews in the village cowering and terrified, all wondering, will I be next? Thatôs what my father saved me from, Tadorus thought. And here I am, running.

õWho in your family was butchered for being a Jew?ô he asked Jerzy.

Jerzy sighed.

õNobody. Yet. Itôs just that I canôt understand the idea of Jews being Godôs Chosen People with all the *sheisse* weôve had to take forever.ô

Historyôs reality clashing with ingrained religious fundamentalism is a fight which rarely has a winner.

It can however drop a sudden anchor in any discourse, and for some time the boys sat in silence, considering the otherôs position.

õI was once the target of a bully in RÎdigkās,ô Tadorus recalled eventually. óA big fat boy ï about fifteen. I was little. Maybe seven or eight years old. I told my father, one day after this boy had beaten me again, that I wanted to lay in wait for him and, when he least expected it, jump out and hit him on the head with a walking stick or a pole. I wanted revenge for the humiliation.

óBut my father told me it is best to pick your battles. He insisted that smiting a fellow Jew might not be the best option ï and anyway, the bully might turn the tables on me and Iõd get another hiding. I could understand what he meant. And I also understood his advice was designed to protect me from becoming a bully myself. He said sometimes it is better to flee and live than stand up and die. Maybe our real battle is still to come. Meanwhile, I suppose the idea of God is as good a hero to hide behind as a David and Goliath.ô

Jerzy and Tadorus sat in deafening silence in the heaving ship, trying to make sense of their own understanding of lives ending and lives beginning.

õWeõll know soon enough if our fathers were right, I suppose,ô Jerzy said eventually. óMaybe Europeôs not the place to be when our apocalypse happens.ô

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Tadorus nodded and thought, ôand maybe everything will blow over, and there will be peace in Vilnius and I will be alone somewhere else in the world and I wonôt ever know if itôs safe to go home.ô

Yitzhak sighed, rubbed his forehead, and struggled to his feet.

ôIt is only in the most contemplative moments in the noiselessness of ourselves, that we peel away the worldôs clatter and listen so very intently to the actual sound of our lives,ô he mused.

ôSometimes what we hear is peace and acceptance. It sounds like a distant harmonic hum. Other times there is the noise of dreamlike frustration, leaving you unable to reach out and grab those sounds and hold them trapped in your fingers until they change.ô

It all depends on how your version of God put you together.

'A mentsch tracht und Gott lacht,ô he said. ôA good man plans and God laughs. An old Yiddish saying.ô

ôThe Polish kid wasnôt totally wrong, Yitzhak,ô I suggested. ôThereôs been no halting anti-Semitism for é well, forever.ô

ôTrue. But for a while my father chose to take the route of sincere belief in God. As did I. We had different reasons, of course. I know your father lost his faith a long time ago. So did my father. Then he found it again and lost it and so on and so forth. Like religion is a carousel at a funfair.

ôEither way, my father survived almost everything, every piece of *tsores* that life or, in his mind, God threw at him. I like to believe his faith was always there. Buried deeply for sure, but there nonetheless.ô

ôAnd you? Ever have any doubts?ô

ôMe? Never! Which is why I am the mighty hero you see before you,ô he smiled.

ôWhich Idôll tell you about next time you visit. Now may I twist your Pagan arm and top up your glass with this excellent Manischewitz wine? Itôs last weekôs vintage.ô

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CHAPTER TWO

Tsvai falen tsu last: der nar tsevishen klugeh un der kluger tsevishen naronim ï Two are embarrassed: the fool in the company of wise men and the wise man in the company of fools.

Bravado is a wonderful thing except when it becomes an ill-timed display of hubris, Yitzhak philosophised, holding his teacup the English way, pinkie pointed towards the ceiling.

And if that metaphorical puffing of the chest occurs in young boys with no real clue as to the out-and-out bitchiness the world has always held in equal portions for those people with their backsides hanging out their trousers (so to speak) then in these begrimed juvenile émigrés there was a pair of pouter pigeons about to be mauled.

Jerzy and Tadorus disembarked timorously, their *faux* pluck liberally shot through with unspoken terror of a land brimful of wild beasts and savages, if the shipôs crew were to be believed. But it was not an Africa of myth and fiction that confronted them. Rather, they found themselves awed not by the town itself, but rather at the spectacle of clouds rolling softly off the tabletop mountain overlooking it.

There was not a wild beast or savage to be seen.

The town itself astonished the boys, whose perception of Africa was built on tall tales and horror stories fed to them by sniggering galley workers and sailors, painting vivid pictures of jungles filled with terrifying black people with bones in their noses boiling missionaries alive in cooking pots while sharp-fanged pygmy headhunters waited to one side for table scraps.

What the boys found as they moved away from the brand new wharves ï recently declared open by Queen Victoriaôs son, Prince Alfred just two years before ï was a bustling town fringed with hills and mountains, and which was no longer just a port to load provisions onto passing ships. The town and the docks were, unlike the great ports of Europe, seamlessly connected to each other; tanners and fishmongers, haberdashers and book shops, salons and saloons happily trading side by side.

Nothing, the boys reasoned, could possibly be vaguely wrong with this piece of paradise é which attitude made of this place a Venus flytrap: exquisite to behold, but not so wonderful if you happened to be a fly.

ôHoly Jesus Christ,ô Jerzy whispered reverently as he gazed up at Table Mountain, at the foot of which stood the exquisite Sea Point House. ôIf this place is the doorway to horror, then the hell inside must be beautiful.ô

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en they dreamed of their new home, both boys had fully) having women who looked like their mothers and grannies rushing to enfold them with arms chubbied by chicken fat and s*chmaltz* to their pillowy bosoms, smelling of *latkes* and warm *challah* just out the oven, all wrapped in the promise of soft beds, soothing lullabies and moist *mameleh* kisses showered all over their cheeks and foreheads.

The reality was twittering flocks of elegant women floating past, parasols a-twirl, their full-width skirts ablaze with the new, popular colours as decreed by the matrons of London and Paris: here, a mauve and purple skirt, there a bodice with pagoda sleeves in dazzling magenta. Some wore fingerless crocheted mitts, others, delicate lace gloves despite the balmy weather; atop their chic heads they wore a variety of snoods, bonnets and chenille strips which held their oiled and modishly parted hair in place.

They were all so graceful.

Heaven help them if a Sou' Easter suddenly sprang up.

Their menfolk were done up in morning coats and porkpie hats, straw boaters or wider-brimmed Stetsons. Some wore full military regalia as they elegantly shepherded their women down the quayside streets in search of all the latest fashions, or copies of *London Illustrated News* (to ensure changes in the Victorian fashion of the day had not bypassed them.)

Tanned hands invariably rested casually on pistol butts holstered at the hips of many of these pioneers. As if to ensure absolutely no foreign riff-raff would even dare approach their side of the street.

Two such foreign riff-raff were Tadorus and Jerzy, sucking in the sights and sounds of the town, eyes sparkling as they scanned this Eden.

ôMove along now, move along,ô a policeman with a truncheon ordered, genially prodding Jerzy and Tadorus with the blunt end until the boys shambled off, agreeable as sheep.

Tadorus and Jerzy, brimming with the audacity of unbuttered bran muffins, had initially considered hiding in tea chests to try and dodge the boring formalities of British officialdom. It was an idea they discarded on the basis that the tea chests were already full of tea. Also, if they were caught, they might be shoved back on the ship and God Forbid, sent back to their respective homes which, they had by now rationalized, were up in flames and their families strung up like Tadorusô*zayder.*

Then they imagined the fun ï such as children might do ï of watching these people trying to wrap ornate European names such as Banaszewski and Ivanchuk around their palates, so they decided to strut ashore like landing gentry and report to customs.

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Like *mentsches*.

Not like fleeing Jews, petrified of their own shadows.

Thus girded, the boys strode forth, filled with *chutzpah* ï the Eastern European version of piss and vinegar ï ready to take on the challenges of their new world.

Jerzy, being the oldest, naturally marched a stride ahead of Tadorus, his brain crammed with the awful realisation that he could not now lose face in the presence of the more circumspect Tadorus. He recognised that buckling at the knees and behaving with weakness in the face of new authority figures like, well, those supposedly gutless fleeing Jewish archetypes he had so volubly ridiculed, was clearly not acceptable.

In retrospect years later, Tadorus would wonder how it was they could have been so utterly and completely deluded. He would justify it by imaging that Hercules probably also thought his tasks would be a snap until, that is, he arrived at the Aegean stables and was asked to clean up horse manure with a teaspoon.

Of course, Tadorus and Jerzy were just two terrified boys pretending to be men, but sadly failing, possessing the gravitas of soft-boiled eggs.

Despite the hordes of French soldiers milling around waiting to sail on to China, it was a quiet day in the embarkation area, where a handful of new immigrants shuffled around like dead people dancing in molasses, waiting to be welcomed to their new home.

They clung together in small clots of humanity. The haggard discarded people of Eastern Europe and the thuggishly foreheadless world-wanderers looking to either build or break things. Some would be put to work on the railway lines, which would carry the first trains to Cape Town in 1864 or shift off down the coast to Simons Town to help complete the Patent Slip.

There were stoop-shouldered empty people whose only achievements in life had been scaling the peaks of mediocrity, and who now sought any kind of escape from the soul-grinding misery of the places they used to call home. Many would find residence in what were called ósanitary residencesôï which was another way of saying óthe dirty old shacksô that hunched alongside Kloof Road.

There were beefy, bearded men too. Rough and alone, a speculative glint in their eyes as they imagined adventure, wild animals and the wealth theyôd been told they could scoop out of the soil with their bare hands.

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ctive dreams, a substantial number of these newcomers graves or Roeland Street Jail. Progress in this new country could be measured by the fact that the first Houses of Parliament and the first jail had been opened almost simultaneously.

In counterpoint, with Tadorus giggling in fearful expectation behind his hands, and Jerzy thrusting his quivering chin towards whatever challenges he might have to face, the boys eventually presented themselves to a formidable pudding in a gray uniform and who, with extreme irritation dangling off every syllable, practiced the time-honoured customs official tradition of shouting at all non-English speakers in English, the idea being that if a man does not understand you, then keep shouting until he does.

This, (Yitzhak interjected as a sort of editorôs note) is how Britain had ruled the world for centuries, and while the history books donôt specifically say so, thatôs how it was done in those days ï volume and guns. It was a time in the worldôs history when the British Empire was a mighty thing indeed.

God, wise men used to say, created a world full of many little worlds, and this Cape clearly was one of the prettier ones. Of course, the British had snagged it from the Dutch in 1795 to make it part of their mighty realm.

The British, being British, then gave this beautiful port back to the Dutch in 1803 by virtue of a treaty.

Then, (again) being British, the Empire took the port back in 1805.

This time, there was no negotiating.

The British clearly needed a landmark battle (wishing, apparently to rehearse for the Battle of Waterloo, to which they would journey in 1815) so they dutifully fought the Battle of Bloubergstrand, which they won.

A few years later, in 1824, the British presented a treaty to the Dutch, which they creatively called The Anglo-Dutch Treaty, and which permanently ceded Cape Town to the British, along with sundry other pieces of global real estate. The Dutch (being Dutch and with other issues on their plate) signed it.

So it was that around the middle of the nineteenth century the British Islesôred-coated military was everywhere, like starving dogs looking for fresh bones and fighting all other dogs to get them, irrespective of the oppositionôs size, colour or proof of longtime residence.

Volume and guns.

So it was that on the day of Tadorusôarrival, the Empire was represented in Cape Town by a man who was not sylphlike by any stretch of the imagination.

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uge plodding beast with sweat stains like soup plates ow and a massive moustache suspended under his nose as a used toilet brush might dangle beneath a hook in the wash-house. His skin was not so much the archetypal peaches-and-cream English complexion of legend, but was rather a brisket-coloured hide.

Below his wattles the rest of the man descended into a tribute to the excellence of the local hostelries, with an added salute to the *vetkoek* and *koeksusters* the townôs remaining Dutch housewives made in artery-clogging abundance. Blubbery shoulders flared outwards and downwards beneath the breast pockets of the customs officerôs uniform to a spectacular gut the size of an extra large iron cooking pot and which so threatened the alarmed shirt buttons they all visibly strained to escape from the belly within.

Comparatively, the officerôs pants were almost a disappointment, having been meticulously laundered and ironed by his Malay housekeeper. His boots had, with similar attention to military detail, been polished until they gleamed, hinting at a past which clearly included service in the Grenadier Guards, the Black Watch or perhaps the Dragoons.

Which shows how wrong perceptions can be, the man having been a Police Constable from Skegness whose wife had left him and fled to Peterborough with a man who sold fish.

On the officerôs desk squatted a bronzed nameplate that introduced to the world that Walter Middleton-Pike was the portôs Senior Customs Commissioner ï a position he had held for an entire month.

It was Middleton-Pikeôs initial considered opinion that dealing with new arrivals to this piece of Empire should be handled as a congenial duffer of an uncle might handle less fortunate relatives ï that is, with geniality and all the benevolence a representative of Queen and Country could muster.

In short, be a Big Man in spirit and action. These people were, after all, merely lost sheep seeking a better flock, he reasoned. It was a philosophy which changed within days of his arrival at the Cape.

Alongside the Commissioner sat a noodle whose rapidly dying stringy black hair topped a *farkrimpteh punim* – an impossibly twisted, narrow face in the middle of which sat a nose like a blunt hatchet, and which at that moment cleaved into a pile of paperwork which had been shifted towards him by the man with the bigger nameplate

The Noodleôs nameplate simply said óassistantô.

Confronted by the Senior Customs Official, Tadorus and Jerzy rapidly found the remnants of their confidence draining. While impressed by the length of the Commissionerôs name and the sheer girth of the man himself, Jerzy was even more massively cowed by the manôs hands which were immense, even by the standards of Kosczinsky the blacksmith in Warsaw.

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Heôs so huge, thought Jerzy.

The man slowly leaned forward and aimed his nose imposingly at Jerzy.

óAnd from where do you lads come?ô Middleton-Pike boomed from under his moustache.

The boys gaped uncertainly at each other.

óI think he wants to know our names,ô said pragmatic Tadorus to trembling Jerzy.

óYou think so?ô

óTell him your name,ô Tadorus hissed.

Jerzy nodded.

óI Jerzy,ô he said in Pidgin English, smiling weakly, using two of the very few words he knew and thumbing his chest.

He pointed at Tadorus.

óHim Tadorus.ô

The Noodle looked up from his papers.

óHe wants to know where you come from,ô he said to the boys in German and dropped his head back into his paperwork.

'Oh. Er, vielen dank, Herr,' Tadorus said to the assistant.

'Me aus, um, Polen' Jerzy said, emboldened, to Middleton-Pike, who was instantly confused.

óEh? *Polen?* Thatôs not a country. Thatôs the stuff in flowers, surely?ô he asked the Noodle, who wearily lifted his head again.

óPoland, sir.ô

óOh! Poland?ô barked Middleton-Pike, thumping his desk triumphantly. óFirst bloody Polander Iôve seen in all my days.ô He poked a finger at Jerzy. óWhatôs wrong with Poland then, boy?ô

From that point, the simple act of passing through customs and into a new and exciting land descended to the point where it became a thunderous confrontation of twin-edged frustration during which Middleton-Pike became bilious with rage while the boys wilted under a barrage of a language they did not understand, abetted by excessive finger-pointing and steam.

Volume increased as epithets and curses flowed.

It culminated in Tadorus ï now squarely Middleton-Pikeôs target and convinced he had become trapped in purgatory for all eternity, head clanging in terror as God failed to hear his hysterically whispered prayers ï squeaking at Middleton-Pike a series of colourfully descriptive schoolboy Yiddish curses in a terrified soprano.

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'Du shtik fleysh mit tsvey oygn!' he piped in terror, ó*Du shittern mogn!'*

The outburst proved that he who keeps quiet is half a fool and that he who talks is a complete fool.

Regardless, it stopped the confounded official in his tracks.

There are moments.

Like that which Admiral Lord Nelson might have experienced when he realised Hardy most assuredly wasnôt going to kiss him as he lay shot through with French musket balls and dying ótwixt decks on *HMS Victory* a half century before. Middleton-Pike, utterly perplexed, his face now the colour of *borscht,* wheeled his bulk towards the Noodleôs desk.

õWhatôs the dashed boy say?ôhe roared at his assistant who, dour as a dead pancake, cleared his throat, emitting a snort which sounded much like the first chuff of a small locomotive as it leaves the platform.

õHe suggested sir,ôthe man translated without any degree of dramatic enhancement, óthat you are ï and this is literal, sir ï a stick of meat with two eyes. Thatôs what *tsvey oygn* means in the text. Two eyes. Not a compliment, sir.ô

ó*Oy,* a *chorbn!'* Tadorus hissed at Jerzy, ó*A klog af defruf, halevay!* He speaks Yiddish! *A broch!*ô

ó*I heard!*ôJerzy hissed back. õWhat have you done? Theyôll send us back to Europe!ô

Middleton-Pike glared at Tadorus. õYou said that?ôhis brows connected above whisky-drowned eyes. He pulled himself up to his full and not insubstantial height, and aimed the gigantic belly at Tadorus and prepared a broadside.

The Noodle interrupted: õUm, sir, thatôs not all. The boy added sir, that you are, erm, a loose bowel movement ï thatós what ó*shittern mogn'* means.ô

óAé ?ô

õLiteral translation, sir. Also not a compliment. Just one of a series of wonderful curses in that language.ô

Middleton-Pike, thunderous as Brumhilde about to eject a drunken Helgakviða Hjörvarðssonar from Valhalla, clenched his great fists and leaned across the battle line of official forms on his desk. He worked his mouth into firing position while he cocked his brain for a full and comprehensive verbal discharge at Tadorus, clutching the little suitcase with his worldly belongings to his chest.

In a philosophical flash, he realised that if you want to avoid old age, you should hang yourself in your youth.

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a Maidenhead strumpet é ô Middleton-Pike began, then paused, gathered himself, and turned slowly on his axis until he faced his skinny assistant.

Absolute rage in one utterly out of control manifests itself in yelling. Beyond that, anger reaches a level of such comprehensive fury that control now presents itself as terrorising whispers.

It was this stage that Middleton-Pike had reached.

óAre you done? Is that it?ô he asked his assistant calmly, smiling from the moustache down.

óYes sir.ô

Middleton-Pike breathed deeply, clenching and unclenching his right fist behind his back and kneading the bridge of his snout with the knuckles of his other hand.

Be Big, he thought.

óGood,ô he said when peace had more or less descended upon him and left him with a beatific smile. óNow é be so kind as to take this young rabble and hand them over to the Sergeant-at-Arms at The Castle after youôve filled in their immigration forms.ô

He leered at the boys.

óSend the good sergeant my compliments and ask if he has any need for two young upstarts from *Polen* and suggest to the Sergeant that they might apply their knowledge of loose bowel movements to the regimentôs horses.ô

óYes sir,ô said the Noodle.

óGood. Now get them out of my sight, Rabinowitz.ô

Dismissively he turned to the next immigrant in the line.

óAnd which God-forsaken pisshole did you escape from?ô he roared at a man and his family who were suddenly reconsidering their decision to flee Irelandôs troubles.

Rabinowitz the Noodle happily had no intention of taking the boys to the regimental stables where he assumed both would be buggered by every rank from Private to Colonel before sunrise and by the cooks and stable hands at the weekend.

Instead he hustled the boys into a small cubicle at the rear of the great hall and filled in and stamped the necessary paperwork which, as promised by the shipôs crew, provided the boys with new names, the logic at the time being that no one outside of Europe would be able to pronounce their real names let alone spell them.

Rabinowitz (whose original name was Wojciech Szczňsny) put a hand on each boyôs shoulder before casting them loose into their new homeland.

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and without his signature nasal clearance, ôI see *Kolboynike* like you every day. Boys full of *chutzpah* and fire. Unfortunately for most of you, the mirror fools none but the ugly, so you need to be aware that this place is not a playground.ô

He explained that more and more young refugees were arriving in the Cape almost every day as each new ship disembarked traces of humanity failing itself across the world.

Mostly boys came to this port, although some girls too of course, he said. Sometimes, the single, slightly older girls ended up in whorehouses or found work as nannies and housekeepers for the British gentry. Very little by way of class and quality, he stressed, arrived in Cape Town.

ôMainly people just those, like you, carrying the luggage of poverty. That is, nothing,ô he said.

Rabinowitz looked towards the wharf. Another steamer had passed through the new breakwater and prepared to dock and offload people while the chandlers dashed around provisioning the great boats for their next voyage.

He snorted.

ôYoung people arrive here with big ideas and bigger hopes and so many end up gutted like fish in the back alleys of this town.

ôAfrica is nothing like your hometowns, boys ï as bad as they may have been. Nothing at all. Iôve been there. Seen the *tsores*. Lost my whole family. Escaped, stashed away in the arsehole of a ship twenty years ago. Leaving my troubles back in Latvia. Trouble lurks everywhere here too. Maybe even worse.ô

He told the boys of the *schvartzers* who populated the hinterland. Not just the little Hottentots who could run for days on a sniff of water, but also the ferocious Xhosa (he said) who wanted nothing more than murdering as many young arrivals as possible, then shoving sticks up their *tochesim* and grilling them over open fires.

ôI hear tales all the time of the Zulus on the East coast. They fight like *meshugenehs,* and they have more military knowledge than Lord Kitchener. Also, do not forget the Dutch, who are the hugest people I have ever seen. They have all mostly gone inland to seek a new homeland. Huge? They came here decades ago, along with French Huguenots, probably for the same reason you two fled Europe. They too were victims of their own pogroms.ô

There were no treks heading inland any longer, he said.

Somewhere in the vicinity of fourteen thousand farmers ï *Boers,* they were now called ï had trekked en masse into the heart of this land, trading punches, bullets and assegai stabs along the way with all manner of exotic natives.

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They'd largely intermarried, Rabinowitz explained: the Dutch and Huguenots had even started developing their own language.

"There's another tongue for you to learn," he said. "It's sort of High Dutch, except it sounds like dockyard Flemish. Kitchen Dutch, we call it. They're all intent in finding for themselves a piece of the country which they can farm and call their own. Mind you, they built a very pretty Dutch Reformed Church a few miles up the coast road.

"Decent enough people to be sure, but heaven help anyone who gets in the way of them finding their new homeland. Quite a few Jews went along with them for the ride – opportunists mainly. I believe they also intermarried. To some of the uglier girls, I suppose. Now we have this new breed, *Boerejoode.*

"Imagine that?" he mused. "A tribe of short, intelligent farmers speaking High Dutch with *Yiddische* accents.

"The *Boers* really hate the British, and before you tell me you're not British, to them anyone who isn't one of their own is British."

He ruffled Tadorus' hair and smiled. "That would make you *Lithuanian* British, boy. Don't bother arguing with them either. They are not now, nor ever will be, your *chaverim*. They will resolve the argument by putting such a *klop* on your *keppele* you will wake up three weeks later and think you're the Pope."

Did anyone here like anybody who wasn't one of their own, Tadorus wondered.

Rabinowitz added that while most of these apparently giant foreigner-hating crossbred Dutch-Huguenots-random Jews had already gone inland – ox wagons by the score setting out in the Twenties to God knew where – some had stayed here in Cape Town, and were brewing up some decent wine.

Rabinowitz gestured towards the vineyards.

"Anyway, that's what's awaiting you. And God help you both."

"Where should we go, sir? From here, now, I mean – " Tadorus asked

Rabinowitz shrugged.

"Listen, there's a *Yiddische* couple who run a small boarding house about two miles from here," he said. "Travel up this road – it's called Burg Street. Keep the mountain on your left. Then turn into Strand Street. About a five minute walk will take you to the boarding house. People name of Katz own it. The husband is a complete *chamoole* and his wife is, well, z*i iz a rikhtike miyeskayt,* an evil soul. Nice combination, the Katzes," he mused. "A bitch and a moron."

He shrugged.

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u both a bed and make you work for your keep and might point you towards some other work so you can start saving *a bissel gelt.* There are all sorts of new businesses around here where a young boy might earn a few *pfennigs* – and start a life.

óDo that. Keep your noses clean. Go with good health. Learn English, and I now have to get back to the stick of flesh with two eyes and calm him down before he declares war on Slovakia.ô

Rabinowitz loped back to his desk, where he would later pretend to snort and chortle with the gloating Middleton-Pike about how the Sergeant-at-Arms must be rogering himself blue in the face by now.

óAnyway, theyôre out of your hair now, sir,ôRabinowitz reported to Middleton-Pike.

óGood stuff, Rabinowitz, what?ôthe Commissioner nodded. óMind you, strange tongue, those boys spoke though,ôhe mused. óItôs that *Jew* language, isnôt it?ô

óErm, yes ï Yiddish, sir.ô

óVery quaint. Quite expressive too, what?ô

óYes sir. Expressive and quaint. And containing no small, um, measure of wisdom some might say.ô

óA *chorbn* é ôMiddleton-Pike recalled, testing a word heôd registered.

óWith a more stressed *ch* from the throat sir. Like phlegm you want to expel. *Cchhhh* é like that sir. Think of *cchhching* out a splinter of pork chop lodged in your gullet.ô

óQuite so, quite so.ôMiddleton-Pike shrugged. óStill, not a language Iôd care to learn. Itôs all right for the dashed Jews, I suppose. Certainly not for a man in my position.ô

He allowed his gut to sag outwards and stroked the walrus moustache with his forefingers, elegantly twirling the waxed tips.

óAnyway, English is the language they need to learn, really. Language of the conqueror, isnôt it, Rabinowitz, eh? Eh? And thatôs me ï a conqueror, damn their eyes!ô

óOf course, sir. Although as the Jews would probably say of you, sir, em, in their *Jew* language, *'a katz vos mýakvet ken kain meiz nit chapen'.'*

óAnd that means?ô

óIt means sir, you are, wise beyond your years.ô

óWhy thank you, my good man.ô

Middleton-Pike preened briefly, looking proudly at his reflection in the yellowing window across the hall.

óJolly decent of you to say so. Wise? Hmmm é and so I am, so I am,ôMiddleton-Pike guffawed, oblivious to his assistantôs actual suggestion that a meowing cat is incapable of catching any mice.

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ed aching ligaments.

óDo for me a favour,ô he asked. óPut on the kettle for tea.ô

óSure thing,ô I rose and in three strides was in the kitchenette.

óWhatever happened to Jerzy?ô I called as the kettle whistled.

óFirst the tea, then the rest of the chapter,ô Yitzhak called back.

Routinely, he sipped his second cup of tea, mindful of his bladder, which, he swore blind, had shrunk to the size of a raisin. Then, once the Earl Grey had been satisfactorily downed, he set the cup on the tiny chipboard side table, knitted his fingers over his belly, gazed up at the ceiling and continued his tale.

It was sundown when the boys reached the gates that led out of the port and into the town. Tadorus read the document in his hand.

óLook? I suddenly became Theodore Isaacs,ô he said in wonderment. óJust like that ï I am a person who didnôt exist until an hour ago.ô

Jerzy shrugged.

óAll right, Tadorus,ô he said. óIôll maybe see you around the town sometime.ô

He turned to walk away.

óBut é arenôt you coming with me?ô Tadorus asked.

óHell, no,ô said Jerzy, turning. óWhy would I go with you to some workhouse? Iôm going my own way.ô

óI thought é arenôt we friends?ô

óFriends?ô Jerzy scoffed. óWake up. Youôre just a little boy. A short pants *pischer* just off mammaôs tit, for Christôs sake. Iôm a man with plans and they donôt include dragging a child along behind me, hanging onto my coat.ô

óBut the time on the shipé ó

óé was just time stuck together on a stinking tub eating *sheiss* with weevils and slop the crew wouldnôt touch. That sure as eggs does not make us friends. Jesus Christ! Weôre nothing more than two people who got stuck together and travelled from there to here ï and now weôre here, this is where we go our own way.ô

Jerzy snorted, shook his head and began his climb up the hill to the Castle, leaning forward with energy and purpose and no essence of shame in his wake.

He did not look back.

Theodore watched until the gray shape of Jerzy became a diminishing square, then a minute dot, then nothing.

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Strangely, there was no sense of betrayal or hurt: he did
n after Jerzy plaintively calling his name. Theodore struggled for a moment to try and understand why it was that felt no fear at the notion of being totally alone.

He wondered if being alone wasn't necessarily such a bad idea. He had realised weeks before, when he had set sail from Lithuania, that he had just himself to depend on.

Perhaps the Polish boy was simply someone sent by God to help him pass the time of day.

He didn't even know what Jerzy's new name was.

Truth be told, he didn't really care.

Theodore felt nothing other than a calm recognition that he should now wind his way towards where the moron and the bitch ran their Inn.

There would surely be *shabbats* in the home of Jews, he reckoned.

Briefly, he remembered his family's traditional *Shabbat* every Friday night. His father would hold the wine in his left hand, place his right hand on his son's head (always knocking the *yarmulke* askew) and sing in Hebrew:

May God show you favour and be gracious to you.
May God shine his countenance upon you and grant you peace.

Sighing, Tadorus-now-Theodore hefted his little suitcase off the dirt road and wandered down to his potential new home, kicking pebbles as small boys do, until he reached a rambling dump garbed in peeling green paint and with begrimed windows gawking blindly onto the world. It was appropriately named *Katzes Bording House.*

Moishe Katz instantly answered Theodore's timid tap on the door, as if he had either been pre-warned of Theodore's arrival or had as his lot in life, the task of waiting for people to come a-knocking. He was a squatty ball of *schmaltz,* blue-jowelled and reeking of a rampantly untreated allergy (clearly not caused by soap) which had turned his entire body into a relief map of Europe after the Congress of Vienna. Muddy eyes set far too close together switched from side to side with the rhythm of an adder sizing up a rat and had that peculiar oriental slant which hinted correctly at an ancestry which included a forbear being raped by Genghis Khan's hordes.

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ayed a hint of goldï tipped canines, and he scratched
s as he silently sized up the boy, saying nothing, just scratching and picking and examining. Theodore wasnôt quite sure of the etiquette, so he stood politely and deferentially allowed himself to be sized up.

Moishe Katzôs wife, Gilda, hove into view a moment later, briefly distracting Theodore, who wanted to look anywhere but the manôs hands. She was a wholly unpleasant specimen possessed of stevedore shoulders and gigantic, pendulous breasts, which swayed hypnotically, like oat bags. Gilda Katz, her hair hennaed in the fashion of revolutionary era French hussies, spoke in an orchestrated set of gasps and wheezes, her emphysemic lungs created by an endless chain of hand-rolled cigarettes.

Even now, a fag dangled at the corner of a mouth like a paper cut. Precisely round rouge circles the size of Guineas marked the areas where, approximately, a prettier womanôs cheekbones would be. In Gilda Katzôs case makeup was a mask worn to convince the world she was exactly the raving beauty she imagined herself to be.

Ill-fitting dentures, which caused her to pepper tiny gobbets of food at whomever she was speaking to, helped create a wonderful experience for the recipients of her rasping conversation as they were bombarded alternatively by minisculous missiles and gaseous tobacco breath.

ôWhat you want?ô she snapped at Theodore in English.

He stuttered back in Yiddish a sentence he had taught himself to recite off by heart, as he climbed the hill to *Katzes Bording House*: ôMy name is Theodore. I am looking for somewhere to live. I have just got off the boat from Lithuania. I have no money but I will work for my keep.ô

ôNo money?ô whined Moishe Katz in Yiddish, digging at his scabs. ôWhat you tóink is dis place? A charity Iôm running? *Gey feifen ahfen yam!*ô

ôNo money, no stay,ô his wife confirmed.

ôNo money,ô Moishe Katz crabbed at his sores. óCan you believe?ô

Irritated, Gilda Katz spat delicately into the flowers and then gazed shrewdly at Theodore, thinking, plotting, and working out odds and possibilities. Theodore imagined he could hear her mind clicking.

Eventually a thick eyebrow lifted a half-inch.

Sheôs going to murder me, Theodore thought, trembling. He clutched the handle of his little suitcase, imagining it was the finger of God.

Gilda Katz eyed Theodoreôs small frame, clearly working out how long he should be boiled before serving him garnished with *perogin.*

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es which terrified Theodore more than the face itself, mbined odours of the couple, more than Moishe Katzôs nauseating scratching.

óSo é what kind work you can do?ô Gilda Katz asked craftily.

óAnything. Almost,ôsaid Theodore, looking at the floor and realising the only thing he was really qualified to do was to be twelve years old.

The woman walked slowly around and behind Theodore, making of her fingers little budgie beaks, which she used to punctuate her sentences, pecking incessantly at the boyôs cheeks and buttocks as she spoke.

ó Iôm tõink,ôshe wheezed in Yiddish as she circled and pecked, ódat we can make from you some use.ô

ôWhat you got in mind?ô Moishe Katz asked warily.

ó*Shtum,'* she ordered her husband distractedly, óand let me tõink dis tõrough completely.ô

She circled and pecked, circled and pecked. Finally, she turned to Moishe Katz, who immediately ceased scratching.

óSo vy we not put der boy to verk witô de gels?ôshe asked cannily.

ôWhat? In de kitsen?ô Moishe Katz was appalled.

óNo, *schmuck*!ô Gilda Katz railed, uppercut-slapping the back of her husbandôs head. ôNot wit' der *kitsen* gels. Witô de *udder* gels é you know ï de *gels* gels*!'*

ó I not understand.ô

óChrist!ô Gilda Katz shrieked in frustration, creating a brief and terrifying spasm of coughing which caused her to lean on the balustrade to catch her breath.

Eventually, she gasped, ôPut de boy witô de *nafkes*, dammit, Katz!ô

óAh é ô Moishe Katz now understood. Almost. ó*Dose* gels.ô

ôDose gels, yes. Der hoors.ô

Still not totally sure of his wifeôs idea, Moishe Katz scratched his head.

ôBut, so what de boy gonna *do?* Witô dose gels?ô

Gilda Katz emitted a forlorn and bubbling sigh and flicked her half-inch of cigarette into the road.

This was not the first time sheôd had to explain the basics of life to her husband. If I hadnôt shown him what his *petselleh* was for, she thought for not the first time, Iôd still be a virgin (if you discounted the Pimstein twins and Israel Rutstein for whom sheôd provided a unique *bar mitzvah* gift when in the brief bloom of her youth).

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ô?ô Gilda Katz jeered sarcastically at her husband. óFirst, de boy is still a baby, so he not likely to *shtupp* de gels for free and make dem preggint like your *trombenik* brother, Stanley, bless his departed soul.ô

óAh,ô said Moishe Katz shrewdly, óbut how you can be sure he not gonna *shtupp* de gels behind mein back when I not looking?ô

óYou tôink dis boy gonna *shtupp* the gels?ô Gilda Katz snorted. óJesus, Katz! He only é ô

She swung on Theodore.

óHow old you, little boy?ô she rasped in Yiddish.

óTwelve,ô answered Theodore.

óTwelve. See?ô trumpeted Gilda Katz. óTwelve means he also donôt know what his *petselleh's* for.ô

She explained her thinking to her husband. Slowly.

óListen. So right now,ô she wheezed, ówe got der two Malay girls. Dere only job is cleaning up after de gentlemins callers. Unnerstan'?

óSo, if now we got de boy to clean up de rooms instead, end make de beds, wipe away der *gloppis* from the sheets é det mean we can use the Malay gels for satisfying of more gentlemins. See?ô

Moishe Katz finally understood.

ódet mins,ô he crowed with the delight that accompanies a sudden dawning of rare knowledge, ówe den got ten hoors instead of eight! Two extra, which mean we can take in (he added on his fingers) maybe anudder maybe two, tôree punds a week.ô

Gilda Katz rolled her eyes. ó*Oy, a gezunt dir in kepele!* Such a smart *boykele* you turned out to be.ô

To Theodore: óSo, boy, here vot we do. I give you room, mit vun meal a day. Maybe breakfast. Some bread. Some tea. Your job is every day, seven days a week, you go to back of house. In de beck you see some rooms witô eight pretty gels. Wait. No ï is now *ten* pretty gels. All right, so also maybe not so pretty. Anyway, for you, just make look only and cleanink.ô

She shook a forefinger in Theodoreôs face.

óEnd rememmer, dere not never no *shtupping!* Ever. Unnerstanô?ô

óI understand.ô

So you clean up der rooms fun de gels. You make dere beds. You clean floor witô mop, mit water. Sometime maybe you need der carbolicses soap from der cleaning. *Farschtain?'*

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d sometime if a gel gets maybe a *schlog in der kop* from ce, den you clean up der bloods. Again, mit der carbolicses soap if de bloods not come off de sheets mit just water.ô

Gilda Katz warned, óBut you make sure you not become friend from de gels. You just worker. Dey just *nafkes*. Dey not decent, clean peoples like us.ô

She abruptly hawked something ghastly into her fist from somewhere deep within her bubbling chest. It seemed to perk her up.

óMaybe we give you a sixpence a week,ô she continued generously. óYou do good, maybe bit more. Maybe a shilling. You bring a gentlemins to de gels, we give you extra sixpence for each gentlemins.ô

Theodore had no clue what a sixpence was.

óIf der gentlemins you find come and *shtupp,* but not pay,ô said the suddenly pragmatic Moishe Katz, now wagging his forefinger at Theodore, óden you gotta pay us instead. No free *shtupping* in dis house.ô

Theodore had no idea what *shtupping* was either but was not going to ask.

óDetôs right,ô Gilda Katz beamed proudly and awfully at her husband, and lit another hand-rolled cigarette.

óNow, Katz, take boy to der *kleine* room behind de kitsen. Dere little one next to de pantry. Give him blanket. Maybe see if we got old towel. Den when you done, *mein* clever *Katzelleh,* come in our room to talking. End stop der *kratsing* already!ô

Theodore gaped at Gilda Katz and wondered what she and Moishe would be doing in their room. He could only guess that it had something to do with his skin. And he also wondered what she was going to do with the stuff sheôd coughed into her fist.

Not for the last time, his stomach turned.

Theodore Isaacs had arrived, Yitzhak concluded.

ó Iôll tell you more next time,ô he said. óBring bagels. The kind with sesame seeds.ô

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Sadie Rosen walks up to some men standing on the pavement. 'Farshtain Yiddish?' she asks them all. They all shrug because they don't understand her. Eventually one man nods his head. Sadie says, 'So vot's de time?' ï Old Yiddish joke.

Theodore was ushered into his new room by Moishe Katz. It was substantially smaller than the tiny room in his home in RÎ digkās and, like his cubbyhole on the ship, it was possessed of neither windows nor rugs, but instead heaps of dust, old rags and rodent droppings.

The room was somewhat like a large box, the bottom of which was only wide enough for Theodore to sleep in a perpetual foetal position. It had an angled roof to cater for the camber of the stairs that angled up to the top storey of the boarding house where travellers stayed overnight before their better judgment took over.

A nail in the wall served as a cupboard.

The bed was not so much an actual bed or even a cot, but rather a wadded collection of mouldy old clothes, newsprint and a rancid thing that may have once been a pullover but was now a scrap of wool carrying a pattern. Theodore chose not to decide which it was, opting to rather take the foul-smelling jersey to the rear of the boarding house and toss it onto a pile of refuse near the back gate.

It was there that he saw, for the first time and from a distance, some of the girls who provided the assistance to gentlemen visitors Moishe and Gilda Katz referred to as *'shtupping*ôï which Theodore had perceived as meaning some sort of service for those obviously single males from the town who clearly needed (he imagined) buttons sewn onto their shirts or their britches mended as their own wives or mothers were obviously elsewhere.

The blood he had been told he might have to wash away, he deduced with pre-teen logic, must therefore be the result of needle pricks or scissor cuts suffered while the girls sewed and stitched and patched. It was the only way, he concluded, they could possibly draw blood, a gentleman being unlikely to remove his jacket (or God forbid, his pants) in the presence of a lady who was not his wife or his mother.

Later that same evening, after being grudgingly given a sandwich by Gilda Katz (it was a slice of bread folded over with something unspeakable stuffed within the fold) and a glass of murky water, Theodore wandered outdoors again.

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Whistling and with his hands nonchalantly stuffed into his pockets as if to bamboozle observers that he was simply out for a stroll and not to spy, he discovered that the girlsô service was clearly not simply tailoring and mending, but was of an obviously more festive nature. Sounds of merriment clanged through the night air as gentlemen visitors entered the rooms behind the boarding house. Later, their roaring laughter intermingled with girlish giggling, which indicated that there must be someone telling comic stories.

Theodore, not for the last time, shrugged it off to the strange behaviour of *goyim.*

There were at social gatherings in RÎdigkās a great many jokes told, mainly by the village comic, Mordechai the tailor while the village women sat in another room well away from stories deemed too risqué for women (but oddly acceptable to small eavesdropping boys.)

Throughout his life Theodore loved retelling Mordechaiôs favourite story about the cow from Minsk.

Russia was inevitably the butt of Eastern European jokes, the assumption being that Russians were mostly mindless peasants and therefore none too bright.

Mordechaiôs story went like this:

ó There was in a small village in Russia,ô Mordechai beamed, the lamplight shining off his round, bald head, ó that had just one cow. Then it stopped giving milk one day. Just like that! *Pfft!* No more milk! So the Mayor and the village elders gathered together. To discuss, which is what Russians Jews do all the time. They discuss. They negotiate.

óSo one *alte kocker* says he knows of a cow from Moscow which can be bought for two hundred roubles. A lot of money in those days! Then Mendel the Grocer says he knows of another cow for sale, but from Minsk, and which costs only one hundred roubles.

óA bargain! *A vilder metsiye*! Being a village where people were short of arm and deep of pocket they decide to buy the cheaper cow. They send Mendel the Grocer to Minsk to buy it.

ó It turns out to be a wonderful cow,ô Mordechai enthused. ó It gave more milk than the other cow ever had and was such a success that the elders got together to discuss (again) and they reached a smart business decision. Buy a bull, they decided, make some more cows, and the village could then sell the extra milk, buy more cows with the profitsé and so forth.

óGenius! So they put all their money together and bought a *gezunte* bull, as fine a specimen as you could wish for, which they expectantly put it in with the cow.

óBut the cow wants nothing to do with the bull. Nothing!

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close to the cow, she moves away. The bull approaches other side. The bull moves from the back, the cow moves forward. The bull approaches from the front, the cow backs away.

ô'A brokh tsu dayn lebn!' The villagers curse and threaten the poor bull, and beg and plead with the cow. But whatever they do the cow is not interested.

óIn desperation, and because they suspect maybe the bull is a *faygele* and not interested in cows, they call the Rabbi, who comes to apply his wisdom gleaned from vast Talmudic knowledge to the disinterested cow.

óThe Rabbi arrives and watches the whole show. He watches the bull approach the cow which moves away again and again, wherever the bull goes, the cow goes the other way é from the side, from the back, from the front always the cow showing no interest in the bull whatsoever.

óThe Rabbi sighs and says to the Mayor, óyou got this cow from Minsk, didnôt you?ôô

óHow did you know that?ô The Mayor asks in amazement.

The Rabbi answers sadly, óMy wife is from Minskô

Yitzhak arched his back and kneaded his lower lumbar area to release some of the age-worn stiffness.

óIôd like to say that Theodore retained his innocence for years to come, but I canôt because I simply donôt know. Either way, his focus was not on enjoying the wondrous bounties of the flesh, but rather seeking an education, learning to speak English é and getting away from the Katzes who, Iôm not so sorry to say, did not become loving foster parents to Theodore.

óInstead they treated him like a small pack animal. A slave. A small slave. Boy! Do this, do that. Boy! Clean the *sheiss* off the floor. Boy! Roll that drunken *mamzer* into the street and kick his *toches* é all the lessons a young boy needs as he learns to make his way in life at a cost of sixpence a week.ô

Yitzhak rolled his eyes.

ó*Nu,* so anyway, between the drudgery of his daily labours for Moishe and Gilda Katz, Theodore wandered about the nearby streets, exploring ï not for hidden treasures as twelve-year-olds do, but with a rather more mature outlook.ô

On his first night at the *Katzes Bording House* he sat scrunched in his tiny space and considered his future.

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ngôs session with Middleton-Pike ï and with Noodle Rabinowitzôs advice still fresh in his mind ï Theodore recognised would must learn English. Urgently. He would also need to earn and save as much money as possible (and quickly) so he could move to somewhere more to his liking. He wasnôt going to do that without understanding English.

There was no closely-knit group of family and friends to embrace him in this new place, but this did not overly concern Theodore, who discovered that he was more than comfortable in his own company.

One more thing occurred to him that first evening: ôItôs a funny thing,ô Theodore confided years and years later, ôbut I had still not cried one tear. I was a little boy cast out on my own in a strange land where I didnôt speak the language. I had no idea if my parents were alive or dead, and I knew I would never see them ever again. I should have cried, surely?ô

He wondered if he had lost the ability to cry when he left Lithuania. As if crying was something fleeing children must leave behind with their favourite toys.

Theodore realised that there was in his. é What? His soul? An emptiness that was actually full of something he couldnôt identify, and it bothered him. It struck him as odd. Something he needed to investigate about himself to discover exactly what was wrong.

Sitting on the pile of stuff that was his bed, Theodore tried to force himself to cry.

First, he made a turned-down mouth with a pursed and quivering bottom lip such as you see on little children a second before the tears arrive.

Nothing.

Then he tried to remember his weeping *mamelleh,* keening for her lost boy as he was whisked away from his home. Theodore squinched his eyes, tried to imagine her utter anguish. Nothing.

He thought of his wailing father uttering a blessing over his head and tried to consider how saturated with heartache his father must have been, losing his only child. He imagined a beating from Middleton-Pike, a slap across the face from Gilda Katz, a rash all over his body like Moishe Katz.

And still, there was no misery. No welling up inside as if he was about to burst.

It wasnôt as if heôd never cried of course.

When Chaim Pincus had stolen his pet frog and stamped on it until it looked like a *knish* his granny had dropped on the floor, he had cried copiously.

In fairness, he thought, I was only four at the time.

And when his teacher, Mrs. Pagremanski, had ordered him to stand in the corner because heôd laughed during morning prayers, heôd wept quietly and promised *Hashem* heôd never do it again.

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phise, as would Yitzhak, about this strange behaviour. In Cape Town though, in his room under the steps, he eventually gave up trying to cry. He shrugged, and flopped down into the pile of alleged bedding, plunging headlong into the deepest sleep he had ever had.

The following morning he was awakened by Moishe Katz savagely kicking at the door.

ôUp fun der bed, lazy boy!ô Katz shouted. ôTime for der werk! Make hurrying up! Dis is not a hoytel! Well, it is a hoytel, but not for you. Hurry!ô

Theodore sat up, stretched, remembered where he was (heôd been dreaming vividly of Chaim Pincus and the frog, which in his dream looked exactly like Gilda Katz) and dressed quickly in his second set of clothes.

In the kitchen ï der *kitsen* ï Gilda Katz reluctantly shoved across the table a cracked cup with tea. The tea was cold, of course, and there was neither milk nor sugar added for flavour. Theodore knew instinctively not to ask.

Gilda Katz impatiently watched Theodore drink the tea, clicking dirty fingernails on the countertop, tapping towers of cigarette ash into an empty teacup.

Theodore swallowed the tea, mumbled a quick thank you.

ôEnd nah,ôsprayed Gilda Katz rubbing her hands together, óto werk!ô

Theodore, clutching a pail of water that held the promise of dysentery, some ragged cloths and a bar of ócarbolicsesôsoap, was ushered towards the back rooms, where the previous nightôs festivities had taken place.

ôYou remember, boy,ôthreatened Moishe Katz, stooping and wagging the ritual forefinger at Theodore, ôYou no *ever* touch de gels. You no talk even to de gels. You definitely no *shtupp* de gels. *Farshtain*?ô

Theodore nodded, drew in a deep breath, and entered the room.

It would be lovely to tell you (said Yitzhak somewhat ruefully) that Theodore was confronted by a bevy of beautiful maidens, naiads and nymphs so heartbreakingly beautiful they took his breath away, and that the prettiest of them all took a shine to him and looked after him for the rest of his stay at the house. But of course, that didnôt happen.

Firstly and most importantly, *de gels* had not seen girlhood in many years. Other than the two Malay girls who had been shifted from kitchen duty into the business of satisfying the requirements of gentlemen callers, the remainder were specimens scraped from beneath the dregs of the earth.

Theodore guessed the women ranged in age from older than his own mother to very much older than his own mother. At this early hour, some were draped over a variety of couches and chairs, asleep, and in various stages of undress.

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nourished; as if theyôd been purchased by the pound.

or croaked.

The room sounded like an orchestra with tuberculosis.

From what Theodore saw at first scan, the women were all missing a variety of teeth; their complexions were welcome mats outside houses where no decent people ever go.

One particularly substantial woman seemed to be the most senior, in Theodoreôs estimation of a hierarchy based on age, poundage, makeup and volume. The woman lay spread-eagled in an easy chair like Barabbas awaiting crucifixion.

Theodore noted with some relief that she was strategically covered, after a fashion, by a tattered sheet which had incongruously needlepointed tiny red roses along its seam.

It was a first view of the relatively nude female form for Theodore. Happily it was relative enough to not to totally warp his future opinion of the gender.

Regardless, it was still (to a small boy) provocative enough and Theodore had to shut his eyes while seeking out the necessary Commandment to protect him from impure thoughts which may or may not have been connected to the mysterious concept of *shtupping*.

He considered and rejected the committing of adultery because he wasnôt sure if the woman was married or not, and anyway he didnôt really fully understand what adultery was, other than it was conducted by adults.

Then he thought of the commandment about honouring fathers and mothers and realised his parents, distant though they might be, would clearly not approve of, for Godôs sake, his peeping at a nearly *nakte* woman.

But his parents werenôt exactly there to be dishonoured, so that Commandment was redundant.

Finally, Theodore settled on the Commandment that ordered people to not covet their neighboursô oxen, maidservants and so forth.

It would have to do.

Theodore spent his first working day sweeping and cleaning around the snoring heaps of partially clad flesh in the room which was somewhat like a rather large lounging area. It had several couches but no rockers, and in the corner of the room was a dented upright piano. A man with clasps on his sleeves snoozed with his head on the keyboard.

An odour Theodore recognised instantly as alcohol hung like a pall in the room, although the grog on view was clearly nothing like the *Shabbat* wine his father allowed him to sip if heôd been well behaved.

One of the women rose during the morning cleaning session, opened one eye, farted noisily, and staggered off to a small side room ï one of what Theodore later discovered were the *nafkes'* sleeping quarters, each containing a cot and a small cupboard for the womenôs meagre belongings.

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cleaning done, Theodore bravely decided he would
est and therefore most important woman, whose tubaesque snoring was in perfect counterpoint to a series of coughing spasms.

Theodore decided to tap her on the shoulder to awaken her gently and offer either a cup of tea or a blanket (or both) on what was a chilly day.

He did this because Theodore was a dutiful, thoughtful boy.

Theodore was kind and considerate of others.

Theodore wanted to do a *mitzvah* ï because God smiles on people who do good deeds.

Theodore was a *schmuck*.

He touched the woman on her shoulder, as gently as a butterfly tiptoeing over a bay leaf, until the woman winched open a baggy eye which eventually focused on the small boy standing alongside her.

ôMe Tador ... Me Theodore,ô he introduced himself brightly.

ôFook awf.ô The woman belched and returned to her noisy sleep.

So he did.

At mid-afternoon, after Moishe Katz had checked Theodoreôs work and deemed it acceptable, he cast around, established his bearings and walked off with the mountain always on his left in search of a school which would take him in and continue the education he had so cherished back in Lithuania. Despite Mrs. Pagremanski.

What he found was the Cape Town High School which, he would later discover, had been opened just two years before. As schools went, even his old school back in RÎ digkās was bigger than this school. Much, much bigger.

The Cape Town High School, which Theodore saw over a low fence that day in 1862, was a single room. It would, over the next few years, grow, run out of space as more immigrants arrived, move, then grow more, and then move again until it finally settled into a permanent home.

On this his second day in the town, Theodore stood and watched a clutch of end-of-day children of all ages emerge from the little school, passing a small sign which stated that this was a school for Jewish children.

Theodore listened to the chatter of the children and recognised right away some talking Polish and others chatting happily in what he understood as Latvian (which the shipôs cook had spoken).

Then three little boys with olive skin and pitch-black wavy hair hanging down to their shoulders emerged with a ball, which they kicked along the dirt road, whistling and yelling as they went.

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speaking to any of the students. Instead, he waited
idery specimen with round spectacles and who closed the classroom door and scuttled towards the gate where Theodore stood, hopeful he would the man would welcome him into the school with open arms.

But of course that didnôt happen either.

It was for Theodore another of the many frustrations he would have to endure in the years to come. The teacher spoke English and some French, but no Yiddish, German or Russian. The more Theodore battled to make the man understand he was a Lithuanian boy, new in Cape Town and wanting an education, the less the man understood.

Unlike his arrival in the port, or meeting the Katzes, his name and home were suddenly less important than his religion, this being a Jewish school.

ó*Ich Jude,'* Theodore said, pointing at himself.

ôYooder*?'* the teacher echoed. ôWhat is Yooder?ô

ó*Jude, Yiddish*. Me!ô

ôYes, yes, *Yiddish*. Me Anglican,ô he said impatiently. ôSo what can I do for you?ô

ôMe *Yewish*,ô Theodore walked to the sign and pointed at the words. ôMe school.ô

óAh! I see! Oh, well, excellent ï that makes it all very clear,ô smiled the man. ôTell your mummy or father to come and enrol you first thing in the morning. Weôll sign you in chop-chop.ô

Theodore had not a clue what heôd been told, but the sentence was long, and the man had smiled reassuringly, so he assumed the teacher had understood.

ôMust dash now,ô the man said, patting Theodore awkwardly on the head. ôFrightfully important meeting.ô He sped away, turning once to call, ôRemember to tell your mummy to see me tomorrow!ô

And then he was gone.

The following afternoon Theodore returned to the school after his chores.

The school was empty.

The same thing happened the following day. Frustratingly, Theodore was never able to get to the school in time to catch the teacher ï and even when he woke up earlier to buy himself more time, Gilda and Moishe Katz found more tasks from him to do, and which took him through to mid-afternoon when they would disappear for their ritual afternoon snooze.

After a few weeks of fruitless attempts to get to the school in the morning, he was desperate enough to ask Gilda and Moishe Katz for help.

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chool,ô he begged them in Yiddish. ôBut I need to go in
e. Every day when I finish my work it is in the middle of the afternoon. Please will one of you come with me? Or let me go in the morning? Just one day maybe, please? And in the week because the school is closed on *Shabbat* and Sunday. Please?ô

Gilda Katz looked in astonishment at Theodore, then at Moishe Katz, whose scratching left hand hung frozen, poised over his scabbed right hand. Moishe Katz, in amazement, looked at his wife in turn, then back at the impertinent little boy.

Mystified, Theodore watched the Katzes simultaneously burst into an avalanche of hooting and cackling at his sheer bravado.

A lack of breath eventually forced Gilda Katzôs hysteria to an abrupt hacking conclusion and her great amusement switched in a blink to intense, palpably icy aggravation.

ôListen, boy,ô she rolled her great shoulders like a prizefighter, ôHere are der choices. Der choice number vun is you peck der begs and get out mein hoyse. De bleddy nerve you werk fun a few days only and vant time off areddy! End der werk you do badly, I should kick you out now. *Skande* on you and for shame you take advantage nice peoples like me end Katz!

ôDer choice number two is, you do de werk, you get der payment fun a sixpence, end you forget der nonsense fun der school end ve forgive you fun dis, dis, dis *baloney*.ô

ôYou lucky! You even got lovely home,ô Moishe Katz chimed in acidly, sweeping his arm towards the pantry. ôFor shame, you take der good graces of mein vife end me end spit on it, *ptoo*! Like det,ô he added, with demonstration.

ôBut é ô

ôBut no but,ô Gilda Katz said, tea potting her hands on her waist. ôYou make cleanink. No more school nonsense or you get out det door.ô

Theodore dropped his head, nodded.

In a good apple youôll sometimes find a worm, the saying goes, and this particular apple was full of them.

Di tseit ken alts ibermachen – time can change everything, Theodore thought, so a strategy of patience would serve him best.

ôAll right,ô he said. ôIôll work and stay. I have no choice. I have nowhere else to go.ô

ôGood! Smart boy!ô Gilda Katz concluded. ôNo more ówishesô nonsense. Just werk end make cleanink.ô

I suppose, Theodore thought, asking them about the possibility of a *Shabbat* dinner and service would be pointless.

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eodore would talk about how taking the Katzes to the school as his sponsors would probably have been akin to serving a baked ham at *Rosh Hashanah.*

Undefeated, Theodore did the next best thing: he turned to God for help.

He put on his *yarmulke,* closed his eyes and uttered his own tailor-made prayer in the sanctum of his tiny box of a room.

ôDear God,ô he prayed. ôForgive me for what I am going to do, but I have no choice. I have to get an education and I can only help myself because the Talmud says that *Hashem* helps those who help themselves. So I have to do something which is bad, but Iôll explain why later. Sorry. Thank you. By the way, this is Theodore ï you used to know me as Tadorus Ivanchuk from RÎdigkãs. Sorry. Again. Amen.ô

That night, when the revelry and *shtupping* had swung into full action, complete with wailing, glass breaking and raucous singing, Theodore sneaked out the house and crept towards the school.

Under a pale thumbnail of a moon, he carefully and soundlessly cracked open a window with a small chisel he had found (see how God provides?) and crawled into the classroom, which had a dozen desks in three neat rows.

Theodore struck gold inside the very first desk.

Sneaking back out through the window, with his treasure tucked under his armpit, he raced up the hill to the *Katzes Bording House* to examine in minute detail the book, which would change his life by teaching him English.

Theodore ran his finger along the title and mouthed the words: *Young Lady's Accidence; or, A Short and Easy Introduction to English Grammar.* It was written by a person named Caleb Bingham.

A book written by someone with so elegant a name as Caleb Bingham, Theodore rationalised, made irrelevant the Commandment decreeing that we should not steal. And anyway, expedience and a trembling moral compass decreed in the mind of the twelve-year-old boy that this particular theft was at best nothing more than a temporary loan. At worst, it was a crime that was a means to an end ï that end being Theodoreôs pathway forward, which began with two more minor thefts.

Reading with the help of the light of a single candle, which heôd pilfered from the sitting room, and gnawing on a pear heôd whisked off a plate in the kitchen when no one was looking, Theodore began to study the English language according to Caleb Bingham.

From the very first word, he loved it.

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Drei zakhen ken men nit bahalten: libeh, hisen un dales – Three things cannot be hidden: love, coughing and poverty.

Thereôs no doubt the bartender loves drunkards ï but wouldnôt give his daughterôs hand in marriage to one (stated Yitzhak as he picked delicately at the cocktail fish balls Dora Lipschitz had *schlepped* across from next door, balancing a small tray on the frame of her aluminium walking frame.)

ôWhile these arenôt exactly *gefilte* fish, they are nonetheless very edible,ô he diagnosed.

ôOf course, itôs mainly the Ashkenazi Jews who *fress* these snacks like theyôre part of the menu from the last supper which, by the way, was clearly not a kosher affair judging by the paintings of the day.

ôI ask you, did you see separate plates for meat and milk in any of those pictures? Of course not! And everybody leaning over Christ and pretending they love him? Meanwhile, if you look at specially the Da Vinci painting you can see the bad one, Judith Iscariot, just waiting to betray Jesus, the *mamzer.* Clearly heôs a *Dybbuk*, destined for his soul to wander around forever, seeking refuge in the body of an honest, God-fearing man. Evil has no power over such people all. Like there could ever be such a person, *Feh!'*

'*Dybbuks* are a kabbalist concept, surely?ô I asked Yitzhak.

'Double *feh!'* he responded, slapping the air. ôKabbalists, Zionists, Conservatives, Reformists é in the end weôre all *Yidden*. So too was Jesus, you know.ô

It was a recurring theme with the old man. Yitzhak needed, for reasons of his own, to continually affirm Christianityôs roots by referring to Christôs religion, as had Theodore decades before.

Yitzhak was on the charge, as when talking about his six favourite subjects, family, religion, books, religion, music and religion.

ôAnyway, provably Jesus was betrayed by one of his best friends. This goes to show what Iôve always said: the biggest failing of *goyim* ï no loyalty.ô

He gathered more steam.

ôThink of Julius Caesar,ô demanded Yitzhak, directing a fork-impaled fishball at the top right hand shelf of his library, which contained óde classicsôï everything from rabbinical hypotheses via Dickens to Shakespeare to (I was staggered to see) a well-thumbed copy of Jack Kerouacôs *On the Road.*

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hetorically, ómurdered Julius Caesar on the Ideas of March?

óHis best friends, thatôs who.ô

He creaked to his feet, started towards the bookshelf to pull out the relevant tome, thought better of it, uttered a brief and heartfelt ó*oy*ô and sat down again.

óBrutus! Casca! Cassius Clay! All of his best friends and government associates ï what were they called again? Senators!ô Yitzhak trumpeted.

óAnd were they Jewish? Of course not! Roman Catholics every one! You see? *Goyim*! Not a loyal bone in their bodies.

óAnd so they stabbed Julius. Which by the way is also a Jewish name. Did you know Groucho Marxôs real name was Julius? Anyway so they stabbed him sixty times. Caesar, not Groucho of course. Why would anyone want to stab a Marx Brother?

óSo you want to talk loyalty? Pah! Nothing! Especially the Pope, wearing his little red *yarmulke* all the time because he knows God is also Jewish and heôs taking no chances.

óListen, you see other *goyim* – they never wear anything on their heads in their Churches, but the Pope? And the Cardinals? All taking no chances, praying with their heads covered, hoping *Hashem* mistakes Latin for Hebrew, like He canôt tell the difference.

ó*Goyim*? All taught as children to grow like onions with their heads in the soil and hate us Jews. I know this because I have the scars for proof!ô

óScars?ô

óThatôs for later in the story.ô

óSo youôre done with the gentiles and their loyalty shortcomings?ô

óFor the time being.ô

Yitzhak punched his chest gently and belched.

ó*A chorbn!* Iôm getting such heartburn.ô He complained. óMeanwhile, eat!ô

Dora Lipschitzôs fine fish balls notwithstanding, there were more pressing items on the menu.

óToday,ô Yitzhak declared, licking his fingers clean of the last smidgens of fish balls, óweôre taking a small walk through Cape Town in the few years that Theodore was there, before he left for the interior with his wife, seeking a future for his family, yes?

óSo I was talking about bartenders é ô

Without wishing to underplay that what Theodore did was in the name of educating himself, itôs clear he became an adept small-time thief, stealing to feed what he called his óbeast of knowledgeô.

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n book from cover to cover and made some sense d back into the small school, selecting each time other desks, Theodore being a democratic petty thief who didnôt want to target specific children.

He eventually found *English grammar: The English language in its elements and forms* by William Chauncey Fowler and read it through the next several nights by candlelight.

A month later, he celebrated his thirteenth birthday by presenting himself with the gift of William Cobbettôs *A Grammar of the English Language.*

It did occur to Theodore that thirteen meant his traditional ascension to manhood, and therefore he was due a *bar mitzvah* ï but he chose not to pursue the ritual, deciding that his life and its responsibilities was currently being lived as an adult. Besides, the townôs tiny Tikvat Israel synagogue was several miles away and, at the end of a long week he didnôt fancy the trek up the steep road.

And anyway, Friday evenings guaranteed schools would be empty, particularly the Cape Town School for Jewish Children, which would allow Theodore undisturbed access, the children and their parents presumably occupied with their own *Shabbat* dinners.

The Sabbath was prime shopping time.

Theodore continued pilfering more and more books in which he discovered the wondrously complex layers of a language which never ceased to astound him.

Adages, idioms, proverbs. Similes and metaphors! Adjectives! Hyperbole! All of which he drank in.

He couldnôt wait to practice.

Of course, he felt extremely guilty when he considered how the schoolôs children might be punished for mislaying their schoolbooks. His mother used to chide him if he claimed to have lost anything. People never lose anything, she would insist. They just misplace them. Theodore imagined without guilt the young boys receiving a caning and the girls being made to stand weeping in a corner.

He resolved to (maybe) sneak the books back into the class at some time in the future.

Or maybe not. Heôd become way too attached to the books é and whatever else he happened to find lying around.

The scope of his collecting broadened in tiny bites as the weeks passed.

Having almost no possessions had created in Theodore a deep-rooted need to cling to whatever he found and declare as his own, so he became a magpie who discarded nothing, believing that everything he owned would eventually have value. In the latter half of the twentieth century, long after he had passed away, those first stolen books were still in the possession of the family. In Yitzhakôs current library in the Hunter Street house.

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a growing suspicion that pinching from a Jewish school effectively made him an anti-Semite) Theodore found another school to burgle. The South African College Schools, founded just a few decades before, was, Theodore discovered, the oldest school in the entire country. Disregarding, that is, any schools the Zulus, Hottentots and other tribes might have had in place for centuries before the French, Dutch, Portuguese and other Europeans arrived in their galleons and steamers.

Certainly, long before the British sailed in.

Maybe the *schvartzers* didnôt have actual schools with desks and blackboards and chalk powder and a corner to stand in for misbehaving children.

It occurred to Theodore that he might be developing a dislike for the British, and he couldnôt fathom exactly why. It was strange because he loved the English language and should logically, therefore, adore the people who spoke it, wrote it, and published it.

ôWould William Shakespeare butcher the name, Ivanchuk?ô Yitzhak interjected. ôHardly. Philip Marlow, perhaps. Bacon definitely é but Shakespeare? Never.ô

Other than Middleton-Pike and one or two guests at the *Katzes Bording House*, Theodore had actually not met any British people at all. And even those he had come across in his day-to-day wanderings around the boarding house or in the town had opted to ignore him, looking past him, over him and around him but never at him.

Was being ignored something to be angry about?

There are advantages to belonging to a group ï a gang, even, such as Theodore and his former school friends had. As gangs go, it wasnôt much of a gang. What sort of gang is it where the leader (Hyman Mickiewicz) runs off home the moment his *mameleh* calls?

There were no gang palace coups back in RÎ digkãs either. No squabbling to see who would be the leader or squaring up to each other with fists balled, ready to fight for the right to be in charge.

Rather, gangs were about snickering in corners because you happened to catch a glimpse of Sadie Kalvaitisô ankles or because you heard the blacksmith use a bad word when he smashed his thumb on the anvil.

A gang was about belonging, and you did what everyone else in the gang did, even if it seemed daringly, excessively risky. But if all the boys were going to do it, so would you, regardless of how irresponsible it might have seemed at the time. The problem, in a *schtetl* like RÎ digkãs, was that any time some boyish mischief had been perpetrated, you were sure to be caught if you were in the gang. There were far too few boys in the village, so by eliminating those boys who were studying for their *bar mitzvahs*, or who were such *nebbishes* they would never even consider of a life of crime, you were guaranteed to be nabbed.

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nd invisible certainly worked when he sneaked into a literary loot or pencils or on a good day, an unfinished sandwich.

Theodore, with the last tendrils of Lithuanian memories still in his mind, found a point of comparison with the English people in Cape Town and a man who lived next door to the Ivanchuk family back in RÎdigkãs. The neighbour, Paulius Naujokaitis, was apparently involved in money, one way or another and obviously had means, always wearing well-tailored clothes and clean boots with very little manure on their soles. Despite being the familyôs neighbour for as long as Theodore could recall, he could not remember the man ever talking to either of his parents, and certainly not to him.

Naujokaitis spoke *at* people only when conversation was absolutely essential, exactly as the English-speaking guests did to the Katzes at the boarding house. And they obviously comprehensively ignored Theodore, placing him (Theodore assessed) at a level below his employers.

But then again, even non-English speakers disregarded him as did the *nafkes,* the Katzes, and even the two recently promoted Malay girls whom he assessed as being at about the same hierarchical level as him.

They all looked right through Theodore Isaacs, late of RÎdigkãs, Lithuania, currently resident in Cape Town, and he didnôt care a fig.

Theodore was philosophical. Better you should pour out your troubles to a stone, but donôt carry them within yourself, he thought in Yiddish, then considered how nice it would be to have a confidante, a friend of any sort.

Another Jerzy, but less of a bastard.

Other than his new language, Theodore had also acquired a taste for the history of his new home, and the role played by the British. He worked on the assumption that just as Christianity is based on a history of less than two thousand years, so too did the British calculate their History of the World based on when they arrived in ï and conquered ï countries across the planet.

Using that flawed logic, this would make the culture of China less than thirty years old, Theodore reasoned, Britain having invaded China in 1839. It did not appear to matter overly much that older history books recorded that these Orientals had been using writing implements for eight centuries, back when their conquerors were running around in animal skins hitting each other on the head with clubs as a means of practising future sour relations with the Irish and Scots.

Of course, any suggestions that Indiaôs culture had its roots as long ago as 3000BC could be swept aside by proving that life for the Hindu apparently only really began in 1798 when Britain and India signed (naturally) yet another pact.

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ï especially the ones the fourth formers were reading at

He adored Alexis de Toquevilleôs *The Old Regime and the French Revolution*, not because it was about the French revolution with lots of riots and Royal heads being lopped off, but because someone had translated the book into English from French é someone clearly as passionate as him about the English language.

Of course, being just thirteen, Theodore didnôt really have a clue what Toqueville was writing about, the French revolution being, in Theodoreôs reckoning, a sort of reverse pogrom, which suited him well enough.

With the current status of the British Empire (the Queen having her finger in *kreplach*s throughout the world) Theodore concluded that the face of the world had reached a natural endpoint. Now that the British were here on this far tip of Africa, the country would obviously be a part of the Queenôs empire for time eternal.

There seemed to be nothing else to conquer.

History though, for the time being, was less important to Theodore than the English language, so every night, using just the flickering light of a pilfered candle, Theodore would prowl through a variety of classrooms in search of plunder, taking just enough to satisfy his next educational requirement.

Theodoreôs grasp of the English language improved rapidly. He had, like so many multilingual Eastern Europeans of the era, a natural ear for other tongues.

And while complexities of English sentence construction did not always come easily to him, he understood enough to think about conversing in English with people other than the Katzes and the occasional visitor who spoke one of the European languages in which he was fluent but who typically ignored him anyway.

Then, to Theodoreôs great joy, a scholarly gentleman, festooned with photographic equipment and thick tomes, moved into the *Katzes Bording House*. He was clearly a scholar, judging by the folded papers, scrolls and a worn satchel out of which peeped a variety of rulers. More to the point, he looked professorial, possessed as he was of a thatch of black hair as wild as a haystack in a Cape gale, and with a full beard monstrous enough to match the most esteemed of Eastern European *Rabbonam*.

Theodore had just emerged from his closet when he heard the visitor chatting with Moishe Katz, whose grasp of German was at best laboured. Theodore quickly recognised the unmistakable gutturals and clipped sentence structure of the Rhineland.

ôHerr Bleek,ô burbled Moishe Katz in abysmal German, ôI will pleasure you by throwing breakfast at your door in the morning. Of course I will have also one of the serfs crush an orange and install it in a clean spectacle for you.ô

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red at Moishe Katz in some confusion. óThrow
ter German.

Theodore stepped forward and, in acceptable German, translated Bleekôs request into Yiddish for a relieved Moishe Katz, who happily trundled off with the breakfast order to Gilda Katz, who was standing in the kitchen watching socks boil on the stove.

Bleek and Theodore could hear from the foyer the muffled sound of the ritual slaps to the back of Moishe Katzôs head, grinning as only delighted eavesdroppers can at the torrent of Yiddish curses and insults raining down on Moishe Katzôs unlovely head. The closing stanza was Gilda Katzôs expressed desire that her husband be transformed into a chandelier to hang by day and burn by night.

ó*Willkommen in Kapstadt*,ôsaid Theodore when it was over.

Bleek gravely shook the small boyôs hand, thanked him for translating and permitted Theodore to haul and struggle up to the landing the hugest valise filled with books.

Bleek, Theodore discovered to his astonishment, was the author of one of the books heôd recently sequestered from the Cape Town Jewish School: *A Comparative Grammar of South African Languages.*

ólôve read it, Herr Bleek,ôhe breathed in awe.

óYou and five other people,ôBleek said wryly. óMind you it was published fairly recently. Iôm surprised copies are even here.ô

This wasnôt Bleekôs first visit to Cape Town, he later explained to Theodore as they sat on the front porch watching the sun set gloriously behind the mountains. Bleek had been a linguist on the staff of the former Cape Governor, Sir George Grey.

óI translated for him, but also had the pleasure of cataloguing Sir Georgeôs famed private library,ôhe explained in high-register formal German.

Theodore was smitten by any job which involved books.

Imagine, no cleaning up *gloppis* deposited on, around and near the gels, no sweeping, no torrents of abuse.

Imagine...

óHow does one become a cataloguer of books?ôhe asked Bleek, who explained that he was more than just a linguist; he was in fact a philologist ï which he repeated slowly for Theodore ï and explained that this title simply identified him as a person who loves language. A great deal.

óMe too!ôTheodore trilled, and rushed to his room to fetch his collection of English books, which he displayed proudly to the German.

Bleek flipped through the pages.

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ein freund,ô Bleek smiled, looking at the flyleaves of one of Amordeiza Almeida, Ernest Mazansky or Cyril Shepstone-Smythe are *you*?ô

Nonplussed, Theodore blurted out how heôd created his book collection, and how he intended (he swore blind on his *Siddur)* that he had every intention of returning them, and ... Bleek shushed him and handed over a copy of his own grammar book.

óFor one who loves language from one who loves language,ô he wrote on the inside front cover. óNow you can return the other one to its rightful owner,ô Bleek suggested.

Over the next few evenings, Bleek told Theodore sweeping stories of his quests into the hinterland in search of what he called óAfrican textsô from the apparently endless flow of missionaries who sallied forth into Africa clutching New Testaments and crucifixes in one hand and the promise of salvation in the other.

óThey were doing Godôs work, surely? Theodore interjected, detecting a bitterness in Bleekôs tone.

óMaybe that was the original intention, but I suspect history will reflect another outcome completely.ô

Bleek explained how the good people of the London Missionary Society had set forth, packed to the gunwhales with Christian zeal, and intent on bringing religion to the Khoekhoe.

The Khoekhoe, he said, was not a species of thieving birds, but were what European people chose to call the Khoikhoi or Khoisan, which name was then corrupted into the word óHottentotô.

óHottentot,ô Bleek said, óis not a name the Khoekhoe enjoy, but when white people insist, black people must obey. That seems to be a common thread in this land. They are deemed to be hewers of wood and carriers of water..ô

So much for equality in the eyes of God, Theodore thought.

Regardless of the Khoekhoeôs traditional religions, beliefs, Gods and other sundry cultures, the New Testament had been delivered unto the people as mission stations sprang up like so many mushrooms.

óIt has been a brutal time for these tiny, peaceful people,ô Bleek said. He unfurled a page from a book.

óListen to this ... itôs from a missionary who recorded the treatment a young Khoekhoe girl received from a farmer.ô

Bleek peered though his *pinc nez* and read: ó óShe had been flogged to pieces with a *sambok* or whip made of the skin of a rhinocerous or seacow and then a vast quantity of salt rubbed into the woundsô. Barbaric!ô he huffed, óAnd immensely painful too. But it does give you an idea of where the phrase, rubbing salt into oneôs wounds, originated.ô

óI know that one! Itôs from the Hot .. the Khoe...people?ô

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pted by those farmers from English marine lore. Captains s lashed with a cat oô nine tails until their backs were shredded and bloody. Then they would add to their agony by ...ô

á.. rubbing salt into the wounds? From the sea salt?ô

óPrecisely.ô

Theodore introduced into the conversation the hanging of his grandfather in Lithuania ï which he believed was relevant.

óTypical of these backwards Eastern European peasant nations,ô snorted Bleek when Theodore finished his tale, right down to the wailing of the family, but excluding the execution as the reason for his own departure from Lithuania.

óJudge a man based on his religion? Preposterous! It could never happen in Germany, *Gott sei dank,*ô Bleek snapped.

He dug into a valise.

óThese,ô Bleek said, showing Theodore some more bounds papers, áare my pride and joy. The Namaqua Texts. I received them just last year from a Reverend ... Kronlein was his name. Iôd just returned from Europe. I love these texts. They prove to me that everyone has literature in their souls. Even those small brown people with their language of clicks and grasshopper noises. They all have stories to tell. You will too some day.ô

Bleek looked at the autumn sunset and sighed.

ólôm hoping to meet some of those little Namaqua bush men before theyôre all gone,ô he said.

óWhere are they going?ô

óThe way of all dying species. I truly fear for them.ô Bleek ran his fingers through his massive black beard.

óI fear for a people who are so simple, so easy to sway. People who will believe anything just because we say so. They have no guile, no ... *verdacht* ... suspicion. Like simple children. I believe they are a doomed species. Like the Dodo bird.

óThey will intermarry with other brown people who have come to this beautiful land ï the Malays who work in the vineyards and on the docks. They will also interbreed with the white men coming to this land where there are many more men than women.

óEven if there was to be some law designed to protect each culture ï to make sure that the Xhosa and the Zulu and the Khoekhoe retain their individuality ï they will still be a doomed people.ô

He yawned and stretched.

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end, are we not? Democracy, my boy. Thatôs what ations with their Khans and their Chiefs and their Emirs and their Kings and Khalifs. We respect the right of each person to make decisions regarding their own lives. I used to argue with Sir George about the colonies eventually winning the right to self determination, and even suggested the time might come when the Royal family becomes little more than the titular heads of the Empire. Grey laughed of course and swore that a land founded by Royalty would not and could not ever change. England does have a Prime Minister and a Parliament ï but everything needs approval from Her Majesty.ô

Bleek launched into a complex dissertation on British and German parliamentary systems, gazing into the middle distance as he did so, drawing forth fact after evidence after detail.

That was the point where Theodoreôs understanding hit a wall of utter incomprehension as the German which Bleek spoke so melodically soared miles over his head. Nonetheless, Bleek had left just enough of a dent in the young boyôs perception of the world to further light the fires under Theodoreôs Knowledge Beast.

For the few days that the professorial Bleek spent at the house, Theodore drank in everything the German had to tell him. They even had a brief conversation in (from Theodoreôs perspective) classically high register English. Alas (from Bleekôs viewpoint) Theodoreôs command of the language was a mangled attempt which might, in a classroom, have elicited at best a ówell triedô.

ôDonôt let your failure to immediately grasp the language bother you, Theodore,ô Bleek said in English.

ôIt does worry me not,ôTheodore answered proudly in English. ôIt runs off my back like a duck.ô

And then, Bleek was gone.

Off down the hill on a Sunday morning with his books and photographic equipment and his sketch books and his beloved Namaqua texts.

Theodore was mopping stains off the whorehouse floor when Bleek departed in a hired Cape Cart, so he missed saying farewell. He had fancifully imagined in the dark early morning hours that he might ask Bleek to adopt him, but realised that was unlikely as Bleek was a confirmed bachelor. When he discovered Bleek had left, he wrote it off as another missed unrealistic opportunity.

The following day however, armed with the knowledge that people could live like royalty just by understanding languages, and with his growing library of largely looted literature, Theodore pursued his holy grail of having a conversation in flawless, grammatically correct English.

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Theodoreós life became a routine, sneaking out at sunset and prowling around the rapidly growing town. Wherever possible he would root newspapers out of piles of garbage and painstaking follow the sentences by running his finger under each word, his lips silently pronouncing each syllable.

He would make logical connections between pictures and words: indeed, one of his favourite night haunts was a photographerôs shop belonging to Samuel Bayliss Barnard.

Under each photograph in the shop window was a short caption explaining the photograph. Theodore carefully matched these to words heôd heard around the *Katzes Bording House.* Hence when Tillie (one of the girls) talked about her óold man gettinô nicked and sent to Roeland Steet Gaolô Theodore connected the word ógaolô in the caption under Barnardôs picture of one or another tenant of Roeland Street.

Theodore heard the whores conversing from a small eyrie he had built himself in the ceiling of the main building, which shared a wall with the back rooms. Through an intricately and carefully carved hole, Theodore would listen and listen, seeking to contextualise words he heard.

Sometimes he would watch too. With interest, rather than guilt.

óNot that my father, God Forbid, was a Peeping Tom watching unclad ladies frolic and cavort in the moolight with their gentlemen!ô Yitzhak interjected. óDear God, no! But he was always ... there. Always listening, always seeing, but never being seen or heard himself. How else would he have learned their names? And he knew them all. None biblically, of course.

óIôm relatively sure he never made any of their acquaintances other than to say good afternoon if one of them happened to be awake when he went to clean up. But otherwise, he was a solitary young boy. Living like a shadow, always listening and learning, listening and learning, stashing new words and information like freshly earned sixpences.ô

Not surprisingly, Theodoreôs vocabulary grew. So too was Theodore growing up and filling out, as was Cape Town itself. The climate was changing too as the rumblings rolling in from inland told stories about massive wealth being found inland.

Diamonds.

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huge wealth being made following the discovery of
als set foot on African soil for the first time in Cape Town. Granted, most were bleary-eyed and thoroughly wretched due to the rolling waves which welcomed travellers to these shores.

Theodore was seventeen when the first major diamond find happened. The wishful thinking and rumours which had drawn so many desperate people to the country over the past few years was suddenly reality.

And where there is money to be made, the cynics will confirm, out of a cloudless sky will swoop flocks of Jewish businessmen, licking the tips of their pencils and clutching copies of *The Ready Reckoner*.

The lure of huge fortunes to be made was too much for Cape Townôs entrepreneurs most of whom swiftly packed their gear and headed inland.

The townôs slumbering tortoise of a railroad line from Stellenbosch to Wellington was hurriedly completed. Theodore listened to conversations in the boarding house or chatter wafting from the windows of the back rooms; repeated stories of a new Excelsior, a land offering so much more than Milk and Honey. There were tales of places in this mysteriously dark and threatening land where a man could dip his cupped hands into flowing rivers and pull out diamonds the size of a fist.

The size of footballs!

Diamonds which were there for the taking, and which could make a man wealthy beyond his most extravagant fantasies overnight, all from a place whose very name conjured pictures of fabulous fortunes.

Griqualand!

The very timbre of the name ... it rolled off the tongue as had such other magical names as Marakech and Constantinople.

Almost.

Listening to (and largely understanding) conversations emanating from the back rooms, Theodore soon surmised that he would, in the near future, also have to head away from this gateway to Africa and into the heart of the continent if he was to make his own fortune. He saw no future in this town at all.

The Cape was guarded by a coastline which had seen dozens of ships splinter and sink like just so much balsa wood. Theodore reasoned Cape Town (and indeed the entire west coast) would not have much to offer new arrivals. When all the best gold and diamond claims had been staked, few people would return to the ghost town which Cape Town would become, he thought.

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apidly becoming the most attractive bait on the fish hook Theodore surmised, believing that Cape Town was destined to rapidly run out of souls.

No, Theodore decided, this was clearly not a place which could sustain life, let alone business. At best Cape Town was making the most of a brief flurry of activity before receding back to its status as provisioning stop en route to the Indies ... a village which was acceptable in summer, awful in winter.

It was too obvious to not be true.

Leaving Cape Town was inveitable, he reasoned, but in his calculating way, he understood that leaving with little more in his pockets than a few copper coins made no sense.

Theodore found odd jobs in the area, earning more sixpences and pennies, then shillings and the occasional half-crown. Maybe a florin or two on a really good day. Every now and then a random drunkard, head fuddled with grog and lust, would unwittingly shell out a ten bob note to Theodore for unhitching a horse.

Ten shillings was a fortune.

All funds (including drink-sodden donations) were popped into a small tin box Theodore had found on one of his scrounging missions at some school or other.

He might have found it near the Belgian general dealer in Wale Street.

Or at the stage door of the new theatre.

He couldnôt remember.

It became another possession; the start of Theodoreôs wealth, which he stacked in a pile in his tiny, increasingly cramped cubbyhole at the boarding house.

Wherever he went, Theodore listened rather than spoke, afraid to make a fool of himself in English, which he would only fully unveil when he was good and ready.

óThereôs no doubt in my mind,ô Yitzhak said, óthat my father was in some sort of way, hiding not who he was, but what he was. I suspect he had a part of his brain that kept nagging him that what he was doing was wrong. But if you knew him youôd realise he was just a tough and unbending character who stuck to a decision, right or wrong. He lived his early life in the shadows, like his little room under the closet ï in any sort of niche he could find.ô

óListen,ó he elaborated, óimagine youôre having a private conversation with someone in a restaurant. Youôre whispering or speaking in a low confidential tone of course, because itôs a secret.

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ou thereôs a *schvartzer* sweeping the floor or picking up dishes for the kitchen. You donôt stop talking, because in your head heôs not there. He is *there* – in his skin ï but because you believe heôs only a nothing cleaner, a nobody, a person of no consequence, a no one ... you ignore him.ô

The *schvartzer* becomes like a painting on the wall or maybe a spider.

óThatôs what Theodore was. A painting on a thousand walls in Cape Town. For the rest of his life thatôs what my father did ... the same thing wherever he went. He was a piece of art nobody really noticed.

óI am,ô concluded Yitzhak, óas you might have noticed, my fatherôs son.ô

Theodore was nineteen when Moishe Katz, a new map of allergy sores forming on the nape of his neck, suggested to his wife that perhaps Theodore might be moved out of his tiny room, which he had clearly outgrown, despite Theodore not being of small stature.

Moishe Katzôs suggestion was not based on consideration for Theodore, whose lower back had become an agonising problem due to his cramped lodgings. Rather, it was because Moishe Katz had begun illicitly brewing a version of Vodka and needed the closet to store the bottles. He planned to sell his booze (behind Gildaôs back) to members of the Polish community, and anyone else interested in alcohol with a vintage of approximately thirteen hours.

óI tôink it time de boy must move out der room under der staircase,ô he announced cautiously to Gilda Katz.

óTo where he should move?ô Gilda Katz bristled, as usual acutely aware of her husbandôs singular lack of vision or foresight.

Moishe was prepared.

He had his answers ready and rehearsed, knowing his beloved wife would question him with the ferocity of a Scottish terrier. He was so intent on receiving her blessing he consciously forced himself to stop the continual *kribbeln und kratsen* at his inflamed sores.

óTsimple. To de shed behind der beck rooms, I tôink,ô Moishe suggested. óIt not near de gels, not near der gentlemins. De boy is too big for der little room under der stairs, end he make der room smell like old cat.ô

óIf de boy move,ô Gilda Katz enquired sweetly, óHe not troubling de gels and *shtupping* while you not watching? Hmmm?ô

óI promise I wonôt touch them, *Neduok Dieve,*ô Theodore chipped in, defaulting to Lithuanian.

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apped. ôKatz, you guarantee der boy not *shtupping* de

ôI guarantee!ô Moishe Katz swore defiantly.

ôWell, z*ol zayn mit mazel!'* Gilda Katz said to Theodore, smiling angelically.

ó*A dank*,ô answered Theodore uncertainly.

ôMay your move to new end large end smart quarters near de gels be blessed by de Lord God himself, end de Lord Mayor fun London also,ô she added beatifically

Gilda Katz instantly switched personalities.

ó*Schmuck!'* she shrieked at Moishe Katz. ôWere you *eingetunke*n in der stupid barrel dis mornink? I promise end guarantee, if der boy not in mein sight or yours, der boy *shtupp* all de gels! For absolute sure end for nothing end we get a dozen preggint whores by next Thursday.ô

ôNo, but é ô

ôDere no ôbut, butô Katz! You a *potzevateh*!ô she slapped the back of her cowering husbandôs head as was her way.

ó*Pustunpasnike putz*!ô she added, bristling, and gave his little round head another decent cuff.

The second smack did it.

Moishe Katz sighed once and dropped uncomplaining and dead on the floor.

Dumbstruck, Gilda Katz and Theodore looked at the body at their feet.

Moishe Katzôs chest was not heaving up and down, as it usually did when he was confronted by a Gilda Katz eruption.

His too-close eyes gazed forlornly at the ceiling, at the damp spot in the corner that had remained unseen by all except Moishe Katz while he lived, and was now unseen by Moishe Katz for an entirely new reason.

Gilda Katz and Theodore realised at the same moment that death had taken Moishe Katz. That he was neither sleeping nor unconscious, but was utterly and conclusively dead.

They knew this because Moishe Katzôs hands were still.

ó*Oy,'* said Gilda Katz dispiritedly, when it was apparent her husband was not coming back. ôNow I got to run dis place all by meinself!ô

She poked her husbandôs body with her big toe.

ó*A shreklecheh zach* you left me witô, Katz, demn you!ô

Gilda Katz coughed and prodded Moishe Katz again, just to make sure.

ôNo. He definitely dead,ô she stated. ôHe just giblets now.ô

She turned to Theodore.

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óBoy,ô she said, óyou run end call der doctor fun down der street, he should come and confirm Moisheôs dead. He a drunken Irish bastard, but a doctorôs a doctor. Go fetch anyway.ô

ó*Der miesteh leben iz besser fun shensten toit,*ô Theodore heard Gilda Katz say to herself as he ran out the front door in search of the doctor.

The words caused Theodore to pause for the briefest moment: he realised that he had not immediately translated what Gilda Katz had said into Lithuanian. He had automatically translated the Yiddish into English, which had somehow muscled its way forward and become his main language.

He had started to think in English.

Theodore realised too that he now also dreamed in English.

As he sped down the street to the doctorôs rooms, he understood why he had not effortlessly understood Gilda Katzôs words ï which the RÎdigkās village baker, Mikhail Milosz, had said a decade before over his *zayder'*s body.

Something about the ugliest life being better than the nicest death.

It all made perfect sense to Theodore ... in English. He could barely remember any Lithuanian words. An entire language had drifted off into the same mist which also contained his childhood.

The Irish doctor had his rooms in a side street, and he lived behind it in a small annexe not much larger than Theodoreôs own lodgings. McFee was the doctorôs name, and a typical piece of Irish whimsy his name was too.

McFee was an infrequent visitor to the *Katzes Bording House* ï mostly for the girls, but occasionally to provide a service to some new arrival in Cape Town and who had binged on one crayfish too many or had suffered knife wounds after a disagreement with another guest.

Whenever he entered the boarding house, he would ask, óYe got me fee upfront?ô

The doctor seldom paid house calls on the Katzes, despite both being worthy of their own chapters in Sir Williams Harveyôs medical textbooks.

Out of death comes birth: the time had arrived for Theodore to break out his new vocabulary.

óGood afternoon Doctor,ô Theodore greeted McFee in English. ôI have hastened to your door with information that my employer, Mister Moishe Katz is diseased.ô

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,ô McFee snorted, placing a glass of what might have Holy Chroist, son, the manôs a walking example of how not to treat scrofula, the pox, the plague, scurvy and any of them other things which inhabit hisself. His woifeôs none better, mind. Bluidy bubonic plague on legs, she is é ô

óNo sir,ô Theodore corrected himself. óI mean he is deceased. Of a disease.ô

McFee hooted. óThat auld bluidy miserly Jewboy finally snuffed it?ô

óYes sir.ô

óWouldnôt ye believe it? And himself owing me one pound ten and six in fees for fixing them clap-ridden old whores a his.ô

McFee frequently questioned his own interpretation of both his medical oath and the tenets of his religious beliefs. óCreeping Jayzus,ô he would mutter at the boarding house each time he doled out a potion to some malodorous whore or stitched up holes in a drunken sailor. óWhat would Old Father Mulrooney from the seminary say if he could see me now? Fixing whores and looking after the health of Christ-killers?ô

McFee looked at Theodore, who was politely trying to translate the doctorôs rich accent.

óI surely hope to God yiz ainôt the flesh and blood of them two miserable divils, are ye?ô

óNo sir. I inhabit a space below the stairs. I am Theodore.ô

óRight. As long as ye donôt carry the demon seed of those two, yiz canôt be all bad.ô

óThank you, good doctor, sir.ô

óWeôll letôs get a move on shall we? I suppose that damnable auld bitch is standing alongside the corpse, weeping and snottering and wondering where the hell her husband hid the cash heôs been nipping out her purse for years and years? God, and ainôt she the most disagreeable old cow?ô

óMrs Katz,ô said Theodore rolling out his first ever idiom, óis a total prick within a rose.ô

McFee looked at Theodore.

óI canôt argue witô dat,ô he said eventually. óNow letôs we go pronounce the old bugger a stiff.ô

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Yitzhak was seething when I arrived for our next chapter.

ôI could *plutz*!ô he fumed. ôIf thereôs one thing I detest more than anything else, itôs people who bastardise languages. I can forgive those people whose lack of education is the fault ï but this? Barbarism!ô

It transpired Yitzhak had been listening to his favourite classical music programme on SABC radio that afternoon. Classical music and anger tend not to find company in the same sentence, unless youôre a conductor whose first violinist has a tin ear.

ôThe damned *shmegegi* at the Corporation have decreed,ô said Yitzhak angrily, ôthat as we have two official languages ï never mind all the other languages, but thatôs *another* thing I canôt understand ï all classical music titles must now be announced in English and Afrikaans.ô

ôSo?ô

ôSo? So sometimes things cannot be translated.ô

He pointed a crooked finger accusingly at the radio which, guiltily, did nothing at all.

ôFirst,ô Yitzhak stormed, ôthey played Debussyôs exquisite *l'après-midi d'un faune* – which in Afrikaans is apparently *ôn dag in die agtermiddag van ôn bokkie*é and if that isnôt bad enough they then played Chopinôs *Waltz in A Flat*, which translates as ô*Chopin se Wals in ôn Woonstel*.ô

ôHow do you take beauty and make it a parody? How do you take something which comes from so deep within an artistôs soul and turn it into something which is just so much nonsense?ô

Any notion that Yitzhak might perhaps telephone the SABC with his criticisms was met with the inevitable ô*Feh*!ô suggesting (correctly at the time, it seemed) that the corporation was less intent on hearing complaints about translated classical music titles, and was more focused on broadcasting to the country the wonders of separate development.

Happily, a cup of Earl Gray was always enough to bring Yitzhak down from his quick boil. He spired his forefingers, shut his eyes and whistled a few bars from *Eine Kleine Nachtmusiek* after the tea worked its magic.

ôThe next chapter,ô he announced, ôis when Theodore and Leah meet.ô

He leaned forward and waggled a forefinger at me in a manner reminiscent of authoritarian politicians.

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itzhak warned, ôthat there will be nothing about, um, the act of procreation in this story, other than the eventual results of their union. Or even unions. I do not wish to have resident in my head a picture of my fatherôs *toches* bouncing up and down.ô

He paused, as might a debutante on the verge of swooning, then waved his hands in surrender.

ô*Oy,* itôs all too personal to contemplate. The truth is in the sight, which lies behind the eyes, and I donôt wish to go there.ô

I nodded.

ôSo anyway,ô said Yitzhak, ôMoishe Katz was about as alive as a *Pesach* Pascal lamb when McFee entered the *Katzes Bording House,* shoved a cursory fingertip alongside the corpseôs carotid artery and counted silently for a few seconds then arose, creaking and shaking his head, confirming that Moishe Katz had not so much shuffled off this mortal coil as backed out, scratching.ô

ôDeaderôn a mackerel,ô McFee pronounced, ôand he pongs like one too. Sorry fer yer loss, Missus, but der love oô yer loifeôs gone to der great beyond, and datôll be foive shillins if ye please.ô

ôFive shillings!ô Gilda Katz shrieked, her grief instantly surpassed by the concept of coughing up anything other than phlegm. ôYou a *goniff*, McFee! A *t'ief*!ô

She pointed an accusing finger at McFee, who yawned.

ôIôm a grieving widow end you talking money?ô Gilda Katz thundered. ôFor shame end a *skande* on you! *Es vert mir finster in di oygen,'* she wailed.

'She said, ôItôs getting dark in my eyesô. Itôs an expression of sorrow,ô Theodore happily translated into English, because he could.

'Oy ... a gebrenteh tsores!' Gilda Katz moaned piteously, peeping sideways to see if her display of utter misery had struck a chord. It hadnôt, but McFee did not see himself as a dishonorable man (although truth be told he was) and Gilda Katz snortling and phlegming was not a pretty sight.

McFee gazed aslant at Gilda Katz, his head cocked to one side in appreciation of her performance as the Grieving Widow.

ôOh, give it up, ye overpainted fossil,ô McFee chided eventually, then softened as might an old hacksaw blade.

ôListen ï hereôs some Christian charity for yiz. Whynôt yer jist pay me for dis call and weôll let the old bastardôs debt ter me die along witô himself? And nivver let it be said us gentiles donôt do nuttinô fer de Jews.ô

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ing and did some swift mental arithmetic before taking one last dart at saving herself five shillings.

õTell you what ï I pay you after I finish sitting *shiva,'* she announced. õWhen der mourning period over I pay. Until den, I not allowed by religious law from der Torah end der Talmud end all der religion books to touch money for a é for a week! For two weeks, even.ô

õBullshite,ô snapped McFee, whose perception of tight-fistedness among the Hebrews had been solely founded on his dealings with the Katzes. õYeôre not going tae sit one minute a *shiva,* ye cheatinô old slattern. So now Iõll tell *yew* what: pay me everything right now or oiõll get der polis ter come and take me fee outta yer foul old hide.ô

Thus endeth the lesson on Christian Charity Spurned.

Gilda shrugged non-commitally, having gambled and lost.

Some people win even when they lose.

õYou can lend me five shillings?ô she asked Theodore.

And being Theodore, he did.

Theodore, without asking permission because he was shrewd enough to understand the leverage provided by his act of charity amounting to five shillings, moved without Gildaôs approval into the room Moishe Katz had proposed as the introduction to his own epitaph ï which action, Theodore supposed, had spurred Gildaôs Katzôs rant, thus directly contributed to her husbandôs passing.

With Moishe Katzôs departure came more leverage: despite Gilda Katz having always had ownership of the pants in the family, her husband possessed an ability she depended on; that is, Moishe Katz could read, write add and subtract, while Gilda Katzôs abilities stretched to a point where her signature was an unevenly underlined scrawled X which she executed painstakingly, the tip of her tongue peeping out the corner of her mean mouth as she concentrated.

Being Gilda Katz, it was always a capital letter.

This meant Theodore found himself elevated to the level of handling the boarding houseôs occasional visitor, welcoming them, leading them to their rooms, and writing out their bills. Of course, he still had to clean up after the guests departed ï invariably massaging their aching backs and cricked necks thanks to the lumpy beds and cursing the oily breakfast Gilda Katz served up to those who dared meet the challenge of scrambled eggs and something posing as bacon.

If Gilda Katz was unhappy about Theodoreôs move to the new room, she said nothing, leading Theodore into reaching another life decision: he no longer saw himself as the appeasing little boy who did what he was told.

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e thought as he carried his tiny bundle of clothes and his box of books to the new room ï which in truth was a garden shed. It became Theodoreôs fortress.

It not only had a cot of sorts, but also a mattress which was so old the coconut fibres used to stuff it God knows how long ago had been pounded into comprehensive surrender, having endured pounding rumps of every size, shape and hue (not to mention attendant fluids) over several decades.

There may be nothing less sanitary (or more aesthetically bankrupt) than a mattress so overused it has become whorehouse flotsam. But a bed is a bed, and if you need sleep after a dayôs work, then you simply do not care what memories or minute inhabitants live within your place of rest.

ôSleep in tights in case the bed bugs bite,ô Theodore would say to himself in English whenever his head hit the lumpy pillow.

Practice.

Over the next year Theodore began thieving more than books to expand his little library. Now he stole or found bits and pieces for his new nest: a few slats of wood and bricks from a building site made for a serviceable bookcase for his growing library. He found a few broken and discarded lanterns, which he fixed using twine, then took from Gilda Katzôs pantry the oil necessary to provide reading light.

A battered cupboard without doors was a better option than a nail in the wall for the few items of clothing heôd acquired off other peopleôs washing lines.

Theodore had rules.

Just as Moses had laid before the Hebrews a set of Commandments to live by, so too did Theodore have his own code of honour.

He surveyed the growing neighbourhoods which were always a long way away from his home, seeking people roughly the same height and weight as he to meet his clothing needs. Once he had identified an item of attire ï a pair of pants, a winter coat, serviceable boots left outside the front door on a muddy Cape Town winterôs evening ï he would launch surreptitious raids, planned to coincide with one of his visits to either the wharf or the vineyards or the schools.

He would take just one item at a time.

It was his moral duty, he believed, to not take more than he needed, and possibly more than the tenant of each house could afford to lose.

He took items they surely wouldnôt miss.

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rinciple, Theodore only stole from the homes of the wealthy ï or at worst people with at least some evidence of obvious means. Never would he head for the raggedy sanitary residences that housed the poor or, as the chapter on synonyms of his latest English primer stated: ôthe hapless, the meagre, the underprivileged, the miserable, the misfortunate and the patheticô.

Ethical decision-making and learning new languages were essentially related. Both demanded practice. In other words, from Theodoreôs perspective, the well-to-do were his targets for no other reason that they were well-to-do. Theodore was not only scrupulously honest in his thievery he was also blessed with patience.

It took him, for instance, a whole six months to pick off a waistcoat he fancied, but once pinched and tried on, it fitted him as if tailored specifically for his dimensions. The weskit was a beautiful houndôs tooth design with silk lining, elegantly small whalebone buttons and a pocket designed as if by divine providence for the fob watch Theodore happened upon a week before, while helping a gentleman caller (who was boiled as an owl) onto his horse.

The rest of Theodoreôs room featured a rug that might once have been used to haul away a dead body, curtains which were scarlet on the inside and pink on the side that took the brunt of the daytime sun.

The *piece de resistance* though was a wooden kist Theodore had found (and actually paid for) at a shop in Adderley Street. It was the same kist Theodore would one day present to Leah as a token of his love. The kist would spend two decades filled with Leahôs things and then ultimately become a footrest for Yitzhak in his declining years ï especially when he suffered periodic bouts of what he called ôthe goatô which attacked the joint in his right big toe.

For now the chest was filled with the sundry knickknacks and gewgaws Theodore had collected: three butter knives and a fork, a rusty bayonet and three uncracked dinner plates.

Mostly though, it was filled with toys.

Toys which had been well-used, or loved and discarded by children grown too old, or who had received new toys to replace the old ones. These were his real treasures, and even while reading his beloved English books, he would stop and take out of the kist a *dreidl*, or a few marbles, and even a headless porcelain doll, roll them around in his fingers, then carefully replace them in the trunk and carry on reading.

Theodore had found in a pile of discarded rubbish a perfectly serviceable Bilbo Catcher ï a ball and cup game. Children could sit for hours on end, flipping a wooden ball which hung on a string onto a wooden spindle.

It was a pretty enough toy, but a mindless game, Theodore thought.

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In the same pile of trash he discovered a handful of quoits, and wondered if these too were from the toy chest of the same spoilt child.

Outside a nearby public house Theodore found a full set of unused carved ninepins complete with a wooden ball in a muslin bag. It would be opened and used later, as would the quoits, he decided.

At the Jewish school, in the teacherôs desk, he found a confiscated *Jakobsleiter* ï the Jacob's Ladder toy he recognised instantly as similar to one heôd owned in RÎ digkãs. A *Jakobsleiter* had nothing whatsoever to do with the biblical Jacob fleeing Esau to heaven.

Jacob and Esau and God were real of course. This Jacobôs Ladder on the other hand was just a plaything.

Automatically, aloud and alone, by the light of his lantern in the classroom, Theodore dangled the Jacobôs Ladder at armôs length and recited: ósix blocks of wood, connected by ribbon. Depending on which block you turn the other blocks turn to the right or the left, and if you turn the top block upside down then é ô

God was it so long ago, he thought. Theodore had forgotten how to use the simple device and wondered what its actual purpose was.

Mindless.

But he popped it into his canvas bag anyway.

A month later in the same desk drawer he found a Bandelure without the string that would send the cylinder up and down, up and down, up and down. Later, he happened on a set of Jackstraws, which were at the time were as popular as marbles. Theodore, on his wanderings, sometimes watched children squatting around their jackstraws, one player meticulously picking up each stick without disturbing the others.

He remembered the ring of children, sparkly-eyed and grinning evil little children grins, trying to baulk the contestant by chanting:

One, two, buckle my shoe,

Three, four, shut the door,

Five, six, pick up sticks,

Seven, eight, lay them straight,

Nine, ten, a big fat hen.

The children would burst out laughing if a Jackstraw moved, the player always protesting that either the wind had blown or someone was cheating or the earth had moved ï at which point all the others would laugh good naturedly at the embarrassed player, who then became a baulker himself when the next child splayed the Jackstraws and began the process all over again.

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Theodore took the Jackstraws with him and, before placing them carefully in the trunk, tried a game or two, mumbling to himself as he strove to pick up the sticks, óone two, buckle my shoe é ô

Iôm such a child, he thought, but finished the game anyway (without cheating), after which he tried reading the *Children's Manners & Morals Book.*

He found it too pompous, and it too went into the toy chest, along with the other playthings. Manners and morals for Theodore had disappeared some time ago, along with whatever faith he may once have had. Belief, he thought, was perhaps a thing your parents fed you in the hope that a fear of an unseen, all-knowing power would keep young boys from following the wrong path.

All nonsense, of course, Theodore reasoned. Faith sure as hell didnôt keep the noose from around my *zayder's* neck and me out of the stinking cargo hold of a filthy rust bucket.

There was the Great Synagogue in Cape Town, but for Theodore it was little more than cold architecture. It certainly did not suggest warmth and security.

A silently filched blanket, on the other hand é

Just before midnight a week or so before he turned twenty Theodore traipsed towards his room, feeling exactly like Shakespeareôs unwilling schoolboy, but going in the other direction. He had suffered an altogether poor night, finding just a cracked hoop and a checkers board with no pieces.

Hardly worth even picking up.

There were no new books at the Jewish school and he didnôt feel like dragging himself anywhere other than to his bed. Disenchanted, hands stuffed into deep overcoat pockets, he shuffled past the front porch of the renamed *Gilda Katzes Bording House*, examining pebbles on the path and hunching his shoulders against the chill.

ó I say! Young man! Yoo hoo!ô

Theodore looked up and saw, standing at the front door of the boarding house, an elegantly dressed couple meandering just south of middle age. The woman wore a fox fur stole with the animalôs head still attached and glass eyes gazing irrelevantly at the floor. Her husband carried a cane and wore a pinstriped suit, weskit, spats and a cravat which (he believed) offset a patrician nose and aristocratic cheekbones. Truthfully, the singular lack of chin did much to dent the image.

A plainly dressed, impossibly skinny young girl stood deferentially and slightly pigeon-toed just behind the couple, mutely protecting their carpetbags.

óYes?ô Theodore stopped, breathing puffs of condensation into the night breeze.

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e Town and were hoping to find accommodation for a
l we stay here for the night until we could find more é
shall we say, suitable lodgings tomorrow.ô

óYes? This is boarding house. You can stay here. We have vacancy.ô

óWell, weôve been knocking and hallooing for what seems like hours, but no one answered. Would you know where the concierge or night porter might be right now?ô

óWe do not have concierges or night porters. Just Gilda Katz and, well, me. I clean the place and welcome new guests. I am Theodore.ô

óAh, I see é ô the man made a mouth and turned to his wife.

óI think, dearest, we should perhaps hail a coach and travel into town.ô

óTown is too far at this hour,ô Theodore said. óAnyway, you will find no transport now, sir.ô

óHow far is the town main street? Adderley Street?ô

óAbout three miles as the cock crows, sir. Anyway, this town is not a safe place to travel at night. Allow me to open up and find you a room. Mrs. Katz sleeps very soundly, so she would not have heard your knocking.ô

óAh, the sound sleep of the workaday woman,ô the wife mused.

More likely, the workaday half pint down her gullet, Theodore thought.

óOf course,ô said Theodore. óCome along. I will open up as quickly as you can drop your hat.ô

Theodore checked the couple in to the main suite, so-called because it possessed a large bed, a zinc bath and two cupboards. The other rooms offered two small beds, suspect linen, wall hooks and washbasins.

The man opened his heavily stuffed brown leather valise which bore in an ornate serif lettering the name, Montgomery Collingwood Esq., and extracted two ten-pound notes.

óWill this suffice?ô he asked.

óTwenty pounds will reserve two rooms for two months. With breakfast,ô said Theodore quickly, plucking the money from the manôs hand.

óWell, then, letôs make this delightful garden spot our camp for two months, shall we?ô

The registration book stated that Monty and Gladys Collingwood were travelling from London and were in Cape Town for the summer.

óThis will be just fine,ô said Collingwood after scanning the room.

óI will put your daughter next door é ô

óDonôt be silly!ô giggled Gladys Collingwood. óLeahôs not our daughter, perish the thought! Sheôs just a servant girl.ô She smiled at the girl, who dipped her head shyly. óAnd anyway Iôm obviously far too young to have a fifteen-year-old daughter.ô

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óSurely you have servantôs quarters for domestics?ô Collingwood asked.

óNot really,ô Theodore answered, óbut I will tell you what I do. I put the young lady in the room next door at no extra charge.ô

óWonderful,ô enthused Collingwood. óNow off you go, Leah. Wake us with tea at, say, nine oôclock. Thereôs a dear.ô

óYes, Mr Collingwood,ô the girl answered and curtseyed quickly and daintily.

The curtsey, Theodore reflected in his later years, was what caused him to fall in love with Leah right there and then. It was so refined, so like a hummingbird dipping towards a flower at a speed the eye could barely capture. It was so heartbreakingly delicate.

Theodore, his heart suddenly pounding in the early morning chill, and feeling incomprehensibly brave, ushered Leah into the adjacent room.

He would later reveal to Yitzhak that he had not spoken to a young woman his age since arriving in Cape Town. Theodore had neither the courage nor the social skills to even consider embarking on conversation with young ladies, plus his singular lack of basic English for most of that time was, for Theodore, a hunterôs snare, waiting to snag and humiliate him if he so much as attempted in a fractured version of his furtively-learned language to (God forbid) chat.

Indeed, he had, for the past years, scurried to the other side of the street if there was even the faintest possibility of any dialogue. Shadows are excellent place to be for the unspeakable, Theodore would one day tell Yitzhak.

Just like Theodore on the day he first arrived at this place, Leah also carried her entire life in a small suitcase. Her uniforms were kept in another of the several suitcases that constituted the Collingwoodsô luggage.

óMay I overturn the bed?ô Theodore asked politely when Leah had placed her case in the corner of the room, beneath a begrimed, tatted picture of a rose bowl.

Leah giggled. óIôll turn the covers meself,ô she said.

óYour accent ï it is beautiful,ô Theodore said.

óItôs just cockney,ô Leah smiled. óAnd if weôre talking strange accents, I canôt place yours.ô

Theodore had been spoken to.

He soared.

óMy accent is a mongrel which I started breeding a few years ago when I came here,ô he volunteered.

óWhere do you come from?ô

óIt is a long and boring story.ô

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Leah patted the edge of the bed.

ólôm going nowhere. I darenôt risk oversleeping. If I do the Collingwoodôs go absolutely berserkers. So if youôve got sod-all to do until sunrise, you can tell me your long and boring story.ô

óOnly if you promise to tell me yours too.ô

Romance. In a few hours, Theodore thought grimly, he would be slopping out the whorehouse, sweeping the floors, disposing of the unspeakable debris *schlepped* into the place by the gentlemen callers. Heôd be washing away the last traces of beer, wine, brandy or whisky currently being consumed in the whorehouse even now as he sat in this room looking at the girl in the plain dress.

There was no option.

This was where he had to be.

Leahôs hair was a shade darker than whole-wheat bread, with insane curls swept back and over ears the size, colour and fragility of some of the more beautiful shells he had picked up on his occasional visits to the strand.

Her eyes were a dazzling Siamese cat blue.

She watched him as he talked, her exquisite eyes transfixed unblinking on his face as he spoke of Jerzy and the Katzes and his dead *zayder* and his presumably now also dead parents. Leahôs lips parted every now and then as shy smiles rewarded a Theodore grammatical error.

The quick smiles were never mocking. She did not correct any mistakes. Chose rather to adore them.

Theodore asked if Leah had news of pogroms in Lithuania. She shook her head, urged him to talk on.

And he did, pouring out his life to Leah, about his meeting with Bleek and his books, and McFeeôs doctoring, and the little man at the Jewish school who did not understand him. He recounted tales of transient grape pickers and tanners at the wharf and the barely remembered cobblestones of his home in RÎdiġkās, and the sailors on the ship, and a mother and father whose voices and faces had completely whispered out from his memory.

Theodore soaked in the creaminess of Leahôs throat, the sprinkled freckles like barely visible watermarks across the bridge of her nose.

Of course, Theodore did not utter a word to Leah about the *shtupping* in the back room. Nor did he mention his forays into the night in search of books, toys and whatever else he could lay his hands on and which may have had some sort of cash value.

There was not a word about the pilfered clothes.

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ling inability to cry over a stolen childhood.

the longest conversation heôd had in English ï or indeed any language ï since Jerzy on the boat all those years ago.

He could not fail to notice how intently Leah watched him as he spoke, sometimes even silently mouthing his own words. She seemed incapable of blinking, such was the intensity in her eyes.

It was when Theodore spoke of how his dream was to be his own man ï independent of any single person not chosen by himself ï that he felt Leahôs pinkie softly resting on his own little finger. He suspected that, even then at that first encounter, Leah would have understood at some mysterious level, everything about the life and times and destiny of Theodore Isaacs.

Every little thing.

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h in der haim. Az men shmirt, fort men –

When you go to your neighbours, you find out what is happening at home. When you grease the palms of the authorities, you get what you need. When you grease the axles, you can go travelling.

ôPerhaps the most difficult thing about actually speaking a new language is how you wrap your mouth around the new sounds it demands,ô Yitzhak explained.

ôFor example, if you listen to German, itôs full of gutturals. Itôs a very assertive language. A request to find out if the toilet has spare paper must sound like you intend reinvading the Sudetenland.

ôSo you have to, after a fashion, reshape your mouth, your tongue and your teeth. Well, not reshape them, but use them differently. Speaking German is like biting words in half with your bottom jaw, while at the same time, spitting at your bank manager. English is different of course ï it is much simpler to pronounce words, I have found. But do you see where Theodoreôs real challenge was? The words he knew, the idioms and sayings he knew, but he was afraid to converse. Until he met Leah. Now, he had the chance to speak to people without being laughed at.

ôEverything in the spoken word changes, even within some languages,ô Yitzhak added. ôLook at South African languages and its many dialects ï the clicks that change depending on how you align your tongue against your palate. How in some cases an X is a click and in others it sounds like a broom sweeping cereal out the door.ô

Yitzhak shrugged, pondering momentarily the wonders of language.

ôSo,ô he continued, ôin the following few days, Theodore is having entire conversations in his new language, trying to make his English as clear as Leahôs. Itôs like when a little *babeleh* learns to walk. First he staggers and falls. Then all of a sudden he wants to walk everywhere. It was like that with Theodore, except he wasnôt walking, he was talking. He became a broken dam wall. The words just gushed. After a fashion.

ôYou see, he had all the words, but, well, sometimes it was like his jaw was making the wrong teeth get in the way when he tried to speak what he called ôposhô English. When that happened he would revert back to saying the English words, but with a distinctly Yiddish flavour.

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erdôs Pie but made with *gehakte* herring. Strangely
e less *pukkah* was his English. And Leah just adored the natural, *oisgeshlogene* way Theodore spoke. This made him happier than he had ever been in his life, so he kept the airs and graces at bay. That meant Leah became even happier, which meant Theodore é well, you see it donôt you? Clearly love invented perpetual motion, and the hell with what the scientists say.ô

Thanks to the courage he got from that first evening with Leah, any criticism he received for his abuse of the language ran off his back like a duck.

óAnyway, so now Yitzhak reached a defining crossroad, and once again, the thing that pushed him to his next life was death.ô

*'In shlof zindikt nit der mentsch, nor zeineh chaloimes,*ô Yitzhak said, and translated the words as something about a man not sinning in his sleep, but his dreams do.

The Collingwoods, with Leah dressed in inappropriate tab shoes held together with brogan-style eyelets and buckles and wearing a bonnet and apron, headed into the interior on their expedition eight days after arriving in Cape Town. The Collingwoods had left the bulk of their luggage in their room (which Theodore locked, keeping the key on a string around his neck). The leather valise he locked in the ancient safe that squatted like an underfed toad in the corner of Gilda Katzôs office.

óSuch was the breadth of trust in the nineteenth century,ô Yitzhak interjected. óToday you wouldnôt trust your mother with a sixpence. Obviously, Theodore had an honest face. Or maybe the English people were just plain fools. Who knows?ô

As safaris go, it wasnôt much to write home about, other than that both Collingwoods achieved nothing more than ending up dead.

Here, said Yitzhak, is what happened.

The day after setting foot on dry land, and filled with a surfeit of stiff upper lippedness, grit and determination Monty Collingwood set forth ï following Theodoreôs careful directions ï with his purse full of pounds to acquire a Cape Cart and three sturdy steeds, plus a guide. He returned to the boarding house a few hours later with a spanking new and fully provisioned cart, a shiftless guide named Snuffelaar Caatje, and three horses.

Two of the horses would pull the cart, and the third horse, Monty Collingwood stated, would be tethered to the back of the cart in case of lameness.

Collingwood immediately named the main horses Bucephalus, which he explained was the name of Alexander the Greatôs horse, and the other, Chetak, which the Rana Pratap of Mewar in India rode into battle.

The spare horse he named Norman.

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rs, riding boots, a deerstalker hat and a billowing white shirt, frilled at the throat like Beau Brummell, Monty Collingwood hoisted Gladys (done up to the nines in corsets, a knee-length chemise, and multiple layers of petticoat) onto the front seat of the four-wheeled cart.

He turned heroically to the mountainous horizon, at which he gave a thousand-mile stare.

ôThere is our path,ô he emoted like the elder Barrymore, pointing with his pipe stem towards the hinterland. With a muffled sob catching in his throat, he added, ôWe shall venture forth in search of lions and tigers, elephants and water buffalo and all the other beasts of this mysterious, dark continent.ô

He sucked in a gigantic, lung-bursting breath and expelled it slowly, savouring its sweetness.

ôThe African air é Does it not make your heart sing, dearest?ô

Gladys Collingwood, nose wrinkled, smiled at her husband.

ócanôt wait, dear heart.ô

ócaatje?ô

óYes boss?ô

óAre we ready to move out?ô

óYes boss.ô

óAnd I have your word weôll find wild animals to look at in abundant numbers?ô

óYes boss.ô

óRight-oh then,ô Collingwood sang out heartily as he vaulted onto the front seat alongside Gladys, quickly adjusting the cartôs bowed leather hood, óweôre off! Cheerio, old man!ô

He waved at Theodore, who waved back bleakly, eyes glued on Leah, strategically positioned by Monty Collingwood to walk at the swaying left rear of the cart, with Caatje front right alongside Bucephalus, his hand resting on the horseôs leather bridle.

Leah and Caatje had been so placed to ensure that in the event the cart wandered towards the edge of a mountain road, either Caatje or Leah would push it back on track.

That Leah was built like a barley twig was of minor consequence for Collingwood, who assumed that servant class people were genetically possessed of greater physicality than toffs.

ôTake good care,ô Theodore called.

Leah turned, waved and smiled broadly. óBack in a tick, Theodore,ô she called. óPromise!ô

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ssion wander down the road, heading in an easterly

velled, even back in the mid-nineteenth century.

He sighed, pondered the likelihood that Leah, like Herman Bleek, might drift out of his life forever and shrugged at the inevitability.

His reasoning was not entirely based on pessimism, but rather a realistic assessment of what life had offered him so far.

The previous evening Monty and Gladys, with Theodore in attendance and in charge of manning Collingwoodôs whisky decanter, had sat at the dining room table poring over hastily acquired rudimentary maps of the territory.

óWe shall head for Agter Cogmanskloof, via what I hear is a positively spectacular gorge,ô said Collingwood, poking at the map with a kitchen match. He sucked on a black cheroot and expelled a perfectly circular smoke ring, which he briefly admired for its excellent shape and form.

óCogmans Kloof, I suspect, is so named because it skirts the Cogmans River,ô Collingwood deduced, pointing at a village which lay along the route, and sandwiched between the Keisie and Kinga rivers. óLovely place, Iôve been told. Grow grapes and other fruit there. Nectarines and so forth. And it has positively wonderful hot springs, Gladys dearest. Near the entrance to a place called Badskloof.ô

óIt sounds like an awful lot of kloofs,ô said Gladys.

óActually, what exactly is a kloof?ô Leah asked.

óOh, itôs a small hill. I asked Caatje and his friends if it they were easy to cross and they all said it would very easy indeed. And they should know of course, being natives.ô

Theodore examined the map.

óIt looks as if you may have to cross a few rivers several times to get there.ô

óNot to worry, old son,ô Collingwood patted Theodore on the shoulder. óWe shall be safe as houses. Anyway, there are bags of people weôll meet on the way. Seems weôre building a new pass é the British, that is, not Mrs. Collingwood and I of course.ô

Monty Collingwood shuddered delicately and leaned back in his chair, knitted his fingers behind his neck, considering a world filled with Colonial Innovation.

óScottish engineers doing it, I expect,ô he surmised. óWherever you go in the world, wherever thereôs progress, youôll find Scottish engineers. If thatôs the case, the pass might even be ready by the time we get there.ô

History would prove that Collingwoodôs estimation was off by seven years.

Seemingly, there were no Scottish engineers available because the pass and a tunnel through Kalkoenkrans opened in 1877 and by then the Collingwoods would have been somewhat decomposed and therefore no longer concerned with any sort of structural innovation.

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The incompleteness of the pass, the rudimentary roads that became tracks, and that Collingwoodôs travel provisions comprised several bottles of local champagne, sandwiches and cakes and some bully beef for Caatje and Leah was probably what set the seal on the life and times of Gladys Collingwood and her beloved husband, Montague, banker (retired), late of Chipping Sodbury, South Gloucestershire, England.

You see, a kloof is not a hill, but is rather an extremely deep ravine, and while a good Cape Cart was a sturdy enough means of transport, it was entirely inadequate for the purpose of following the trail pointed out by Caatje, who was no more a guide than he was heir to the Rothschild fortune.

Evidence led later in his extremely abbreviated court case showed that the furthest Caatje had ever travelled was to Wellington, and that passed out in the back of an ox wagon. Added to his singular lack of knowledge about the geography of the area was his complete absence of any English: Snuffelaar Caatje knew the sum total of two words, both of which had served him well enough.

Yes, boss.

Caatje (a translator later told the court) apparently thought he was going to help the English man with his garden, when Monty Collingwood approached him and a clutch of his friends as they loafed outside a bakery in Wale Street hopeful of discarded loaves or rusks.

He thought this because his best friend, Adonis Contant ï who did speak English ï interpreted for him, aided and abetted by the rest of the group who smirked conspiratorially at each other as Adonis Contant positioned Snuffelaar Caatje squarely in the crosshairs.

If you canôt trust your best friends é

And there was the first problem.

Adonis, being something of a wag, decided to play a small joke on his *ou pellie* Snuffelaar when opportunity presented itself as Monty Collingwood, who hove into view bristling with funds and enquiring if the group contained anyone who knew his way around inland Cape.

Caatjeôs best friend Adonis quickly whispered to Caatje in Dutch that the white man wanted to know if anyone wanted to earn ten shillings.

*ôZeggen "*Yes Bossò *om alles wat de Engelsman vraagt,'* Adonis whispered conspiratorially.

Thus é

óCan any of you gentlemen assist?ôCollingwood asked.

óYes boss,ôCaatje quickly volunteered, raising his hand.

óHis name is Caatje, My Lord,ôContant said.

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ollingwood asked Caatje.

óAnd do you know all the trails and roads to the Cogmans Kloof?ô

óYes boss.ô

óGood-oh! We have a deal then. Iôll pick you up right here tomorrow morning then? Does that suit?ô

óYes boss.ô

óIôll make sure heôs here, boss,ô Adonis promised, winking at his other friends, who sniggered into their hands.

óIs it an arduous é a difficult trip?ô

óItôs simple, My Squire,ô Adonis said. óJusô a small tiny trek into the countryside. Like a *piekniek,* My Lord.ô

óSounds like bags of fun,ô Collingwood said.

óYes boss,ô concurred Caatje, rib-prodded by Adonis.

óAnd to the nearest town or village?ô

óLess than a dayôs easy ride. Right boys?ô Contant said.

The group nodded as one.

ó*Ja*, itôs simple, My Master. *Ou* Caatje here, he knows the land like the back of his own hand.ô

óYou do?ô Collingwood looked at Caatje, who of course confirmed the tripôs simplicity in his usual manner, nodding eagerly at the concept of how much of the good stuff he could buy with ten shillings ï an amount heôd never seen in one bunch.

óWonderful,ô Collingwood smiled. óThanks chaps! See you tomorrow, Caatje.ô

And off he strolled, whistling the *Black Bear* until he disappeared over the rise.

óBest you go tell Liesbet the good news,ô Adonis suggested to the grateful Caatje, who dashed off home, leaving Contant and his gang weeping with laughter as he disappeared around the corner.

It seems they all knew something that Caatje did not ï that is, Adonis Contant had eyes for Snuffelaar Caatjeôs pretty wife, Liesbet. Whatôs more, Adonis suspected the delectable Liesbet similarly fancied Contant too: it was simply a matter of making sure, but Caatje had to be out of sight for a while, so Collingwood was a Godsend.

The appropriately named Adonisô suspicions were spot on, it later transpired. Snuffelaar on the other hand suspected nothing.

He found out eventually though. After he struggled back into Cape Town several weeks later, with a story to tell his wife and friends about the demise of those strange English people who had no idea where they were going, and who died getting there, and how heôd be damned if there were rose gardens anywhere.

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ôThis goes to show the wisdom of the *Yidden,'* Yitzhak interjected.

ôThey will tell you, a fool can answer more questions in an hour than a wise man can answer in a year. Such a fool was Collingwood, and to a lesser degree Caatje who was a *schmuck* and knew not what he did, to paraphrase the New Testament. Luke, I think, but without the *schmuck,* of course.

ôSo, Leah told Theodore what happened, and he told me, and of course I will now tell you. Such is the nature of high-class story telling. As you may not know, Leah passed away soon after I was born. I have only had conversations with her in my dreams. But my father? *Oy,* could he talk when the mood took him. In Yiddish, we say ñ*Ibergekumeneh tsores iz gut tsu dertsailen",* which means that itôs good to talk about troubles that are over.ô

He rose, squinting.

ôTalking of troubles, I need a quick *pisch.* Iôm desperate.ô

The first few days of the Collingwood quest were tough, but acceptable, bearing in mind this was nineteenth century Africa. At the first sunset and Monty Collingwood called a halt alongside a small stream, hopping off the cart and helping Gladys dismount.

ôWe shall encamp here,ôCollingwood announced, surveying the small clearing.

That was when the next problem arose.

Collingwood had omitted to acquire anything resembling bedding. No blankets or anything which might be used to construct any sort of shelter. Such things had always been arranged by the menservants back at home.

There being no expectation of this adventure being anything more than a day trip, Collingwood had similarly not purchased such items as tents, forage for the horses, water containers (therefore excluding water from the list of available beverages) digging utensils or any kind of firearm with which to slaughter passing edible wildlife.

Leah imagined that Collingwood presumed the path to Cogmanôs Kloof would be paved with acceptable eateries, taverns and sundry public houses in which one could buy a decent cottage pie or ploughmanôs lunch ï just as one would do in the backwoods of Great Britain, in such exotic places such as Leicestershire.

The discovery that this piece of rural Africa was paved with nothing more than *fynbos* and trees interspersed among rocks set him back only momentarily. Resolutely, Collingwood set about finding a solution to this temporary setback.

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bout this,ô he suggested cheerily, which translated to ing the sandwiches and cake while the small round three-legged pot ï a *potjie,* which he had been told was perfect for braising venison ï served as a makeshift kettle, Leah scooping water from the stream. Soon, she was serving tea to the Collingwoods who sat plump and happy at their makeshift picnic.

Eventually, Collingwood announced the party would sleep under the stars tonight.

ôIt shall be the most fun,ô he enthused. ôTomorrow I imagine we shall ride into Cogmanôs Kloof.ô He nodded towards the stream. ôThis must be one of the Keisie or Kinga River, Caatje? Am I right?ô

ôYes boss,ô said Caatje, wondering when he would be paid his ten shillings.

Satisfied, the Collingwoods drifted off to sleep. Caatje wandered off behind a small bush and was snoring within a few minutes.

Leah, not entirely certain that the ground wasnôt seething with all manner of snakes, found herself a nook in the cart and, with her feet aching from her small trek at the rear of the cart, was soon fast asleep.

The following morning Leah made another *potjie* of tea while Collingwood reasoned that as rivers run down to the sea, they should simply travel upstream, hugging the banks of what was either the Keisie or Kinga River, and which would obviously lead them in short shrift to Cogmanôs Kloof.

Caatje, who emerged from his sleeping place with his woolly hair enmeshed with leaves, naturally agreed when Collingwood posed his solution, as he did when Collingwood proposed veering somewhat off the beaten track as a short(ish) cut to Cogmanôs Kloof and the inevitable soft beds and hot meals.

ôIt shall be another adventure,ô Collingwood promised.

The reconstruction of events heard in court later when a professional guide gave evidence suggested that rather than being either of the quaintly named Keisie or Kingie rivers, the Collingwood party had perhaps happened on one of the Holsloot or Smalblaar Rivers which meandered down from the Stettyn mountain ranges. Or perhaps, it was one of either the Slang or Buffeljags Rivers which drain the Langeberg Mountains and flow towards the Breede River.

The good news might have been that at some point around these rivers lurked the town of Swellendam, where yet another river ï the appropriately named Riviersonderend ï happened to amble by. Alas, a week into the journey, and with neither village nor campsite, tavern nor eatery, Scottish engineer nor *Boer* trekker crossing their path, it was evident the Collingwood party was in such *tsores* not even supplication to the Almighty helped.

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em all that while there was no shortage of water, there f the men to catch a fish, let alone shoot a warthog or suchlike, given there was no firearm available nor any bow and arrow.

The sandwiches, Caatjeôs bully beef and of course the cakes and biscuits were gone.

Only Caatje knew where the four bottles of champagne had disappeared to, and he wasnôt telling.

In addition, the small trek had wandered far down a road less travelled, which is to say, the track became a path, then a series of ruts, then nothing.

Somewhere approaching mid-afternoon on the eighth day, with Monty Collingwood scanning the horizon impatiently and Gladys sighing with pointed annoyance, Chetak put his hoof into a meerkat hole and snapped his leg.

It made a sound like a Smith and Wesson pistol, the crack echoing through the hills.

Leah shrieked as Chetak stumbled and collapsed inside his harness. Gladys Collingwood let go the reins, clapping her hands over her mouth.

Horses scream.

They scream when two stallions confront each other to fight for leadership of a herd of wild ponies or mastery of the paddock among civilised horses.

They also scream when there is pain of such intensity; the animal recognises at some deeply instinctive level that this agony is a precursor to the end of life.

Being horse people, the Collingwoods understood. Monty Collingwood immediately leaped from the cart seat, shouting, ó*Good Lord! My dear good Lord!*ô and squatted alongside Chetak.

ó*Heôs splintered his cannon bone,*ô he pronounced, ó*and the fetlockôs absolutely shattered.*ô

ó*He must be in agony,*ô said Gladys, still sitting in the cart. ó*Can you do something?*ô

Sad to say, repairing broken horse legs is, even in modern times, extraordinarily difficult. In the gloom of the Cape backwoods, it was hopeless.

This meant yet another conundrum for the touring party.

The Collingwoods chose not to put Chetak ó*to sleep*ô by shooting him in the head, there being no gun available. Also, being refined, one couldnôt really put a 17-hands-high horse out of its misery by cutting its throat with the butter knife from a *Toccatore della Zecca di Venezia* cutlery set

ó*Perhaps you should hit him on the head with a rock?*ô Gladys suggested helpfully.

Collingwood nodded with little enthusiasm, and stooped to lift an insubstantial stone the size of a tennis ball, which he immediately dropped, shrieking and clutching the small of his back.

ó*Itôs gone!*ô he howled at Gladys. ó*My backôs gone!*ô

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Collingwood staggered bent like a staple and clutching a point fractionally due north of his buttocks, and hobbled at astonishing pace to the back of the cart where, saucer-eyed with relief, he hopped nimbly aboard.

This was apparently an encore performance of previous well-timed back problems, judging by Gladys Collingwoodôs rolling eyes and unsympathetic references to actress Dame Sarah Siddons.

ôDear?ô Gladys said to Leah, nodding towards the horse, then the stone, which was genuinely way too heavy for Leah to pick up.

Ants can carry many times their own body weight. Leah, being a worker but not an ant, usually struggled with the average filled teapot.

ôPerhaps a sharpened stick?ô Gladys suggested.

ôWeôd need a knife to sharpen it, maôam,ô said Leah.

óOh yes. Good point.ô

Collingwood poked his head over the edge of the cart.

ôWhereôs Caatje?ô

Leah and Gladys Collingwood looked around.

Of course, Caatje was not there.

They hallooed and called, then assumed he had drifted off to heaven-knows-where.

ôI suspect weôre on our own. Or maybe Caatje went to find help,ô Collingwood suggested without any great belief.

ôWell, we shall have to manage,ô Gladys stated, firmly grasping the cart reins in her terribly refined hands.

There has throughout history been a dogged fortitude about English women, beginning with Boadicea and continuing through the suffragette Emilies ï Pankhurst and Davidson ï and which Leah and Gladys Collingwood displayed that day. After waiting for a short while for the prodigal Caatjeôs unlikely return, the two women set about unharnessing Chetak and replacing him with Norman who stared in alarm at Chetak writhing and snorting alongside the cartôs harnessing and bows.

There was clearly no humane way of putting Chetak out of his misery, so leaving the big horse alive was adjudged by the women as the most pragmatic, next best option. And anyway, they were two women lost in the bosom of Africa with a disabled husband and absentee manservant, so what to do? With Gladys steering, Leah walking in front, holding Normanôs bridle and Monty Collingwood whimpering amidships, the tiny caravan rolled away, leaving the anguished Chetak, blasting hot gusts from his nostrils and rolling his panicked eyes.

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ad a more-than-acceptable hunting knife tucked out of
ention the weapon to Collingwood, believing that the Englishman, affable as he was, would automatically pigeonhole an armed native as a criminal.

Caatje had, shortly before Chetakôs mishap, shuffled into the bushes to spew a bellyful of pilfered champagne behind a bush, after which he passed out, as was his habit when heôd had a few.

The distant crack as Chetakôs leg snapping was unheard by Caatje who lay fuddled in what the Dutch called a *dwaal* ï or if you were Scots, a ódeep broon thingô.

Headache thundering in his temples, Caatje snored himself into oblivion.

Some hours later, rested and still bewildered by the surprising potency of warm champagne, Caatje emerged just in time to see the Cape Cart trundling off into the distance.

ó*Hel en verdoemenis,'* he cursed and ran to the campsite where he found Chetak twisting and blowing like a steam pump.

Whatever Snuffelaar Caatje may not have been, he most certainly was a lover of animals, so the sight of Chetakôs agony was a punch to the heart.

A soft heart soaked in stolen Champagne will do that to you every time.

He took the bone-handled old hunting knife and in a thicket he sawed away at some strong branches, which he planned to use as a makeshift splint for Chetak. Then he shredded his miserable shirt into strips to hold the splint in place.

He returned to the horse, wearing just his knee length khaki trousers held up with twine. His dejected shoes had perished days before, but his feet were callused for barefoot walking in Africa.

The rags in his hands were the colour of bleakness.

Chetak, by now even more hysterical with pain, was of course never going to be splinted. Of course, Caatje knew that. He gently stroked the horseôs neck, weeping and crooning and cooing in soft Dutch until Chetakôs terror slowly subsided into the profound silence of a church after everyone has gone home.

Chetak looked deeply into Caatjeôs eyes as Caatje stroked the blaze on the horseôs forehead.

It was when the horse nudged Caatjeôs arm with a muzzle soft as Liesbetôs hand that the failed and cuckolded husband, lazy grape picker and hopeless guide finally broke down.

He was a zealous believer in the concept of all Godôs creatures deserving dignity, so he squatted alongside Chetak, stroking the long neck, just as he had stroked his wifeôs cheek when he had courted and wooed her years before with impossible promises and hopeless hope. Man looked at horse and horse looked at man, and never was there a firmer consent between beings.

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ry and lost and there was obviously no rose garden to
orse, crazy with pain and ready to die.

Sniffing and wiping his nose with the back of his arm, Snuffelaar Caatje said a brief *Onze Vader,* then calmly placed his left hand over Chetakôs eyes.

Like the soft touch of a loverôs trailing fingers, Caatjeôs knife slid gently and effortlessly through Chetakôs flesh, severing the artery so very easily that the horse felt little more than the slightest suggestion of a tingle.

An hour later, with several pounds of horseflesh wrapped in his tattered shirt, Snuffelaar Caatje trotted off to find the Collingwoods and the skinny little girl.

It was near midnight when he realised he was utterly and completely lost, so he did the next most logical thing: he started a fire and roasted a chunk of Chetak.

His search would continue at first light.

óI must tell you now,ôsaid Yitzhak, óthat almost everything in the next part of the story is from documents I have managed to dig up from old court files. Thereôs also some anecdotal evidence from newspapers of the day, which suggests not everything was entirely kosher from the moment Leah and Gladys trotted off into the sunset, with Caatje in lukewarm pursuit.

óThere is Leahôs story, which she gave after recovering from her ordeal. I managed to find old press cuttings from the South African Library: you send them some information in a letter about what you want to read in a newspaper from that time. What do you call it in the newspaper business? The morgue? Anyway, the library sends back pages from old newspapers ï the miracle of nature and technology. They have small fishes that they send to find the exact pages.

óMicrofiche?ô

óThem, yes.ô

Yitzhak smiled at me with just the left corner of his mouth, which went up minisculously, as if tiny workmen resident in his white moustache had a winch.

It was a smile unrelated to humour, and which suggested something immense was troubling my fatherôs friend.

óI discovered in my research that this story was not just about people getting lost in Africa, as happened back then. It seems that the deeper into the hinterland the party went ï tracked like a dog by Caatje ï they took a series of terrible deviations. Leah said in a report that in a moment of panic, Monty Collingwood mistakenly insisted that as the sun rises in the west, the group head in the other direction, towards *that* range of mountains *there.* East.ô

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hak explained, indicated that the group thus headed off
tains ï Obiqua, Winterhoek and Witzenberg ï believing these to be the peaks that peered down on Cape Town and safety.

Sometimes one mistake is compounded by another, then another.

So it was that, at the foot of the Klein Winterhoek, Monty Collingwood suddenly experienced a forehead-slapping moment of clarity and damned his own fool eyes for his earlier directional confusion.

ôWeôre going the wrong way,ô he confessed. ôSun rises in the east, not the west, of course. I must have been dizzy with pain and lack of food. We must turn about and head back.ô

The party returned to their wilderness where they happened across Caatje, who was steadfastly tracking the three English people using terror, missionary teachings and poverty as his compass.

Hindsight is an exquisite gift God bestows upon the luckless.

Had Collingwood not corrected his initial error, the group would have blithely trotted onwards and right into the tiny village community of Tulbagh, which sits in the heart of the Winterhoek, Witzenberg and Obiqua mountains.

But they didnôt, of course.

óAt that point in the journey, events become very cloudy,ô said Yitzhak. óNo one really ever understood what happened in the next few days. At least, there are no records.ô

He looked at me.

óBut I have my ideas,ô he added. ôI have notions. I have the stories my father related to me too.ô

I knew it would have to wait until the next time, though.

Yitzhak needed to prepare.

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Faren doktor un faren beder zeinen nito kain soides. From a doctor and from a bathhouse attendant there are no secrets.

óCoincidence is a funny thing,ô Yitzhak said. óOr maybe it was fate or kismet or that karma thing the hippies talk about.ô

Yitzhak, resplendent that evening in what he called his óRabbinical chicô style ï that is, black pants and white shirt unbuttoned at the throat ï tented his fingers, as always, but instead of wearing the barely-suppressed glee which usually masked his face when he was about to unveil another chunk of his story, the expression on his face was one youôd see when picnickers look at the sky and see thunderclouds looming.

óAs I told you, Theodore kept everything. He was a hoarder,ô Yitzhak said, measuring his words.

óNot too long ago, out of that very kist, which once contained my fatherôs toys, then his papers, then all of those things plus Leahôs *tschatchkes* ï her trinkets ï I found a copy of *South African Commercial Advertiser.* This was the main newspaper in Cape Town in the last century. There were some other papers in his kist. Iôll get to them in due course.

óLook at them,ô he said, gently proffering the ancient broadsheet pages. óTheyôre the colour of jaundice.ô

The newspaper reports covered the inquest into the deaths of Montgomery and Gladys Collingwood. In the quaint journalism of the day, the reports said both Collingwoods had died from head injuries ósustained in a fall down a Kloof upon which they had unwittingly stumbledô.

Leah Miller (that was her maiden name, by the way, Yitzhak noted) said she was sleeping in the Cape Cart and heard what she termed a ótremendous commotionô. She looked over the edge of the cart and saw first some dust, then a man named as Snuffelaar Caatje, an unemployed grape picker, óemerge from the gloom with his hands covered in bloodô.

óMiss Miller,ô the newspaper reported, ótestified that she asked Caatje if the Collingwoods were dead. Miss Miller said Caatje had confirmed this. Miss Miller then climbed down the kloof herself and reached their bodies which were not too far down.ô

The report noted Leahôs suspicion when she saw that coincidentally both her employersô heads had been óshocking mashedô in exactly the same spot, that being on their respective right temples.

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e had climbed up the steep side of the kloof and ódespite being terrified, courageously confronted the thoroughly wicked Malay manô who admitted to her that he had killed both Collingwoods and set the horses freeô,ô said Yitzhak, who had clearly memorised every word in the news report.

He rubbed his eyes tiredly.

óCan you believe such prejudice, even back then? Anyway, the newspaper reported that Caatje was then asked by the magistrate ï after his plea had been entered ï if Leahôs claim was true.ô

Snuffelaar Caatje, who was eventually hanged for the murders, denied everything. He insisted that the English people had tried to sneak away under cover of night so they wouldnôt have to pay him the ten shillings he had been promised to tend the Englishmanôs garden.

óWho would you believe if you were a judge in a British Empire court? The evidence of an England girl versus the word of a blood-spattered black grape picking thug, rambling mindlessly about rose gardens in the depths of Africa?ô

Yitzhak pointed to a line in the newspaper story with an extended little finger.

óThe defence counsel did not quiz his client on the stand too excessively, using the time-honoured code that defendants tend to incriminate themselves when giving evidence, so better to let others do the evidencing,ô he said. óSadly for Caatje, the prosecutor had no problem having Caatje dig his own grave, so to speak.ô

Yitzhak topped up his glass of sweet red *Shabbat* wine.

óIn these days, of course, the police would probably have been able to test the blood on Caatjeôs hands and find it to be maybe horse blood. Also, they might have found it strange that a fifteen-year-old girl in leather-soled shoes and severely weakened by lack of food and water could have climbed down the side of a very, very steep kloof.

óSo, we have a prime example of what ignorance of the prosecutorôs language can do,ô Yitzhak said. óPoor damned Caatje. The trial obviously proceeded rapidly because colonial law was not too concerned with long trials of a trivial nature, the natives seemingly always running around killing each other at the time.

óAlso, the victims were English gentry, so the courts probably wanted to show London how swiftly justice was meted out in the Cape. There were many such examples back then. Malays hanged or imprisoned for, well, nonsense. So much for the presumption of innocence.ô

Caatjeôs trial included the testimony of one Adonis Contant, who told the court (in English) of Caatjeôs úuncontrollable temperôô

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ever actually appeared in court at all, provided a sworn statement that similarly suggested Snuffelaar Caatje was a brutish thug unafraid of using his fists or his knife. Liesbet could not attend the trial because she was pregnant é with Adonis Contantôs child, but the newspaper didnôt note that little fact either because (obviously) they didnôt know.

ôNothing,ô mused Yitzhak, óexplains why the Queenôs Counsel or Caatjeôs defence didnôt query why it was that, if Caatje had murdered the Collingwoods, he did not also kill Leah? What happened between the time Caatje disappeared and Leah wandered back into Cape Town, half-dead and barefoot?ô

He looked up.

ôDid I mention that? Leah must have wandered through the backwoods for about fifty miles. Maybe more. This was a very long distance to walk. Not like now, when you can drive your Buick to the coast in half a day and stop for a Coca Cola on the way.

ôLeahôs evidence showed that when confronted by this blood-soaked man, she fainted é and it suggests she remained fainted for several days after that. Maybe it was hunger. I imagine most people faint for seconds. But this was a different time and she was starving, so who knows?ô

Yitzhak mouth-shrugged tersely.

ôAnyway, the court records, which were pretty good in those days even though they were hand-written, show not much cross-examination of any of the prosecution witnesses. Just Leah and Adonis, and of course the medical examiner, were briefly quizzed. Evidence showed that Leah staggered home, followed a day later by Caatje, who swore on everything holy he had been trying to catch up to Leah for days and days.ô

ôThe story notes that Caatje, after sentencing, was led away ôbewilderedô and shouting to his friend Adonis, ówhat happened?ô in Dutch. The story does not mention Adonisôreaction.ô

Yitzhak paused, sipped, adjusted a cushion in the small of his back and eased into the chair.

ôI *kratsed mein kepelle* many times over this case many times and have come to a hundred different conclusions. Was it that Caatje, gripped by remorse after killing his employers, decided to follow Leah back to Cape Town, where he would confess? If so, this makes more questions. Who buried the Collingwoods? They must have been buried because there was never sign or sight of them alive or dead ever again.

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óOr maybe they were left to the vultures? I donôt even know if there are vultures in the Cape. Could Leah have known what was happening? Was she terrified out of her mind? Walking around as if in a mist?ô

Yitzhak wore his frustration like a *tallis*. óFor quite some time it all made no sense to me. Justice was seen to be done, but maybe it wasnôt actually done at all. I just do not know.ô

He absently arranged the *tzitzit* tassels poking from beneath his white shirt hem.

óSee what happens when you read Perry Mason books?ô

He rose and plodded to the kist, using his ornate walking stick to prop up the lid as he gently took out a carefully wrapped leather-bound folder.

óNow,ôhe said as he slowly lowered the lid, ówe need to examine some other interesting events which occurred while the Collingwoods and Leah were stumbling through the mountains in search of either Shangri-La or a decent pub.ô

Over the hills in Cape Town, Yitzhak said, while the Collingwoods and Leah were gone, something was stirring.

The widow Katz and Theodore had a meeting.

óI know this because I found in the kist a copy of a contract of partnership between Theodore and Gilda Katz,ôsaid Yitzhak. ódôm going to give it to you to read in your own time. You must digest it and you can draw your own conclusions.

óIt is how the story unfolded, based on the evidence, and also as my father told me at the end of his days.ô

Jews have a sometimes undeserved reputation for fiscal sharpness ï an acuity which historically supersedes all other religion when it comes to raking in everything from Francs to Dollars to Kenyan Shillings, Yitzhak said, pointing to himself as a prime example of a singular failure to accrue massive amounts of funds, thus (in his mind anyway) decrying the stereotype.

Theodore, on the other hand, lent substantial credence to the reputation.

When the Collingwood safari clopped out of town, Theodore irritably shoved his hands deep into his pockets and trudged towards the wharf, singing *sotto voce* an off-key version of *Oyfn pripetchik,* an old folk song heôd learnt as a little boy.

The song was about children sitting with their Rabbi in a cosy room somewhere in Europe or Russia, learning their alphabet while a fire roars in the hearth.

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...rl,

Un der rebbe lernt kleyne kinderlekh

Dem alef-beyz.

Zet zhe kinderlekh,

Gedenkt zhe, tayere, vos ir lernt doh,

Zogt zhe nokh a mol un take nokh a mol:

'Komets-alef: o!'

ó*On the hearth, a fire burns; and in the house it is warm. And the rabbi is teaching little children the alphabet...'*

So long ago. So very, very far away. Somewhere in another universe he would never revisit.

At the end of the second verse, Theodore halted, about-turned and marched back to the boarding house.

It was time.

He sat on the boarding house steps for some hours, thinking.

Scheming.

Taking some of the notions Leah had hinted at in their through-the-night conversation, then expanding these ideas. Adding some thoughts, then ferociously discarding them because they did not make any sense at all. He considered every possible flaw, fiercely attacked his own theories, and examined options. In due course, Theodoreôs natural gift of being able to think laterally helped produce the answers he sought.

Humankind continuously seeks answers that make sense of our lives. Theodore worked out what made sense (in his mind) and planned a way forward until just before sunset, when he concluded his ómapô. On a scrap of paper, using the nub of a dwarf pencil, he scribbled numbers, added and subtracted, checked his arithmetic, then checked again.

Theodore was very, very good with numbers.

It would work, he concluded.

It couldnôt fail.

Confidently, he tapped on Gilda Katzôs bedroom door and heard a response consisting of a series of rasping coughs, which he interpreted as proof of life.

Theodore cracked the door a fraction, heard no objections to his entering, and walked in to find the widow Katz sitting in her bed, propped up by pillows and sipping tea from a handleless cup. She squinted quizzically at Theodore.

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y in English, ól want to talk to you about a deal.ô

ôs face, saw nothing but guileless eyes and patted the side of her bed, as Leah had done not too long before.

ó*Zitz*, boy. Let me hear what you got to say.ô

Expecting the usual barracking laughter Theodore put forward to the woman his grand concept.

ól wish to purchase your boarding house,ô he said without preface.

Gilda Katz did not laugh or jeer.

óSpik,ô she commanded.

Then she listened.

Theodoreôs plan was simple: get an acceptable valuation of the property by an expert. Perhaps someone at the bank. There are such people at banks who do this, he explained.

Then (he proposed) instead of working for pennies and saving everything he could for a day which might rain, he proposed that Gilda Katz keep his wages ï and use those funds not as rent but as a means of buying the boarding house over time, thus paying off the valued price in monthly amounts.

Buy instead of rent. Itôs common practice, Theodore pronounced. It was called Deed of Sale. He saw blankness in the eyes of Gilda Katz.

ól will explain,ô Theodore said patiently. óLetôs say the bankôs valuation of the boarding house is one thousand pounds,ô Theodore said, óand letôs say I get from you five pounds a month. Instead of paying me that money, you keep it until I have inquired fifty-one percent. In other words, Five hundred and ten pounds.

ól will then take my percentage to the bank. They will lend me ï against that percentage which I will give them as cholesterol ï the remaining money, which I will give you in fulfilled and final settlement. My debt for the remaining shares will be with the bank, and you will have a thousand pounds in your pocket, free and clear.ô

It was astonishing, the information one could acquire just by listening to a cheap whore having a post-coital chat with a bald banker from Rotterdam.

ôEnd why should dis proposal interest me?ô asked Gilda Katz (who was most certainly interested).

Theodore put on a mask reflecting empathy, concern and deep, deep care.

ôWithout your dear, departed husband, bless his soul,ô Theodore said sincerely behind his mask, óyou need time to grieve. To perhaps in the fullness of time find another husband, to live a full life, rather than suffer the hardships of running this place, in a day and out of another day. You will be getting my labour for nothing, so thereôs more money you can keep.

ôEnd der gels?ô

ôYou can have their income too,ô he said. ól have no interest in their earnings.ô

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nsidered the potential. Then ó*psshhh,*ô again.

óBoy,ô she said eventually. óWe gotted a deal.ô Wheezing she leaned forward and shook Theodoreôs hand, such was the manner in which deals were settled way back then.

In his tiny room, through the day, he drafted, then tore up, then drafted again, and tore up again, a contract, which he finally transcribed (in ink) and took to Gilda Katz shortly after sunset.

In her bedroom, in the flickering light of an oil lamp, Gilda Katz shut one eye and squinted long and hard at the contents, every now and then querying this clause or that sub-section, such as the passage in which Theodore stated that if either partner passed away before the full amount had been paid, then full ownership would revert to the surviving partner. Theodore could sense the cogs in Gilda Katzôs mind clicking and clunking.

Theodore knew with absolute certainty that when the time was right ï at about forty-nine percent, perhaps ï that Gilda Katz would curb her wheezing and sneak up behind Theodore to garrote or knife his young life away. Or get some local tough to do the deed. There were plenty around who would kill a man for the price of a shot of whisky.

Not only did Theodore know exactly whom he was dealing with, he could absolutely see it in her eyes. Indeed, her imagined cunning was critical to Theodoreôs plan.

Theodore was correct, of course.

The next day Theodore walked to the bank, which was called the Board of Executors, to open an account and request a bank-approved estimation of a fair price for *Gilda Katzes Bording House.*

The banker, clad in a neatly pinstriped suit, happily agreed to appoint an evaluator. The official then examined and notarised the contract between Gilda Katz and Theodore Isaacs, using red wax as a seal, and lodged the contract in the bankôs vault. The contract had been witnessed by two visitors to the Inn the previous day.

Theodore also presented a dented biscuit tin to the banker. It contained all the money Theodore had saved since his arrival in Cape Town seven years earlier. Theodoreôs first bank account was opened with a deposit of three hundred pounds ï a fortune in those days, much of it silver and coppers that constituted his pay from the Katzes over the years. There was also some reasonably fresh paper money and other older, ragged notes heôd received as reward money from visitors whose wallets he had managed to find after they had accidentally dropped them in the cathouse.

Whistling, Theodore emerged from the bank, hands in his pockets, and decided to take a cab home.

This was not a day for businessmen to walk.

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trolled down to the docks, mooching around until midday, when the blustering Cape Doctor ï the powerful South Easter wind which howls through the city at odd times and turns flags from limply vertical to stiffly horizontal ï forced Theodore to duck his head and battle his way to the Inn.

There was pandemonium when he arrived back at the boarding house.

Shrieking hysterically, one of Gilda Katzôs more seasoned prostitutes ran up to Theodore.

óSheôs dayd!ô the whore screeched. óFookinô old bat done gone and snoofed it! Right there in óer mangy bloominô óell óole!ô

óMy God,ô Theodore gasped. óSomeone run and get McFee!ô

óAlready dunnít!ô the woman said.

Theodore rushed inside and found McFee covering the bloated corpse on the bed with a stained off-yellow blanket. The other prostitutes, some residual hangers-on, a few late-leaving gentlemen callers and the two Malay girls hovered in the corner of the room, aghast, fingertips at their lips, eyes like moons.

óWhat happened?ô Theodore asked.

Griselda Sidebottom, one of the more sober and therefore more articulate of the prostitutes, stepped forward and recited. óAh coom to missus to get me mooney for the week. I seed the missus lying there, not sleepinô coz her eyes be open. She were lookinô oopôt ceiling like she finally spotted water stain in corner. I said óscuse me, missus,ô but she said fookall. Usually she coughs, like. This time she said noothinô. I went closer and fook me blind, she were clearly dayd.ô

óFits witô what I can see,ô McFee interjected. óHer lungs must look loik overstuffed soot bags. A wonder the auld bitch lasted this long. See dere (he pointed to the late Moishe Katzôs former pillow). She musta hacked out chunks of her lungs by way of a cheery fare-thee-well ta dis loif.ô

Knees crackling arthritically, McFee rose, crossed himself twice.

óPerhaps the Almightyôll look after dis woman,ô he said. óShe sure as hell didnôt look after herself.ô

He crossed himself again.

In accordance with Jewish custom which demands prompt burial, Gilda Katz was taken from the boarding house to the small Jewish cemetery where a local rabbi ï after being convinced the dead body was really Jewish (she doesnôt look Jewish, he said) ï placed her in a simple pine box which was carried to the gravesite and lowered into the ground by a pair of gasping labourers.

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gh Hebrew to intone an insincere *Kaddish* ï the prayer for the dead ï for Gilda Katz, imagining that her simple pine coffin had become a throne.

Gilda Katz, the miserable old bitch, had been queen for a day.

óNow,ôsaid Yitzhak cynically, handing me another leather folder, the brother of the folder with the press clippings of Caatjeôs trial, óhave a look at this, and tell me about the wonder of coincidence.ô

I opened the folder to find the original signed and notarised contract between Gilda Katz and Theodore Isaacs, signed at Cape Town on this day, October the fourteenth, 1870, the day of Theodoreôs twentieth birthday.

It was a masterful piece of nineteenth century quasi-contractual law, transcribed with exquisite penmanship, and of course legally binding, right down to the signatures of the two witnesses who were, specifically, a respected medical man, Dr Seamus McFee, and a local housewife, Griselda Sidebottom.

Perhaps the most remarkable feature of the contract though was Gilda Katzôs swooping signature, produced in a high quality cursive handwriting, complete with twiddles and curlicues.

Which meant something was very wrong.

It clicked immediately.

I was an investigative journalist who also used to read Perry Mason books.

óYou said Gilda Katz couldnôt read or write.ôI said.

Yitzhak rose, shuffled arthritically to his bedroom door and turned.

óNow do you understand why this story has to be told?ôhe asked, and shut the bedroom door quietly behind him, leaving me to read ancient saffron-coloured legal documents.

Yitzhak shouted from behind his door, óThe books must be balanced.ô

I heard the old mattress springs complain briefly as Yitzhak settled into an untroubled sleep.

Two hours later I turned off the lounge lights and quietly let myself out.

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A shverer beitel macht a leicht gemit ï A heavy purse makes a light-hearted spirit.

ôEveryone fears a goat from in front, a horse from the rear and a fool on every side,ô Yitzhak began. Theodore Isaacs had learned who to watch, and who to watch out for. Thereôs a difference. You should understand the concept ï journalists should tell people not what to think, but what to think *about*. Am I right? Of course Iôm right,ô he said, tapping his temple with a bent forefinger. ôIôm always right, sometimes.

ôDespite the modest ending to his life, my father always tried to make sure his family was comfortable while he lived. He was not always concerned with extravagant displays of wealth, although having said that, he was one of the first people to own a car in this city. And he did lose it, but thatôs a story for much later.ô

Yitzhakôs story telling had, over the past weeks, developed a chesslike flavour; an opening gambit here, an Epaulette Mate there, a Kingôs Pawn somewhere else.

God forbid the Bishop should make a decent move.

Storytelling had become a strategic shifting around of facts laced with incidents designed to set up the story and take it towards an inevitable conclusion.

ôIt was now nearly the end of 1871,ô Yitzhak began. ôTheodore had been the bona fide owner of the renamed boarding house for more than a year. It was given a posh English name, and of course thereôs a small story attached to that as well. My father assumed correctly that most visitors to the Cape were English, it being a British colony, and anyway, they had most money, while all the rats and mice from the rest of the world had was holes in their underpants.ô

Theodore gave the renaming of the *Gilda Katzes Bording House* some thought, then paid a young man five shillings to paint away the last memory of the Katz name and replace it with *The Lincolnshire Inn* ï which delighted Leah who had never actually been to Lincolnshire but thought it was a decent reminder of Robin Hood and all his apparent values.

Renaming the place was a short-term matter though. Being an innkeeper was never going to be Theodoreôs life work. He had greater ambitions, but recognised that erasing the Katz name was important because it helped him find an order to his life.

ôScrubbing away all the residual shreds of bad memories Theodore as a small boy must surely have experienced ï being ripped away from his family, for instance ï was important. Freud could have written a thesis on the subject,ô said Yitzhak.

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e Katzes ... well, as they say, the Katzes could *gey kak in der mielies*. In other words, the boarding house was a means to an end for Theodore Isaacs ï the bankrolling of a future that lay far away from this most beautiful Cape. Of course, Iôm not in any way suggesting that the itchy feet Theodore and Leah experienced had anything to do with the string of events leading up to this decision, but I can tell you that within a year of Gilda Katzôs unmourned passing, Theodore and Leah decided to throw seeds into the wind and travel inland in search of wealth, adventure and a place to start a new life together.

óHere we find within Theodore and Leah the proof of the power of desire, of passion, which some people think is just wanderlust or maybe an escape. Desire says if you want something badly enough, whatever it is, it will come to you, just like in the scene with the flowers in Macbeth, when the florist comes to Dunsinane.

óHereôs what happened.ô

There was never any proof ï no marriage license or similar paperwork ï to indicate if Theodore and Leah ever officially married. There was nothing he had dug up in the kist after Theodoreôs passing that bore any evidence of Theodore and Leah ever being anything other than common-law husband and wife.

There was lots of that, back in the nineteenth century.

Doubtless too, there was no question that at that time Leah was only about fifteen years old. Maybe sixteen. Equally, there was little doubt that they lived as man and wife after clearing out the last piece of Katz *drek* and exorcising the former master bedroom with Moishe Katzôs ócarbolicksesô soap until the room sparkled like freshly laundered coal. There was always the appalling ghost of Gilda Katzôs tobacco stench clinging to the curtains and bedding, and at night as Theodore lay half awake, Leahôs head on his chest and snoring like an angry bumblebee. He fancifully imagined he could hear somewhere to the left of the wet spot on the ceiling, the sound of scratching, scratching, scratching.

Maybe it was just rats.

Over the next year Theodore made several changes to the running of the *Lincolnshire Inn.* He appointed Leah as receptionist, deputy manager and his right hand. Theodore handled the money and the thinking. He still did all the cleaning work.

At Leahôs insistence McFee was given a monthly stipend to check the health and well-being of the back room women, with the strict proviso that anyone showing even the teeniest signs of the dreaded pox, herpes, gonorrhoea, syphilis or plain old crabs would be invited to leave forthwith.

Translated, this meant the women were all eventually shown the door.

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g been metaphorically and sometimes literally up to his elbows in a variety of pelvic mismanagements) the prostitutes left in dribs and drabs, snuffling and mompelling as they wandered down the block, clutching their tattered carpetbags until they found another bordello less concerned with hygiene than the *Lincolnshire Inn*.

Within a month the last of the prostitutes ï one of the Malay girls of former kitchen staff fame ï had departed, whistling and beaming and smiling, with one hundred and three sovereigns in her pocket, a song in her heart and a fresh lightly toasted bun in the oven.

The very next day, at Theodoreôs invitation, three men in smartly tailored suits and wearing straw boaters (ótitfersô, Leah called them) came a-knocking on the door. Leah recognised one as Ernest Rofelle from the bank. She hadnôt met the other two, who warmly enfolded Theodoreôs hand in their own as if being received by the Pope.

Theodore introduced the trio to Leah, who curtsied minutely.

óYour sister?ô asked Rofelle. Theodore smiled quietly, said nothing and ushered the three men into the office, which by now was totally devoid of any suggestion either Katz had ever skulked there.

An hour later they all emerged, smiling, flecked remnants of Leahôs lemon meringue pie on their weskits in counterpoint to the ink residue on their fingers.

óMy principal,ô said, Drake, the tallest of the men, ówill be most satisfied with this.ô

He waved a ribboned and red-wax sealed contract before him, like a relay runner seeking to pass the baton.

óIt is a wonderful property,ô Rofelle agreed. óAnd itôs a better-than-fair price, you must concurô

The third man, Appelbein ï who sported the *ferkrimpter ponim* associated with people whose noses are eternally buried in ledgers with too-small writing which they canôt read clearly because their bifocals are too weak ï nodded sourly.

Theodore could see the calculations of compound interests, distribution of profits and salary emoluments and miscellaneous ledger entries running across Appelbeinôs eyes like telegraph ticker tape.

The rotund Rofelle beamed at Leah. óWeôve made you and your brother rather wealthy,ô he said genially.

óLong as me old pot and pan also got some good gelt out of the deal, Iôm well chuffed,ô Leah answered dryly in as broad a cockney accent as she could muster, her mouth tweaking into a wicked half smile.

Rofelle looked at Drake, then Appelbein the accountant, bemused.

óI think she said something about the kitchen,ô Rofelle whispered to Drake.

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ally at tiny Leah, pumped Theodoreôs hand once again, each other on the backs as they popped their straw titfer-tats, and left Leah and her old man (aged twenty-one) on the *stoep*, her arm linked in his.

Rofelle turned at the carriage and called jovially to Theodore: óPayment into your account will be completed and in the ledger by close of business tomorrow. See you soon, old son!ô

And then they were off.

óDone deal?ô Leah asked.

óAll done é and the timing is as perfect as possible,ô Theodore said. óBut now is not time to let our feet stand over growing grass. Letôs go and speak to the Gibsons.ô

óNow?ô

Theodore looked at the new fob watch he had bought at the same store as the tourmaline ring he had selected for Leah a few weeks before as one of many signs of his entirely honourable intentions.

óThereôs no present like the time,ô he said and squeezed Leahôs waist. óLetôs begin the rest of our lives.ô

Not too far down the road in one of the better parts of Cape Town was a boarding house Theodore knew well. It was where his former mentor, Herman Bleek, had stayed what seemed like a century ago.

Owned by a German woman known to Theodore only as Fraulein Roesch (and woe betide you if you failed to stand when she entered the room, and rise again when she departed) the boarding house was a classic Cape Dutch design, its exquisitely rounded gables, whitewashed walls, thatched roof and embracing wings bringing, to the hearts of many a departing *Boer* settler, memories of old and nearly forgotten homes in Holland.

Theodore and Leah loved strolling like an old married couple to Fraulein Roeschôs boarding house on summer Sunday afternoons, stopping for tea and scones topped with strawberry jam bottled by a Malay man who ran a stall on the wharf.

The Roesch Boarding House sitting room, with its swooping beams and yolk-yellow evening glow suffusing the room, sparked memories of late Hampshire afternoons for Leah, and while they did not exactly make her pine for a past life, they did nudge a memory of the ingrained beauty of another time she could not (and would not) ever revisit.

On this day, as Theodore and Leah sat waiting for the Gibsons to arrive, Leah cocked her head, drinking in the ambient village sounds drifting in from the cobbled courtyard outside.

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l Frenchmen were playing *petanque* on the lawn outside, rageous wagers as their metal *boules* clacked randomly around the *cochonnet* in counterpoint to the rhythmic ticking as Theodore impatiently tapped a fingernail on his plush easy chairôs armrest.

The *petanque* sounds were dashed aside as three young men exploded into the room, all talking at the same time in frenzied, excited voices. They were clearly brothers, based on identically lunatic hair, moustachios, darting green eyes and a jumbled, simultaneously gabbled high volume chatter which was clearly heard and understood by all three ï but no one else.

Close brothers understand this unique connection of sound and exhilaration: twins comprehend it even more definitively. To strangers though, it was an onslaught of *meshuggenehs* as the three young men gang-rushed Theodore and Leah, slapping backs, pumping hands, kissing cheeks, slapping backs again, roaring with laughter and yattering without any fear of interruption, dirty looks or the improbability of Fraulein Roesch storming in and throwing a bucket of cold water on the group.

The young men, who had sailed into port from Southampton a few weeks before, were the brothers John, James and Fred Gibson. They were almost identical in size, volume and speed of conversation, and were equally suffused with the sheer exuberance of being.

When theyôd arrived in Cape Town they had taken one look at the geography ï they were halfway down the gangway ï and agreed (presumably all at the same time) that if there was ever a place for three fine young men to make their fortune, this was it.

Rushing off the quayside, clutching their bags, frenetically hailing cabs, buying trinkets, damning the locals, sniffing the air, whistling at pretty young women and roaring for beers, they plunged headlong into Theodore, on his way back to the *Lincolnshire Inn* with a giant *snoek,* hooked just hours before, draped over his shoulder.

The fish was to be dinner at the Inn that evening ï by way of celebrating the sale to the bank, which represented an overseas investor.

ôI say, are you a fisherman?ô asked Fred Gibson

ôDo you talk English? Of course you talk English,ô said James Gibson.

ôMust be a local, surely. Are you? Are you?ô asked John Gibson

ôWhat kind of fish is that? Itôs a huge bugger!ô enthused James Gibson

ôItôs a é ô said Theodore Isaacs.

ôI say, could you recommend a decent place to stay?ô

ôI have...ô

ôMust have decent cooking, of course.ô

ôNone of that desperate curry weôve been warned about. Boils your bollocks, they say.ô

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óYes ï clean would be jolly nice.ô

óMy é ô

óClose to transport?ô

óWell, thereôs é ô

óTransport!ô crowed John and James simultaneously

óTransport?ô Fred queried.

óTransport!ô blared his brothers.

óRight! Thatôs the opportunity, chaps,ô said Fred.

óTell us about the transport system in these parts, old sock?ô James demanded of Theodore.

óThereôs a good é ô

óNot just from here to the end of the block of course, cockie. I mean, how does one get from, say, here to é whatôs that place with the diamonds?ô

óMafeking!ô

óNonsense! Pilgrimôs something.ô

óWait, itôs called New Rush. Right?ô

óYes, itôs also called *Vooruitzigt* though. By the *Boers*.ô Theodore at last completed a sentence.

óHow would one get there?ô asked John.

óNot on a penny-farthing, thatôs for certain,ô James chortled. óYour arse would erode within the day!ô

ó*Your* arse, maybeé ô

óThunderously.ô

óThereôs horseback, of course é ô

óNot necessarily just on horseback, chaps. Any bloody fool can travel around on horseback,ô said James.

óFamilies!ô roared Fred. óThink of moving entire families inland. Not just onesies and twosies. You canôt pop little Norbert Ponsonby-Chickenfeet, aged three, on top of a quarter horse and tell him to giddy-up, dash it all!ô

óSo how, then?ô asked John and James.

The unco-ordinated insanity of the conversation had managed to crystallise itself into a single question.

In complete concert, the three brothers simultaneously stopped talking at each other and swung on Theodore, in unison, in eager expectation of an answer.

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you to stay. My place. I own an Inn,ô said Theodore quietly, ócand I have some ideas for you as well.ô

óIdeas?ô

óIdeas. You have ideas. I have ideas. We can talk.ô Theodore could feel his heart thudding. It was an entirely strange new sensation for him.

óWell, then lead on MacDuff!ô John said.

óShould be, óLay on, MacDuffô ô Fred corrected.

óHeôs right,ô said Theodore, who happened to have a copy of *Macbeth*, once owned by Milo Pincus of the Jewish Schoolôs Lower Fourth Form.

óJolly good,ô said James and slapped Theodore (and some of the *snoek*) on the shoulder. óLetôs be off.ô

In retrospect, when he recalled that first meeting, Theodore sensed in James, John and Fred Gibson (all almost of an age with Theodore) a kinship. Felt in their bursting exuberance those nascent dreams which, if not identical to his own, were certainly from the same neighbourhood.

There was something of the nature of destiny about the meeting.

Again, as realists will tell you, there are no coincidences.

That said, the Gibsons and Theodore Isaacs between them cared not a tinkerôs cuss one way or the other when it came to coincidence, fate, pure chance or sheer dumb luck.

óCome,ô said Theodore, picking up a valise with his free hand. óYou will stay at the *Lincolnshire Inn*, and I will talk to you about travelling into the middle of Africa.ô

óTop hole!ô chortled John.

óWill it be a real adventure?ô James asked with the awed, hushed expectancy of a nine-year-old reading this weekôs *Boy's Own* magazine.

His brothers nodded eagerly at Theodore, similarly desperate for good, exciting news.

óWill it be an adventure like *The Innocents Abroad*? By that American, Twain. Smashing tale!ô asked James.

óGentlemen,ô said Theodore, óby you that bookôs an adventure, and by Twain itôs an adventure ï but by adventures, itôs not an adventure. Come. We need to sit, eat, have a drink and talk about the future.ô

óGood-oh,ô trumpeted Fred. óPerhaps youôll introduce us to some of this fine townôs moneymen. Financiers. Adventure, we happen to know, demands finance.ô

óIt so happens, the food, drink and finance are all in the same place,ô Theodore answered.

He was out of breath.

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with carpetbags and one dead fish, hustled up Theodoreôs

haverim.

Up Burg Street, mountain on your left.

Turn right into Strand.

Theodore had done this route many times before, alone.

ôWhile the poor manôs temptation is a loaf of bread,ôsaid Yitzhak, groaning and stretching his neck like a tortoise seeking signs of sunset, ótôs also true that while a poor manôs enemies are few, a rich manôs friends are even fewer.

ôWhat Iôm trying to tell you is that in the years since he first arrived in this country Theodore had never actually had a friend. Nobody. You canôt count passing acquaintances like Bleek. He was é well, look at the age difference? A grown man and a little boy? I suppose it may be all right for Catholics.

óOf course Jerzy was just a sheep that passes away in the night. Perhaps Leah was my fatherôs first real friend. Of course your wife must always be your very best friend. I think rabbinical law says so. *Feh!* Who knows? Either way, a man needs men friends, even if theyôre only friends up to the level of your pockets. The Gibsons, although my father spoke not very much about their association other than to say it was costly but exciting, were probably the closest thing to friends heôd ever had ï even if Theodore had to, well, buy their friendship.

óCertainly,ôYitzhak said, patting my knee, ót was nothing like your father and I had. Your father ï now there was a *chavver* of note. Anyway, Theodore got the Gibsons settled in, fed them, then sat them in front of the fire for a natter. Among chums, of course.ô

There is something magical about dreamers, Yitzhak said, doubtless with pictures of the Gibsons living a youth he himself had never experienced..

Dreamers are those people who as little children are punished by their teachers for gazing out of classroom windows and watching choreographed butterfly dancing instead of learning, off by heart, that one times one is one, two times two is four and so on, *ad*-boring-*infinitum*.

Dreamers gaze out of windows and never see blank spaces, or black and white or grey. They see worlds of goblins and rainbows, men in animal skins in jungles leaping from tree to vine, or swimming across rivers to rescue blonde waifs with ringlets from the paths of thundering black locomotives or crocodiles.

For dreamers, the hero always arrives in the nick of time.

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The villains the dreamers imagine ï the Dick Dastardlies ï are always sharp-eyed men with slicked-back hair under sepulchral top hats. Their thin moustaches appear to have been drawn with finely sharpened pencils. One eyebrow is always arched like a question mark.

Dreamers rarely picture villains as cold-hearted bankers with foreclosure notices clutched in their claws, any more than they recognise Military Generals with ribbons and braids and sabres at their hips as heroes and saviours.

Heroes, for the dreamer, are masked versions of themselves, be they clad in tiger skins, or striding purposefully down a dusty Texas street with a Colt Peacemaker revolver in a low-slung holster, depending on the fantasy.

Far too many teachers fail to recognise a dreamer as someone who may someday create miracles of science or breathtaking artwork or magnificent structures. They see no potential in a child with Krakens and Jabberwockies in his eyes.

They see a half-dozing flop-haired mind-wanderer, head cradled on the back of one hand, the other hand slowly doodling extravagant and majestic creations on the cover of his history book when he is supposed to be burning into his memories for all time that in fourteen hundred and ninety two, Columbus sailed the Ocean Blue.

Those teachers, teeth gritted and puce-faced with anger, will drag the dreamer to the front of the class and crack him across the back of the legs with a ruler.

The sharp metal edge on the ruler ensures that lines and errant children remain as straight as possible.

The whipped dreamer sometimes cries in quiet frustration because the fantabulous spectacle he has dreamed up in the banality of the day has been thrashed away.

When dreamers grow up, their imaginations hammered out of them by those people charged with shaping their lives, most become just plain ordinary people.

Folk.

Wanderers through the world, burying their dreams in seas of tepid jobs no one else wants, and turgid marriages to unsmiling, hopelessly bland women.

Sometimes though, dreamers come across teachers who understand the dimensions of life that dwell outside of parroted recitation. This rare brand of teacher, who chooses to educate out of a desire to create interesting and informed new generations, is the polar opposite of those teachers who stride in to classrooms to exact revenge for their own miserable schooldays.

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vide-open teacher will recognise the dreamer

pire the child, confirming for the dreamer that those wonderfully exciting imagined dimensions really do exist.

The dreamer simply needs to go and find them.

The Gibson brothers, Theodore was to learn, were happily the products of parents who flung open their windows and gestured expansively towards a massively exciting, undiscovered world beyond.

John, James and Fred Gibson had lived their youthful lives connected by an invisible force, as if they were triplets with the umbilical cord uncut. They fed off their siblingsô energies, fired each otherôs imaginations, learned to talk in almost demonic tongues which only they could truly understand. Breathing was, on the evidence, not required.

And they had dreams.

This is where the real difference lies when defining the types of dreamers who populate our lives. Dreamers who do not realise their gift, who achieve little or nothing, become just plain wastrels.

Dreamers who achieve mightily though are defined differently.

Theyôre celebrated for their ambition.

óTheodore,ô said Yitzhak, interrupting his own story, ówas never a dreamer. He was what you would call a realist. Nonetheless, he was enthralled by the high voltage energy the Gibsons radiated.

óHe told me how, on that first evening, after the Gibsons had devoured an entire *snoek* between them ï a *snoek* is much bigger than a herring, you should know ï the Gibsons had spelt out their new dream of building a railroad line, or a stagecoach track. Something to cart people into the heart of the tip of Africa at speed.

óOf course, my father told them of the Great Trek and the mighty caravans of ox wagons which trundled ponderously into the furthest parts of the land in the early part of the century, fifty years before. These days, he told the Gibsons, travellers took their lives in their hands and found their own way inland.ô

Some went in groups, others singly. Some even made it to wherever they wanted to go.

The Gibsons werenôt interested in transporting big trek-sized groups. They werenôt interested in single adventurers either. Adventurers, they said, could take their rifles and bugger off unto the bushes where theyôd doubtless be eaten by the first pride of peckish wild cats that crossed their paths.

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n England, where trains and coaches which criss-crossed
pping through the fens and moors and glens and dales.

Why, they reasoned, should we not do the same thing here in this country?

They had a point.

Theodore, in the first of his lifeôs quicker major decisions (and as youôll discover not his last, said Yitzhak) was spellbound by the Gibsons, who were monstrously affluent in the ambition and dreams department, but almost bankrupt when it came to the funds needed to feed the Idea Beast.

Theodore was their exact opposite, and by midnight the four young men (Leah had drifted off to sleep, exhausted by the Gibsonsô anarchy) had agreed on the skeleton of their venture.

All it took was planning.

And money, of course.

Theodore had pots of money.

Theodore went to great pains to elaborate to the Gibsons the sorry tale of the Collingwoods, whose quest for adventure resulted in their burial in unmarked graves somewhere alongside a river.

Or maybe a Kloof.

ôThank God your good lady survived,ô James said.

ôGod had nothing to do with it,ô said Theodore caustically. ôOr anything else for that matter.ô

It was extremely brief and sober moment. The Gibsons nodded slowly, pondered what might have happened up there in the hills, then exploded like British Army Congreve rockets.

ôWe need lists,ô said James

ôIôll handle the provisioning,ô said John

ôWhat sort of vehicles do we need?ô said Fred

ôOx wagons?ô asked James.

ôToo slow,ô James responded.

ôWhatôs lightweight but hardy?ô Fred asked

ôCarts,ô Theodore leaped in, grinning, a semi-adopted fourth Gibson.

ôCarts? Are they tough?

ôVery.ô

ôHorses? Asses?ô

ôHorses. Two in harness. Must have some spares.ô

ôJames and Fred can be the horses,ô laughed John and neighed.

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nes simultaneously and leaped on top of their brother,

micably until he cried óUncle! Uncle!ô

óKeep it quiet down there!ô Leah bellowed from her bed.

óShush everyone,ô whispered Fred, burlesque-eyed, finger on his lips,

óShhhhhh,ô the others imitated, then burst into wild laughter.

óNutters,ô mumbled Leah, but no one heard.

By sunrise the next morning, the journey had been planned.

Theodore drew cash to finance three Cape Carts and a dozen horses, as well as food, bullets, guns, water bags, horse feed and a vast shopping list of essential requirements. He handed the money to Fred Gibson, who counted it again in the tellerôs presence.

Then, sitting alone with Rofelle in the Bank Managerôs office, Theodore finalised the withdrawal of the remainder of his funds and closed his account. Rofelle suggested that the bankôs lawyer, Morgan Sochen, should draw up some sort of contract or letter of agreement between the Gibsons and Theodore.

óTrust no one. Put everything in writing,ô he suggested.

óI trust the Gibsons, ósaid Theodore, óbut yes please, draw up a letter by all means.ô

He had purchased in Adderley Street two money belts ï one for himself and one for Leah ï into which now he carefully packed the newly printed notes, watched enviously by Rofelle who found himself torn between the strictures of banking codes and the adventure promised by guns and money belts.

Theodore then trotted into the Malay quarter where he negotiated the purchase of a pair of excellent quality stolen Deringer pistols which would fit perfectly into the side of a boot, or within the folds of a slim girlôs bodice. The Malay, Yusuf, added a bone-handled hunting knife. Special price, Yusuf promised. Anyway, you can never be too careful of your partners, he reasoned. Theodore agreed.

Of course, Theodore need not have worried. The Gibsons were as honest as the day is long. They genuinely wanted Theodore as a one-quarter partner.

Never a fourth brother, though.

In hindsight, it was Theodoreôs own shortcomings which would ultimately trip him up, dash him to the ground and rob him blind.

He would always and only blame himself for the reversals which marked his life. Other people were, in Theodoreôs eyes, purely spectators; witnesses to the sometimes-bizarre events which built him up, then knocked him down.

Of course, those events would all be spread over the next sixty years.

The buyers of the *Lincolnshire Inn* had arrived in Cape Town on behalf of their client, Sir Donald Currie, and now briefly occupied the Inn. The Gibsons, Theodore and Leah spent their last few nights at Fraulein Roeschôs place.

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boarding house a few weeks after the Gibsons and
nôs well-crafted contract, and with the French *petanque* players finishing their game outside, the group prepared to depart the next day.

The Gibson brothers had, on the evidence, cornered the Cape tweed market, and were done up in coats and deerstalker hats (although James wore an incongruous Tam OôShanter as a salute to the game of golf he loved but would not be playing in the forseeable future).

Each brother had a pair of Remington revolvers holstered at his hip.

Stashed in the front cart were half a dozen Snider-Enfield rifles and boxes filled with .577 shells. The Gibsonôs sheer firepower, compared to Theodoreôs Derringers, left him experiencing a strange sense of inadequacy, which he would never quite understand.

James Gibson, again by way of being different, carried his own Pattern 1861 Enfield Musketoon, slung jauntily over his shoulder along with a bandolier of shells.

ôTheyôre ever so popular with the Military,ô he explained to his brothers and Theodore. ôFaster twist, much more accuracy than your silly guns. Pop the eye out of a mosquito at a hundred feet with my Musketoon, I daresay.ô

This of course started a raging argument about which brother was the best shot, resulting in the inevitable conclusion, that being three Gibsons rolling on the floor wrestling each other, just for fun, with Theodore smirking lopsidedly as Fraulein Roesch protested politely in the background, begging them to mind the agapanthus.

When the Gibson and Isaacs parties rolled out of town the next morning, Theodore didnôt even consider looking back over his shoulder at his first home in Africa as it faded into the distance. He simply tapped his whip on the flanks of the horses, and stared ahead.

Went.

Without even a hint of a lump in his throat.

Other than the stuffed money belts he and Leah wore, Theodore also kept close by the brown leather valise with the name, Montgomery Collingwood Esq., in ornate serif lettering.

It was filled, as it had been over a year before, with crisp, never-used Bank of England paper money.

Within the next few months, the *Lincolnshire Inn* would be razed and the ground prepared for the building of a hotel ï which was never built. It was not until years later when land was purchased by Sir Donald Currie to build his own dream. A hotel he would call the Mount Nelson.

That snippet of information is important, Yitzhak said by way of a preface.

ôI know about what happened next because many years ago I received a letter from a man whose family lived in Cape Town at about the same time as Theodore arrived there,ô Yitzhak said.

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ss my fatherôs name through some old bank records. He hitecture, I believe. His thesis was about the history of the Mount Nelson, and the Board of Executorsô files went back to, *oy*, what seems like the very dawn of time, when men were men and women were graceful. This student followed what he called the paper trial which led to the sale of the *Lincolnshire Inn* to the bank, representing Sir Donald Currie.

ôTo make a short story very long, the architecture student flew to Johannesburg to meet me. This was ages ago, of course. He flew in a Viscount aeroplane. Aeroplanes had propellers in those days. I of course have never flown. The flight took hours and hours. Today, I believe you can fly to Cape Town in five or six hours. Maybe less.

ôHow can you fly in an aeroplane that doesnôt have propellers?ô he mused briefly. ôWhat holds you up?

ôSo ï this young man arrived here and told me he had found a journal written by a man who worked on the site of the hotel when they were knocking down the inn.ô

Yitzhak squirmed uncomfortably in his chair. Not from the stiffening hips, but from extremely uncomfortable memories.

ôThis next piece of the story is very hard for me to tell and *Hashem* forgive me for telling it. At first I dismissed what the young man told me as tripe. Told him there were probably several people who had control or owned or even stayed at the Inn. Why was Theodore Isaacs specifically named?ô

Yitzhak had become a growing thundercloud.

He poked a finger at me.

ôBut I knew something. I knew I was being shown history,ô he said sharply. ôYou of all people should understand this. Itôs what journalists are. People who help deliver history, screaming and wailing into life. What this architect student showed me in the journal was history, recorded by people who, as the youngster explained, had no reason to write fairy tales. He did not understand that my distress was because the journal confirmed what I already knew.ô

Yitzhakôs discomfort was palpable.

Grumbling inwardly, he poured himself a half shot of Jerepiko and the tremor in his hands caused some of the liquor to splash on the arm of his easy chair.

Absently, he mopped it with his sleeve.

ôThis next part isnôt easy for me at all, but Iôll tell you what the journal said, as I remember it. Remember? I donôt think Iôll ever forget it.ô

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e of the *Lincolnshire Inn*, labourers unearthed a variety of
ts all in various stages of rictus, suggesting their respective deaths spanned several years. Decades.

Dead people are just plain dead, Yitzhak said, and when the last breath is drawn then thatôs it. Judaism does not believe in the concept of hell. And heaven is, well, itôs whatever you want it to be, and who cares what the gentiles say?

Children and babies are a different story though. Dead children are beyond my comprehension, said Yitzhak, who had never fathered his own child.

According to the journal shown to Yitzhak, the half dozen or so foetuses the diggers found were all wrapped in cotton shrouds.

There were tiny needlepoint red roses along their hems.

The diggers, each in his own way, wondered how a shriek could find its way onto the face of an unborn child.

The adult bodies were in various stages of decomposition and could have been anyone.

One was a sailor, judging by the suspicion of an anchor tattoo on the remnants of translucent flesh on a withered forearm.

The other bodies, each in their own shallow graves, bore evidence of a time when savage death was as common as breakfast. The bodies buried behind the brothel were most probably passing visitors who may have said the wrong words to the wrong people, resulting in a cracked cranium here, ribs nicked by plunging blades there, or a musket ball to the heart. Or were murdered just because they were born victims and thus not even worth the price or effort of a decent burial.

Labourers unearthed a woman, most likely a whore, whose snaggle-smashed teeth and broken neck indicated the work of a disenchanted gentleman caller with few qualms about using his hands on just another pathetic prostitute.

Nearby, there was the shallow grave of another woman, her limbs showing evidence of years and years of violent abuse. Broken bones barely healed before the next, perhaps final, beating. Her remains were a narrative of a lifetime of savagery dealt out by angry parents, or uncontrolled gentleman customers. Or even husbands.

Not that it mattered much, back then.

Workers placed the skeletons and decomposing corpses neatly in a row.

The last body dug up was an infant.

The foreman called the police, who in turn called up the District Surgeon, because this corpse was not a foetus.

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ld, about four weeks old, the District Surgeon estimated. , he said in his report, she would most likely have been buried less than a year before.

Perhaps as recently as a month or two ago.

The baby still had flesh on her tiny sparrow bones.

The worker who dug up the child retched violently into his cupped hands when he saw the childôs eyelashes still intact, saw a thumb in the babyôs mouth.

In 1871 forensic science was significantly more about speculation than definitive proof when it came to establishing causes of death.

ôWhores and their unwanted nippers,ô the District Surgeon carped to his friends the following evening over cards. ôThrow a whelp then knock it on the head and drop it in a hole. Bloody immigrants. I bid two no trumps.ô

This child was not wrapped in the torn square of a whoreôs bedding to bear it to wherever dead babies go.

Rather, it was swathed in what the Great Synagogueôs Rabbi said was a *tallis*, the prayer shawl worn by pious Jews when they pray, to cover their faces in the presence of God.

The Rabbi had been called in because one of the labourers remembered that Jews used to live here. The man pointed to where the tallis clearly showed what he called ôthat Pentangle of David, King of the Jewsô.

Prior to the Rabbiôs arrival, the foreman reverently rewrapped the small body and placed the tiny parcel to one side, in the shade of the last remaining wall of the Inn.

When the Rabbi unpeeled the small shroud, he found within the folds of the sorry bundle, tucked alongside the little body, a *Jakobsleiter* and a small box of exquisitely carved wooden quoits.

Reports said the police decided that ónatural causesô most likely took the baby away. No provable blame could be attached to the previous tenants of the Inn, or its past or present owners, they said.

Any anyway, by then, Theodore and Leah and the Gibsons were gone, gone, gone.

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sodim zolen kain agmas-nefesh nit farshafen, volten geven di velt fil tsadikim. ï
If one could do charity without money and favours without aggravation, the world would be full of saints.

ôIf you listen to the folk rock music of Donovan,ô Yitzhak said, óyou will hear a song about a worm which this Donovan sees. This is typical of the minds of teenagers in the 1960s and 1970s. Always songs about drugs, *shtupping* and worms. Sinatra would spin in his grave.ô

He pondered the concept, could find no mental picture of Sinatra throwing a tantrum about drugs, *shtupping* or worms, shrugged and leaned forward.

óDonovan sings about how this worm ï which is actually a caterpillar, which is a worm with a fur coat ï changes into a butterfly. I think it was a social commentary of the day. Or maybe something to do with those fur hats the Russians wear. Who knows?

óAnyway é you know how a worm moves?ô Yitzhak asked rhetorically. óThe *toches* of the worm goes up, then down, then up, then down. Iôm not sure if a worm has an actual *toches,* mind you. Letôs say its back goes up and down. This is to move it forward. Obviously it does not have legs or a bus ticket, so how else will it get places? ó

Using his flattened hand to demonstrate, Yitzhak spoke the words of the song: ôôFirst there is a mountain (arched hand), then there is no mountain (flattened hand), then there is (arched hand)ô... and so on.

óSo, this brief lecture in the practices of what weed can do to the creative mind serves no purpose other than as an introduction to the arrival in Kimberley of Theodore and Leah, a day behind the galloping Gibsons. The Gibsons took just twenty-three days to get from Wellington to Kimberley. An astonishing pace for those days.

óAllow me to elaborate é ô

Kimberley was named New Rush when the group arrived, exhausted, excited and with not the slightest trepidation. New Rush was a place once so boring and desolate the British regarded it as little more than an unwanted administrative exercise; a place to send poor-performing bureaucrats to cast a disinterested eye over this speck of the Empire.

Naturally, the discovery of diamonds in substantial numbers at New Rush caused a shift in sentiments among the British business and political elite, possibly, as Yitzhak suggested, because it was time for the Queen to get another shiny *tschatchke* for her crown.

The British swiftly decided to proclaim the area ï known as Griqualand West ï as a Crown Colony.

It was akin to taking a child shopping. The child sees something which glitters, reaches out and takes the shiny thing. There are neither recriminations nor problems when your mother owns the shop.

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cated there was a snag to the British proclamation. A tiny

h to delay the actual proclamation being signed, sealed and delivered. It wasnôt rioting miners or anything as banal which held up the proclamation: rather, it was an issue of semantics which rose before the British Secretary of State in charge of Colonies like the fortress of Masada. Simply stated, when Theodore and Leah and the Gibsons arrived (give or take a few weeks) the Cape Colony was still part of the British Empire, lock, stock and bagel. History suggests the Queen or someone of importance in the government of England thought New Rush sounded, well, too American to be British.

This may have been because that the Klondike Gold Rush in America stuck in British craws like Dora Lipschitzôs rubbery *kneidlach.* To compound the problem, the Dutch name for the place, *Vooruitzigt*, was equally unacceptable, perhaps because it was on a *Boer* farm. At that time, the British and the *Boers* were already unhappy with each other.

History shows that the British Colonial Secretary of the day, J.B. Southey, in a smart piece of political apple-polishing, decided to rename the place Kimberley, feeling reasonably sure that the British Secretary of State for the Colonies could both spell and pronounce the new name without too much trouble.

By staggering coincidence, you see, the name of the British Secretary of State for the Colonies was Lord Kimberley.

The town was thus so proclaimed in 1873.

The diggers of New Rush werenôt happy of course. They liked the simplicity of the name of their diggings.

ôHave a look at this,ô said Yitzhak, who gently unpeeled several sheets of tissue paper to reveal the yellowed leader page of the *Diamond Field* newspaper. He pointed with a teaspoon at the Editorôs comment on the pageôs flank.

ôWe went to sleep in New Rush,ô the Leader stated, ôand waked in Kimberley, so our dream was gone.ô

The Editorial in the newspaper seemingly spoke for most of the diggers at New Rush, and for a few (if any) of the many Britishers in the town who were neither civil servants nor military.

The British did not care particularly about the outrage é and anyway, new diamond strikes happened on a daily basis, so the focus of the locals tended towards the glitter of diamonds rather than the briefly downcast expressions of the lumpen proletariat, who resorted to what Yitzhakôs furry worm analogy suggested.

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d back to the hill in which the diamonds resided and did
d dig and dig. Rapidly, they mined the hill into what is now Kimberleyôs Big Hole, plunging to a depth of over a thousand metres.

First there is a mountain, then there is no mountain, then there is.

Yitzhak had not gone *meshuggeh.*

It was thought at the time to be the deepest hand-dug hole on the entire planet. It wasnôt, but whoôs counting?

It seems Theodore was counting.

Eventually it would all be gone, but that would take a few years.

Meanwhile, it was into New Rush that the Gibsonsô rode; a journey from Wellington to Kimberley along paths and roads that were all but impassable was for some time a record ï three weeks of insane risk-taking to complete a trip which normally took months. The carts held up, and although several wheel spokes snapped, the Gibsons were handy enough with tools to fix any mechanical problems. James Gibson, by way of proving himself right (again) used his Enfield with dazzling accuracy, providing food for the pot on a daily basis, and Leah, in an era way before feminism had been given any consideration, was uncomplainingly and naturally the group cook.

Around a settling fire on day seventeen, Fred leaned back against a tree trunk, sucked the marrow from the thigh bone of a duiker, and philosophised: óHere we be, in the heart of the last unexplored land in all the world, under the clearest, star-bespangled sky in all the heavens, eating venison for which the nobs in Piccadilly would pay a royal fortune.ô

The eerie sense of *déjà vu* Leah experienced on a daily basis came as no real surprise. Nor did the execution of one of the horses harnessed into their cart after it split a hoof on a protruding rock just a day away from New Rush.

Coolly, John Gibson unharnessed the animal, examined the hoof, pronounced the horse óbuggeredô and calmly shot it between the eyes.

óWeôll sort out the horse replacement,ô said Theodore. óYou carry on and we will catch up.ô

óAre you sure?ô asked James. óWe can wait around and help.ô

óI am competent to exchange a broken horse,ô Theodore said. óAnd the wild animals will take care of this body. You go on ahead to New Rush. We will find you when we get there.ô

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the Gibsons disappear over the horizon, following the line of the setting sun. Then, as all manner of crickets clamorously chirped in the nightfall, Theodore and Leah sunk down behind the slowly cooling corpse of the executed horse and proceeded to create who would eventually become Jacob Isaacs, first son of Theodore Isaacs, once of RÎ diġkãs, then of Cape Town, and latterly of God-knows-where, right in the *kischkes* of Africa.

Theodore and Leah arrived in New Rush a day later, exhausted from the ride, and met up with the Gibsons at what passed as a hotel. Finding them was easy, Theodore would later recall. óAll I had to do was listen for whoever was making the most noise.ô

The Gibsons embraced Theodore and Leah with their usual exuberance, John offering to take charge of the kist, which (like the valise) Theodore never let out of his sight, and which he struggled to carry like a monstrously overgrown baby his arms.

Theodore gently placed the kist on the hotel foyer carpet ï a ragged and dirty thing, unsuited to even the shabbiest of public establishments, Theodore the former hotelier thought distractedly. Wearily he sat on the kist lid.

óYou see? We did it!ôJames crowed, poking a finger towards Theodore, creating a trumpet call for the brothers Gibson to do their Catherine Wheel conversing, during which (as usual) Yitzhak and Leah reverted to word-bludgeoned spectators.

óCan be done! Told you so! Twenty-bloody-three days!ôJohn added.

óSee?ôFred said. óNow ï imagine better roads é ô

óRest stops along the way é ô

óWay-stationsé ô

óé where horses can be swapped out for fresher horsesé ô

óé or even assesé ô

óé perhaps oxen é ô

óHave to dig wells and watering holes of course é ô

óOr close proximity to riversé ô

óWeôd have to employ staff at these way stations é ô

óé well, of course, staff é ô

óAnd weôll have to get hold of more Cape Carts and some of those bigger ox wagons.ô

óHire drivers and riders.ô

óCanôt drive them all ourselves.ô

óOf course. So ... more riders. Men of experience.ô

óShould be available in big numbers.ô

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llows ï they know the land well.ô

óSturdy devils arenôt they just? What say half a dozen or so for starters?ô

óUp to ten, by say, this time next year?ô

óThen, who knows? Dozens?ô

Leah raised her small hand, as if to ask permission to leave the room. Her twiddling fingers might as well have been a fortress wall, so quickly did they stop the rampant Gibsonsô verbal clatter.

Silently, the four men looked expectantly at little Leah.

óWho actually pays for all these things?ôshe asked.

Another heartbeat.

Eventually, óDamned good question,ôsaid Fred, slowly, his brothers supplying a briefly solemn nodding Greek Choir. The Gibsons, who knew the answer anyway, as did Leah, turned simultaneously to Theodore, who sat hunched and cradling his tired head in dirt-encrusted hands.

óTheo?ôsaid John.

óWe will talk,ôsighed Theodore, óbut tomorrow please. I wish to first sleep the sleep of dead people.ô

óTomorrow then,ôJames nodded.

óRight after breakfast,ôsuggested Fred hopefully.

óActually,ôinterjected Leah, ówhen my man has had his full kip, and a bath and a shave. Thatôs when we can talk about how weôll spend his money.ô

Leah smiled, hooded her Siamese cat eyes, stroked Theodoreôs raggedly furred check.

óSo, midday should be just lovely. Letôs say lunchtime?ô

The Gibsons nodded and turned their noses to the wind to sniff out the nearest public house while Leah and Theodore hauled their aching bones to their simple, fairly clean room.

While Theodore splashed his face with tepid water from a tin bowl that sat on a rickets-stricken side table, Leah laid their money on the bedspread in neat piles.

óThereôs a lot of cash here,ôshe said eventually.

óMore than a few thousand pounds,ôsaid Theodore absently. óI will add it up tomorrow.ô

óThen you must bank it,ôLeah said.

óOf course.ô

Leah wandered to the window and parted the heavy curtains.

For some long minutes, she gazed out the window to the adjacent dirt roads, listening to the burble of conversation as knots of men ambled by, strong and filthy hands crammed into pockets of khaki work pants as they fought off a chill breeze.

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rica of Cape Town, where men were peacocks, their

There was no salt in the air either, of course.

Leah missed that about Cape Town. The sea smell and the scent of freshly landed fish.

Fish. Thereôd be none of that here. In this place there would be hearty stews, cooked slowly for hours to minimise the toughness of flesh from beasts not even vaguely related to the Jersey family of cattle.

Back home in London in her mumôs house, where sheôd been born there was always the odour of something decent to eat ... even before sheôd been offered to the Collingwoods as a downstairs maid at their London townhouse ï which provided more than half decent food, even for a ten-year-old floor-sweeper.

There were always flowers at the London house.

The butler, Bailey, ensured there were always freshly cut roses, Sussex Beauties, Oberons and *Chatelaine* Lupins in vases scattered around the house. Leah remembered their often-cloying scent and how their colours brought brightness to an otherwise very dark place.

One of Leahôs first tasks had been to remove all flowers the moment they looked like dying and replace them with fresh flowers from the nearby market.

ôôScuse me Mr Bailey,ô she would announce with a bobbed curtsey, ôbut the blooms need replacing.ô

Joyously, Bailey and the voluptuous upstairs maid, Susanna, would dash off to the market, returning some hours later, flushed and happy and dishevelled and bearing all manner of flora.

Leah had liked Susanna, who always beamed. Not like mum, of course. Mum had nothing to smile about, after dad went.

Susanna, you should see me now, Leah thought, sitting here in a place that smells of dirt and money.

Should have seen Bailey and me that one Thursday when you were sick abed with the gripe, when he took me with him to get the flowers.

I were thirteen.

Leah would forever recall with staggering clarity the rich scent of leather and wood of the carriage, intertwined with the red and yellow and white rose aroma.

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ed, groomed fingers drifting off his nacre-handled
ssing and stroking as they meandered up her inner thigh, beneath the long, extremely plain frock the young downstairs maids wore.

Dear old gentle Mister Bailey. Woke me up, he did.

Leah shook her head, dismissing the memories.

óJudging from the lantern lights, looks like thereôs thousands and thousands of people here,ô Leah turned to Theodore, who lay on his back on the bed, too dog-tired to remove the covers.

There were indeed thousands. The town was ablaze with money, dreams and incipient heroic failures; opportunists looking for an easy ride had sidled into the town, eyes keenly seeking patsies whose pockets were filled with freshly earned cash. There were the entrepreneurs like the Gibsons (and Theodore, by association) who had similarly made their way here.

And of course the regiments of earnest diggers.

óWhere there be muck, there be money,ô Theodore remembered one of the Katz whores saying, after bedding a foul-smelling marine who had clambered off his ship, clutching three monthsô pay in his fist, and mounted the first available woman he could find, happily exchanging most of his wages for the pleasure.

Indeed, just two years after Theodore, Leah and the Gibsonsô arrival, the hole in the ground had become home and hearth to forty thousand people.

The rapid growth of Kimberley meant lots of people, with money to spend and, on occasion, no money to spend. Thatôs where Theodoreôs first real vice ï disregarding if you will the pilfering of books and clothing back in Cape Town ï chanced to fall some years later. Throughout the history of time people have always found money to gamble, no matter how pitiful their circumstances.

In the town with the growing hole, gambling was not just about wagering on the chance that an acquired claim might yield a handful of diamonds, but also betting on cards on the green baize-covered tables in the back room of the tavern owned by Auntie Cockeye, Bar Mistress Supreme.

Where thereôs money, thereôs muck.

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into his glass, knocked it back in a single swig, poured

ôIn this place,ô he said, ówhere everything seemed to be measured in depths of a digging, or the karat weight of diamonds, or how many pints of ale a man could drink, Auntie Cockeye was the townôs smallest adult. If you add the bright red wig she wore, Auntie Cockeye stood a whole four and a half feet tall.

With not a hint of mirth in his voice, Yitzhak said, ôIôm sure you went to the circus as a boy and laughed at the antics of the clowns. The little ones had names like Tickey and Bobo. They wore red noses that honked when you give them a *kvetch*, and silly pants and giant shoes.

ôHow they made little children laugh,ô he said sourly. ôTwenty little people in one small car? *Feh*! Ridiculous.ô Yitzhak looked away, twiddling the glass irritatedly in his fingers. Something was brewing.

ôOf course, some people donôt find these little specimens at all funny,ô Yitzhak continued. ôSome people are terrified by midgets and dwarves. Did you know that?ô

Without warning, Yitzhak suddenly and angrily bunched his left fist and slammed it down on the arm of the pink wingback chair.

ôTerrified? Other people just plain hate the whole damned lot of them. Any last remnants of piety in my father when he arrived in Kimberley would soon be sucked out by that miniature Gorgon from hell.ô

Disgustedly, Yitzhak turned his head to the side and made a phlegmless spit.

ô*Ptooie*! I spit three times on you. *Ptooie! Ptooie*! I wish one day I could dance on your grave.ô

It was a Yitzhak I never imagined existed. Blazing wrath filled the baggy, bloodshot eyes. He leaned forward and poked a bony forefinger at my chest.

ôSailing across a sea to a new country to escape a pogrom couldnôt destroy my fatherôs spirit. Not even the unspeakably tough childhood where he was forced to steal to live and learn. Not the insane ride through the guts of a dark and ugly land or the monstrous people who crossed his path é none could bend him even a little bit. ôNothing could break his soul. Nothing!ô

He spat again, but with substantially more venom.

ôBut that little harridan did. She and that grey-skulled satanic husband of hers and that den of ... of é I canôt think of a word that isnôt a cliché. Damn them all to hell.ô

Yitzhak rose alarmingly quickly from his chair and staggered briefly, steadying himself by clutching the back of the chair Leah once sat in, watching her life unravel and eventually collapse like an unbalanced *dreidl*.

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e back tomorrow,ô he ordered curtly. óOr another day. I donôt care when. I donôt want you to hear me when Iôm like this. You must not see me with my dignity gone. Not like this.ô

Yitzhak stomped from the room and slammed the interleading door so violently a painting of one of his beloved bearded Rabbis crashed to the floor.

It was oddly prophetic.

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Esn zolstu gehakte leber mit tsibeles, shmaltz hering, yoykh it k'neydlekh, karp mit khreyn, ayngedemfts mit tsimes, latkes, tey mit tsitrin, yedn tog – un zolst zikh mit yedn bis dershtikn! ï May you eat chopped liver with onions, schmaltz herring, chicken soup with dumplings, baked carp with horseradish, braised meat with vegetable stew, latkes, tea with lemon, every day ï and may you choke on every bite ... An extraordinarily comprehensive Yiddish curse.

ôNot too long after Theodore and his pals arrived,ô said Yitzhak (now infinitely calmer than our last meeting, thanks largely to the depleted bottle on the kist) óthey looked around for a more permanent base. They didnôt want to live in this hotel because it stunk of a dog which died three weeks before and was about as clean. But it turned out they had no choice.ô

There were few actual houses at this point in the placeôs history.

Theodore used some of his funds to book four rooms for two months ï funds which the proprietor of this fine establishment accepted with relish, sucking air through gapped teeth as he painstakingly counted, then recounted the pound notes.

Strange how swiftly history can move. Just six years before the growing town hadnôt even existed until a *Boer* settler named Erasmus Jacobs found a ópebbleô in a stream.

Some pebble.

ôYou think women can gossip?ô Yitzhak asked rhetorically. óPut an uncut diamond in a poor manôs hand, point him at a watering hole, and within hours the entire world knows about it. Itôs like some *yente* telling her *kaluki* group in complete confidence about somebodyôs husband having a torrid affair with his secretary or, God forbid, suffering a business reversal. Two minutes later, the story appears on page one of the *Sunday Times.*ô

The same principle, Yitzhak suggested, applied to the diggings and soon after Erasmus Jacobsô discovery, the area gave birth to random settlements ï a pastiche of tin and wood shanties constructed by those who flooded the area and needed a roof over their heads.

óNecessityôs mother was Mrs Invention,ô Yitzhak explained. óShanties rose from the dust like s*hmutzikke* Phoenixes. Tents, which had been pinched or legally acquired from the army, similarly spread across the dry diggings of the place that would soon become Kimberley. There was no town planning of course. The place looked like God had thrown dwellings into this dusty place like a gambler tosses random dice.

óHomes and buildings ï such as these were ï fell where they may, with roads and so on following higgledy-piggeldy in due course. Such was development in a new world ï many higgeldies and a plethora of piggeldies.

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w,ô Yitzhak ordered, ótbecause maybe my dates are not osher. This was a new history being born. Hereôs how my father and the Gibsons became some of its midwives.ô

There was nothing yet like a bank in this place. Banks would come not much later. Any place which grows as quickly as Kimberley had in those first years would have all the trappings of modernity soon enough.

Meanwhile, a strongbox, an eagle eye and a handy firearm were what protected the diggersô cash and the stones they had dug out of the hole in the ground.

Yiddish wisdom confirms that life is not as good with money as it is bad without it. Even non-Yiddish bankers would agree. Thus, when the likes of Sammy Marks, Cecil John Rhodes and the De Beers company arrived, so too, like bridesmaids, did the banks. Meanwhile, in the earliest days of the diamond rush, colony-approved assessors and diamond buyers traded under armed guard. There was no police force of any kind other than the odd informal constable.

In those days the Crown Colony battled to control the illegal sale of diamonds. Illicit Diamond Buying became a cross-border hopscotch game as many diggers smuggled their stones across the border from British Colonial Griqualand into the *Boer*-controlled Free State to sell to buyers whose scruples had gone the way of the Kwagga.

It was an easy decision for most diggers. Cash-in-hand versus taxable income? Many diggers were prepared to accept the discounted rate rather than become a cipher in the Colonyôs tax books.

Meanwhile, just across the border, the *Volksraad* of the Free State ï which had its own thriving diamond mines at Jaagersfontein and Koffyfontein ï was similarly keen to dip their fingers into the diggersô funds, so it was also in the best interests of the *Volksraad* to keep the illegal diamond trade under control.

Along what was known as Boschoff Road, and just a few miles inside the Free State, lay a place named Free Town, where illegal diamond buyers, highwaymen and roughnecks gathered to buy and sell diamonds, well away from the controlled prices and taxation practices of the governments of both provinces.

Stones of all shapes and sizes crossed the border by night, sometimes carried by couriers who swallowed the stones to avoid detection and severe penalties. Carrier pigeons flapped through the air, straining with a Kingôs Ransom attached to their skinny legs.

ótGod help the bird and its owner if some crack shot with a taste for pigeon pie happened to be in the neighbourhood,ô Yitzhak added.

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reat of one hundred lashes and a five thousand pound fine was seen as anything more than a minor consequence in the face of this illegal but profitable free trade zone.

As the ditty of the day went:

'Over the Free State Line,
whatever is yours is mine …'

Of course, Yitzhak said, Theodore and the Gibsons were not led into temptation and were keener on starting their own line of business ï serving the miners rather than actually grovelling around in the dirt themselves.

The lack of a bank left Theodore feeling increasingly uneasy. While most of the skulduggery in the area was reserved for the outskirts of town along Boschoff Road, there was always the possibility of someone sneaking into the room he and Leah shared and carrying off the stack of notes in the strongbox after caving in their heads with a pickaxe.

Sleep, for several months, did not come easily to Theodore, who found himself lying awake in the small hours, listening to the carousing that drifted through the dry Griqua air. Often, he would sit at the window and watch the dawn ï a crimson-drenched spectacle as the sunshine blazed its way through the filter of omnipresent dust draped over the diggings like the veil on a dead bride.

He would sometimes take a nip of whatever liquor was lying around (the Gibsonsô fancy was for malt whisky which became his own acquired taste) to try and force sleep.

It rarely worked though, and throughout the long days he would go about his work, nodding off for a few brief minutes here and there. It was, for a time, enough.

One evening, after Leah had taken her growing belly to bed, Theodore sat in an easy chair and watched her slip seamlessly into sleep.

ôDear God, I wish I could do it that easily,ô he said aloud to a wall.

It was his first thought of God since the group had arrived.

Back in Cape Town, Theodore would sometimes knock off a few quasi-remembered *Shabbat* prayers on Friday sunsets. After Leah came into his life though, and with the purchase and sale of the *Lincolnshire Inn* and the Gibsons and all the other changes in his evolving life, those incantations faded away.

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her beliefs, so the possibilities of her saying the Friday evening *Kiddush* over *challa* and *Shabbat* wine and candles was as likely as Moses reappearing at the foot of Mount Sinai with ten more Commandments and telling the Hebrews, ôWhat? With my bad back, you expect me to carry all four tablets down the hill at once?ô

Theodore wondered if his uneasiness had less to do with the fear of losing the money than with that itch that gnaws in the heads of former believers whose faith has gone to seed. Rationalising: the curse of doubters.

It wasnôt that Theodore didnôt believe in *Hashem.* Rather, heôd momentarily forgotten Godôs telephone number.

Perhaps it was time, Theodore imagined, to rediscover the God on whose behalf heôd argued in a rusting ship a lifetime before. He shrugged at the pointlessness of his internal struggle. There wasnôt anything close to a synagogue here, or even a second-hand Rabbi.

Of course, waking nightmares become silliness in the reality of daylight. Theodore was more concerned about financing the Gibsons while at the same time keeping a pragmatic eye on his diminishing pile of cash.

God always provides for the needy, Theodoreôs grandfather might have said back in Lithuania. While the Gibsons and Theodore had a broad notion of what they wanted to achieve when they left the Cape, the first real inkling of the possibilities offered by this armpit of the world arrived a few mornings after the group had ridden into the settlement.

John Gibson, sitting in his cart smoking a post-breakfast cheroot and blowing large circles into the cool morning air, languidly watched the approach of a specimen clad in foul-smelling holes separated by rotting khaki and a filthy, stained brown bush hat that shielded his heavily bearded face from the May sunshine.

It was the manôs lumpy pockets which immediately attracted John Gibsonôs attention.

The two briefly sized each other up.

ôHow much for your rifle?ôthe creature enquired in an accent suggesting essence of rural Somerset.

John Gibson eyed the man. óôFraid itôs out of your price range, old chap,ôhe said shrewdly.

óThat so?ôthe man mused, examining John as one might check out a piece of meat to assess if it were animal or human.

óThat is, no doubt, so,ôsaid John.

óOh, I think thereôs a seriously big doubt, laddie,ôsaid the man, rummaging in his pocket until his clenched fist emerged from whatever in Godôs name resided within its unspeakable depths.

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ost of your gun, with a fair bit left over.ô

s to reveal, in the palm of his dirty right hand, a rough stone the size of either of John Gibsonôs rapidly widening eyeballs.

Gibson cleared his throat.

óThatôs é ô

óDiamond. Uncut. Unpolished,ôsaid the man. óAnd before you ask, I got the assayerôs valuation. So, ósmine. Not thieved.ôHe took from his coat pocket a signed and stamped certificate, which John Gibson scanned briefly.

óYes, well, that should just about do,ôJohn said as calmly as possible. óDeal. And Iôll even toss in a box of cartridges.ô

óDozen boxes of shells would be even more acceptable,ôsaid the man.

óFair enough.ô

John Gibson cleared his throat again and handed over the rifle and shells, accepting the diamond in exchange, all the while trying not to goggle at the stone or the assayerôs certificate while the digger checked the workings of the Lee Enfield.

Eventually the digger grunted in satisfaction, and touched his forefinger to the brim of his hat.

óDone and done. Should sleep better tonight,ôhe patted the rifle and turned away, calling back over his shoulder, óSuggest you keep that stone safe, sonny.ô

óThanks, will do, sir,ôJohn Gibson called back. óBy the way, I donôt know your name, old fellow.ô

óCorrect,ôwas the answer. óYou donôt.ôAnd he was gone.

óItôs mind-boggling!ôJohn said that night as his brothers and Theodore sat around the small table examining the stone. óFellowôs pockets were chockers with stones!ô

The quorum considered what a pocketful of diamonds would buy.

óOf course, if we want to get our hands on diamonds weôll have to dig óem up ourselves,ôJames said.

óThat means weôd have to register a claim somewhere. We canôt just pop up at the diggings and say to all and sundry, ñhere we are, chaps! Letôs get to itò.ô Fred said.

óNot sure if I actually want to dig myself,ôJames added.

óNor I,ôsaid Fred.

óAlthough,ôsaid John, óone big strike and weôll be set é ô

óé even a small strike ï a couple of small stones must be worth a fortune.ô

óLook at this valuation certificate! One bloody stone!ô

Leah lifted the *potjie* from the stove and carried it across to their jury-rigged table, ladling hefty portions of stew onto tin plates. She had found potatoes and carrots to add

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e table, swallowed a mouthful of stew and proclaimed it

ream stream.

óYour idea was to invest in transport, werenôt it? Back in Cape Town? You havenôt stopped talking of it for a month.ô she asked.

The Gibsons and Theodore nodded.

óSo then why have you now started looking at other things? Youôve come over all starry-eyed because some filthy old buggerôs sat one stone before you. One stone. And itôs dazzling you, it is. You might also find yourselves one ï or a few even. Or you could all go out and dig for months and find sod-all.

óWhy donôt you rather do what it is you set out to do,ô Leah said. óWork it out; how do you marry diamonds and transport?ô

And that was it.

In the next half an hour, talking at more revolutions per second than a Gatling Gun barrel, the Gibsons and Theodore ï Leah smiling quietly to herself to one side ï planned their transport company.

People needed to get to the diggings from the Cape. New arrivals faced getting to the diggings from the Cape and not wandering off into the hinterland to be eaten by savages, and there were those who needed to get back to the Cape of course, with their wealth ï or their broken dreams ï in their pockets. Packed and ready to go back to wherever home might be.

óHow about diggers getting from their claims to, well, here? Tram services? Omnibuses? New Rush will surely become a town of some substance sooner rather than later,ô Fred suggested.

óUntil the diamonds run out anyway,ô said John.

óDonôt see that happening any day soon.ô

óAgreed. Did you see the size of the bloody diamond I got for the Enfield?ô

óMassive.ô

óHuge.ô

Silence.

óValuable,ô said Theodore. óItôs far too valuable to carry around in your pocket. People will need banking services too. And some way of getting to and from their sites as quickly as possible before some *mamze*r with a big stick gives them a hit on the head and robs them.ô

óSafe, trustworthy transport,ô Fred mused. óTrue blue, reliable and damned fast. Itôs just like we discussed ï only now we have more of an idea of what weôre dealing with.ô

That was the start.

The Gibsons, with Theodore providing the finances, first set about creating a transport service from the coast to the diamond fields. It took longer than expected of course ï

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s still by all accounts miraculous considering the d the planôs very insanity.

James Gibson returned to Wellington with cash in his money belt to acquire oxcarts. And while he did buy a few once there, he discarded the notion of oxcarts as a long-term solution because of a newly arrived form of transport called a stagecoach. He snapped up three new Concord stagecoaches which were available immediately and ordered from the agent another dozen, paying a substantial deposit. He used the balance of the available cash to buy horses and hire riders who were paid half their fee on departure from Wellington and the balance on arrival at the diamond settlement.

While Theodore substantially funded the operation ï bringing his cash reserves down to almost nothing ï proceeds from the sale of John Gibsonôs diamond were added to the kitty.

The coaches James Gibson ordered arrived by ship some months later, by which time the Gibsonôs stagecoach service was already thriving (if measured by the number of passengers) but it was only breaking even financially.

At Theodoreôs insistence, all profits were ploughed back into developing the company ... until the stage service was sound enough to allow the four men to draw bigger salaries.

It made sense, and the Gibsons agreed to a conservative approach tempering their natural inclinations to spend now and worry later.

It was agreed that James would remain in Cape Town to run that end of the business, which they named the *Red Star Line* ï so called as a tipping of the hat to the *Union Line*, the shipping company that brought people from all over the world to the tip of Africa.

Over the next few years business flourished as the diamond boom showed no signs of diminishing, and by 1877 the *Red Star Line* had become quick and efficient thanks to Theodoreôs planning as the careful scheduling and well-nourished, powerful horses (each stagecoach needed a dozen of the best horses to haul its passengers to the diamond fields) chopped the travel time from the *schtetl* of Grootfontein near Middelburg in the Cape Colony to Kimberley in just six days.

It had formerly taken at least three weeks.

Happily, James Gibson had an astonishingly good eye for quality horseflesh é which alas a hopeful competitor did not have, opting to ôbe differentô by having his coach drawn by zebras.

A zebra crossing in the earliest days of this country clearly had a different meaning back then, Yitzhak noted wryly.

There was also a new bank into which the *Red Star Line* directors stuffed their money.

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berley was about to become meant the appointment of nunicipal management flowed with as little underhanded graft, backhanders, solicited gratuities and outright nepotism as possible. Sundry weapon-toting representatives of King and Country rigorously maintained Law and order. Level roads were scraped into the dirt and a town hall built. Teachers, merchants, academics, opportunists, missionaries, whores and builders arrived in their scores, as did diggers, diggers and more diggers, with many of the townôs new citizenry hopping off *Red Star Line* stagecoaches filled with oodles of hope and expectation.

Such is the nature of boom towns, and *Red Star Line's* founders were quick to capitalise.

John and Fred Gibson ï the companyôs extremely popular public face, with Theodore quietly buried in numbers and creative bookkeeping in the background ï put forward a proposal to the mayor and his minions to establish a tram service in the town. The town council loved the idea and shelled out the necessary funds to match the *Red Star Line's* proposed development costs.

More money poured into the *Red Star Line's* bank, a mirror of the townôs newly affluent populace. As personal wealth grew, servant girls arrived in droves from England and mainland Europe to dust and clean their homes and launder the finery of the prosperous, which group included the Gibsons, Theodore and Leah.

In five years the Gibsons and Theodore became suit-wearing, tie-pinned, home-owning people of substance in Kimberley.

Mentsches.

The three young men each bought houses in prime locations, overlooking the town and well away from the noise and stench of the hard labour that fuelled their affluence.

Red Star Line added horses and coaches, spread the breadth of their services to other parts of the territory, added more symbols of their individual prosperity.

And as a codicil, nine months after their arrival, Leah produced the son she and Theodore had conceived behind a cooling horse carcass under a star-emblazoned African heaven. Jacob, Theodore and Leah decided to name the little boy, after Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

Wealth had not, for now anyway, arrived dressed as money.

The wife of a local tradesman who sold hardware to the diggers helped deliver the squalling bundle, which she handed to Leah, who lay sweat-drenched, bloodied and exhausted after almost two days of trying to force her baby into the world.

ôHeôs beautiful,ô Leah said, and passed out.

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gly beaming, overjoyed and finally alone after a day of to his *siddur,* which he opened for the first time in years. Inevitably he wound his way to the line in Genesis, which declared: óAnd God spoke to Abraham saying, ôThis is my covenant which you shall keep between me and you and thy offspring after you; every male child among you shall be circumcisedô,ô he read.

Theodoreôs connection to God was at best parlous, however the arrival of his son demanded a new embracing of his religion, if not his entire faith. And while the word of God did not constitute a business issue, Theodore nonetheless sought counsel from John and Fred Gibson, his thinking being that there was nothing yet to differentiate between Jewish and gentile babies.

óHere we are in the middle of nowhere, with nothing like a *mohel* in sight,ô Theodore began.

óA what thing?ô

óLet me explain: a *mohel* is not a rodent which lives in tunnels underground, but is a professional snipper of Jewish foreskins.ô

The removal of the foreskin, Theodore explained, is as important to Jews as the singing of hymns at Christmas is to gentiles.

óFrankly,ô said Fred Gibson contemplatively, óI see no basis for sane comparison.ô

óI will never comprehend the mind of the Hebrew,ô John Gibson added, rolling his eyes at the concept of the circumcision, and setting in motion a new discourse between brothers.

óNor I,ô added Fred.

óListen, this is the great outdoors, man,ô Fred told Theodore. óI must say Iôm not sure if your Jehovah fellow will begrudge your youngster having, shall we say, an anteaterish look about his, er, whatsits.ô

óAnyway, thereôs not even a doctor available.ô

óMind you, the barberôs got a good set of blades.ô

óWould you let a haircutter loose on *your* genitals?ô

óI should say not.ô

óIôve got a splendid hunting knife ï sharp as a witchôs tongue.ô

óYou are not listening to me,ô Theodore interjected impatiently. ôThis isnôt just a matter of sharp knives. Itôs the Old Testament, in Genesis. Itôs as important to a Jewish boy as his *bar mitzvah*.ô

Theodore hadnôt personally experienced a *bar mitzvah*, but he wasnôt about to volunteer that piece of information.

óSo,ô Fred said, ówho did the snipping back at the time when Genesis was written?ô

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ôWho wrote Genesis anyway?ô

rew beavering away with his quill, I daresay, chewing the tip like the Editor of *The Guardian* and trying to work out where to insert the next smiting of heathens,ô Fred guessed.

ôBut surely God wrote Genesis?ô

ôOurs or theirs?ô

ôSame chappie, Iôd suggest.ô

ôOurs looks less Jewish of course.ô

ôLoads of flowing blonde locks, if you believe those Italian artists.ô

It was enough. Theodore clapped his hands sharply, halting the debate on ownership of biblical copyright.

ôWhat are you two talking about? This isnôt about who wrote Chapter One of the Bible ï itôs about what do I do about my sonôs *bris.*ô

John and Fred looked at each other, perplexed, then took the low road. ôItôs obviously your decision, old man,ô said Fred.

ôSnip away yourself, why donôt you?ô John suggested.

ôI canôt do it myself, dammit,ô Theodore snapped. ôIôm trying to find a solution, not drum up the courage of Dutch people. Someone who has been trained has to cut off my sonôs foreskin, and that canôt be me. One small slip and, *oy*, the consequences are unacceptable. I dare not.ô

Fred and Johnôs knees would remain clenched together in sympathy for Jacob for the next half hour.

Imagination is a terrible thing.

Leah, sensibly, came up with the solution when Yitzhak spoke to her later, when sheôd emerged drowsy and aching and ready to put the baby to her breast.

ôItôs just an operation, inôit? And a doctorôs a doctor,ô she said. ôWhy not pop across to the army field office and see if you canôt talk a surgeon into doing it? British Army doctors are usually excellent.ô

It made sense.

Not even Jewish beggars can be choosers in matters of foreskin removal.

ôThe worst that could happen,ô Leah reasoned, ôis the surgeon refuses. In which case itôs our choice: barber or anteater?ô

ôYou obviously overheard the idiot Gibsons?ô

Leah giggled and held Theodoreôs hand in hers, Jacob cooing and gurgling as he filled his tiny belly.

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on, Dr Dan Jardine, agreed to Theodoreôs request, having grown weary of putting splints on soldiers who had fallen off their horses or issuing potions to excise the crabs that infested the groins of countless infantrymen thanks to dalliances with the whores who had followed the money to the diamond diggings. There was currently no war, he reasoned, no substantial fighting with savage hordes or *Boers*. Man couldnôt even find a decent game of cribbage on this particular frontier.

And so it came to pass, on the eighth day after the baby was born, a *goyische* doctor clad in British Army dress khakis festooned with campaign ribbons, and with no axe to grind with the Chosen People, packed his medical bag and, sitting alongside Theodore in his Scotch Cart, trotted off to help honour Abrahamôs covenant with a God whose interest in the wellbeing of the Hebrews apparently extended to the smallest detail.

Holding their respective breaths Theodore and Leah trusted in that selfsame God and the British Army Medical Corps to not mutilate their child and thereby negate any possibility of future grandchildren.

They need not have worried.

Jardine had, in his years of service, hacked off many limbs (mostly in the Crimean War two decades before) as proficiently and deftly as a Chelsea Market Gardener might snip dead twigs from a rose bush.

A foreskin the size of a pinkie nail was never going to be a problem.

With the Gibsons standing queasily to the side ï Leah, of course was not allowed in the room during the circumcision ï Jardine deftly proved himself a more-than-adequate *mohel*, even if just for a few minutes.

When the cutting was complete and Jacobôs *petselleh* dressed in soft military issue gauze (the baby happily sucking on a piece of cloth soaked in some excellent Irish whiskey from the doctorôs bag) Theodore placed his hand on the infantôs head.

ôThis child,ô Theodore recited, ôis named Jacov *ben* Tadorus, *ve* Leah.ô

ô*Ben*,ô he explained to Jardine and the Gibsons, ômeans ôson ofô and *ve* means ôandô. Hence Jacov *ben* Tadorus *ve* Leah.ô

ôThought your name was Theodore?ô Jardine asked.

ôItôs my English name,ô Theodore explained. ôAll Jewish children have a Hebrew name and a name which fits in with where they live. Tadorus, which is the actual name I was given at my birth, is also my Hebrew name. And Leah is also already a Hebrew name.ô

ôSo Jesus é ô Jardine began.

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n Josef *ve* é I suppose *ve* Miriam, which is as close as ary. If youôre accepting that Christ was born a Jew, of course.ô

óé and died one,ô nodded Jardine.

óJust think, Doctor,ô John Gibson ventured, ósomeone like you performed on Jesus two thousand years ago what you did to Theodoreôs son a few minutes ago.ô

óI suppose youôre right,ô said Jardine, imagining himself snipping the Messiah while Three Wise Men nodded approvingly at the quality of his scalpel control.

óWell, itôs all too jolly complex for me,ô said Fred who drifted off with his brother in tow in search of that which pacified Jacov or Jacob (or whatever the hell the sprogôs name was) but in considerably larger quantities.

Jardine gravely declined the proffered two pounds from Theodore, considered resigning his commission and setting up a private practice, then decided a guaranteed income from the Queenôs Army was a better option than taking a chance in this diamond-encrusted arsehole of the world.

Mind you, he thought as he dismounted from the cart and waved a quick farewell to Theodore, you canôt really compare starting a child off on his path into life with removing a mangled foot with a bone saw now, can you?

óFor me to now bend your ear with business stuff is pointless,ô Yitzhak said, stretching. óNeedless to say business was like butter ï good with bread. I have no idea what that means, but it sounds wise.

óThe *Red Star Line* Company constructed special stops along the route from the Cape to Kimberley. This is where passengers could have a *fress* and the horses could be filled up or exchanged for fresh horses. Of course, Theodore suggested they give the job of providing food to someone outside the company. ñIf your only business skill is making cheese *blintzes*ò, he once told me ñwhy gamble with *perogin?*ò'

óWhy, Theodore reasoned, should they worry about making sandwiches for travellers when they should be concentrating on the big things ï like new routes? Which by the way they did, and even became involved in a tramway to link Beaconsfield with Kimberley.ô

The birth of Jacob served to finally wrench open in a hidden part of Theodoreôs mind a pathway to something ingrained into him as a child in Lithuania and which had so troubled him in those dark and silent sleepless nights in Kimberley ... his almost-lapsed sense of tribal belonging.

óLet me explain,ô said Yitzhak. óLove between a man and a woman makes each one see their partner as unbearably exquisite, even if he has a *ponim* like a tonsil and she has the personality of a turnip.ô

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ewish man with an almost palpable push towards the core ıy from it he might have wandered. It all has to do with belonging to the most oppressed tribe of human beings in history.

Theodore mulled over the problem and reached a decision, which he did not share with the Gibsons. This was to be his private business, unconnected to the *Red Star Line* ledgers. It was about the business of his own faith, a point he reached by a mixture of chance and the circumstances provided by fatherhood.

Chance?

ôMaybe just a bit,ô suggested Yitzhak, who noted that while God is our father, luck is probably our stepfather.

He pinched the bridge of his nose.

ôSo, for Theodore, everything was looking bright and shiny as a penny you polished using *Brasso*. But of course, you know the saying about waiting for the first shoe to fall? Well, just when everything seemed to be going like a honky in a dory, the first in a series of shoes fell. Perhaps not a very long fall, but it was the first one, so its importance cannot be underestimated.

ôYou see, just when you imagine your life is as ideal, a misfortune befalls you, followed by another, then another, and so on until you are convinced this set of bad turns, this bad luck, will never end. Such is the spitefulness of falling shoes.ô

Theodore discovered to his joy that circumstances had created in the town a growing Jewish population. It had started with the arrival of Samuel Perilly, a Londoner who had travelled to Africa with his wife and five very plain daughters in tow.

Family legend (Perilly confessed wryly to Theodore) suggested that his wife died on the way because the thought of producing yet another ugly daughter to cast upon the world was too much of a burden to bear.

Samuel Perilly was a tobacconist, which is to say, he trundled into Kimberley in 1881 with four ox wagons filled with tobacco leaves acquired in the *Boer* Republic at a place called (exotically) *Eensgevonden*. Perilly rented a small shop in Kimberley and set about hand-rolling cigarettes for the diggers, and for the growing community of what he called ógentryô (that is, people who hired other men to dig for them) he rolled carriage-trade cigarettes. These differed from riff-raff cigarettes by virtue of superior quality tobacco and their posh livery of pinstriped paper.

Smoking, as with drinking, was and always will be manôs most favoured sin, despite neither appearing in the Ten Commandments. The cigarette business boomed as, regular as cloudless skies over Kimberley, more tobacco wagons arrived. Perillyôs five daughters, clustered together like chattering yellow-handed hobgoblins, expertly sorted each pile of cured tobacco leaves into grades.

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riends back home in London, told them of the octors and accountants and lawyers and tailors and salesmen of all shapes.

ôMilk and honey,ô he asked in one letter, ócor a handful of diamonds? Pick the promised land you would prefer.ô

And so more settlers did come forth unto this land, Yitzhak pontificated, bearing money, goods, hope, skills, ideas, wives, children and in-laws.

Theodore, who had taken to smoking at the urgings of John (who claimed cigarettes put hair on oneôs chest) had befriended Perilly, in whose shop he would sometimes sit of an evening chatting about matters Judaic, which inevitably segued into the ongoing *tsores* of finding five single Jewish men desperate or myopic enough to take even one of Perillyôs daughters off his hands.

ôYou know, Iôve considered offering passers-by a special deal,ô Perilly said wryly. ôTake a daughter and Iôll give you cigarettes for life. I would regard it as a small miracle if someone even made a lewd remark to any of my girls, bless them.ô

ôThis is a bear you must cross,ô Theodore philosophised, óalthough mind you, if we had a synagogue, all your daughters could meet nice *Yiddische* boys.ô

Again, there are moments.

Samuel Perilly looked at Theodore.

óA synagogue?ô asked Samuel.

óSure. Why not?ô Theodore answered, ôWhy the hell not?ô

ó*Nu*?ô said Samuel, óso build a synagogue already. Quickly. My daughters arenôt getting any younger.ô

So Theodore set forth to build a synagogue already.

He purchased a plot of land just on the outskirts of the town and set about having plans drawn up. Building supplies were by this time in fairly good supply in Kimberley, almost keeping up with demand.

All that was missing was a Rabbi.

With the best will in the world, Theodore thought, he did not have even a smidgen of an idea of how to conduct a service of any kind. Samuel Perilly offered his support in any non-sermon-related activity, that being all he was capable of. He did have some ideas though.

ôWrite to the Chief Rabbi of London,ô Samuel suggested. ôThereôs a Rabbinical College there. Advise them of the need for a Rabbi. Iôm certain theyôll find one to come out here.ô

It made sense. Theodore, whose faith in his own ability to pen a letter was not as assured as his confidence in using spoken English, asked Leah to write to the Chief Rabbi, which she did in neat cursive handwriting.

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a request for a Rabbi, it also provided guarantees of and underlined the rapid growth of the Jewish community in this diamond-laden piece of Africa.

The letter was sent by *Red Star Line* Coach to Cape Town, where James Gibson popped it into a mailbag which, in turn, went by steamship to London where it was sorted and delivered to the Chief Rabbi ï who wrote back some months later to confirm he would be delighted to, in due course, send one of his Rabbis to a place where, he theorised whimsically to himself, the Lost Tribe of Israel might have settled.

And so it came to pass that, a year after Theodoreôs initial letter, a coach arrived from the Cape bearing Kimberleyôs first Rabbi.

This man of the cloth paradoxically wore a climatically ill-considered black suit, overcoat and tall stovepipe hat, and emerged perspiring from the coach, sniffing the air in horror as he surveyed a scrubby panorama as foul as naked sin ï out of which emerged Theodore, synagogue founder supreme, hand warmly outstretched to welcome the first Jewish man of God heôd met since his dead grandfather.

The looming crow sullenly introduced himself to Theodore as Rabbi Schwartz, and as Rabbis go he was clearly not your archetypal caring, sensitive soul, ready to explain the *Torah* to toddlers or the meaning of life to the elderly as a prelude to their shuffling off this mortal coil.

His own name, for starters, had set Rabbi Schwartz off on a life path paved with angst.

The only child of Klaus Schwartzman, a German immigrant to England, and a Danish Jewish icicle named Flora, he had been born three decades before, mewling as weakly as a partially strangled kitten, and plonked briefly on the breast of a mother who found the whole birth process as utterly disgusting as the bloodied little boy which had emerged from her infrequently invaded private parts.

Klaus Schwartzman ï who had changed his name to Schwartz by Deed Poll shortly after arriving in Britain ï found out about the birth of his child while in the process of sucking dry a bottle of the cheapest available gin at a public house in Tottenham Court Road.

He was singularly unimpressed with the concept of fatherhood and had no desire to have a brat ruin his life of breadline poverty. Furthermore a child would forever chain him to Flora, whose lack of fondness for him he returned in kind.

Their mutual loathing wasnôt even worth the price of a divorce.

The Jewish telegraph, the word-of-mouth that can spread the news of a local Jewish-related event to a worldwide audience within minutes, resulted in Klaus Schwartzôs neighbour bauchling slyly into the public house, planting himself alongside Schwartz and proffering him the good news in hopeful anticipation of a celebratory drink.

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grunted sourly.

neighbour cheerily.

óSchmuck. What is the kid? What kind of child?ô

óOh é a girl, I think.ô

óAnother *verdammt* mouth to feed.ô Irritably, he stirred the clear liquid with his forefinger. Took another swig and belched.

óYou have to register the birth,ô the miffed neighbour offered when it became blazingly clear there would be no wetting of the babyôs head in this pub, this day or probably ever. óLaw says you have to register within the day.ô

óYou want me to go now so you can polish off my drink, donôt you?ô Schwartz gazed balefully at the neighbour, then pointedly gulped down the remnants of the gin and shoved the empty glass at the man.

óHere. Help yourself,ô he growled and rose unsteadily, wheeling his way towards the hospital, where Flora Schwartz had finally managed to convince the nurse to take the niggling infant off her chest.

óBut you have to feed your baby,ô the nurse wheedled.

óYou feed it,ô Flora snapped. ólôm going to sleep.ô

Baby Schwartz would not then or ever have its mouth anywhere near its motherôs nipple.

Klaus Schwartz reeled, as might a sailor with a too-short wooden leg on a wet deck, into the hospital and eventually found his way to the registrarôs office by dint of alternatively threatening staff and breathing on them.

óWant to register my child. Born yesterday. Or today, mebbe. Not sure,ô he grunted, an incipient gin headache thundering in his temples.

The registrar, unsmiling in the face of Klaus Schwartzôs clear disinterest in the administrative requirements of parenthood, opened a massive book and noted the date of birth, then began his routine mantra, filling in the answers in simply precise block letters.

Motherôs name?

Fatherôs name?

Gender?

Gender?

Boy or girl?

Girl.

Childôs name?

Klaus Schwartz, desperate to return to the sanctuary of the public house, gave the naming of his child a touch more than passing thought, and then opted for his late motherôs name. Bitch that she was, but a nameôs a name.

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vartz decided.

óNo second name. Canôt afford a second name,ôSchwartz said.

When Klaus Schwartz eventually grudgingly got around to seeing his wife two days later, nursing a blinding hangover, Flora coldly asked if heôd named and registered the child yet.

óOf course. Same day. I am not a fool.ô

ôWhat did you call the boy?

ôWhat boy?ô

ôYour bloody son,ôsaid Flora, nipping off the words. ôWhat boy would I be talking about?ô

ó*Sheisse*!ôcursed Schwartz. óI thought it was a girl. I called her Frieda. After my mother.ô

ôWell heôs not a Frieda, idiot. Heôs a boy. With a huge damned head too, curse his eyes. Go. Go now and sort out your bloody mess. Quick. I want to get out of this butcher shop.ô

Nearby, a nurse rolled her eyes.

Klaus Schwartz, apoplectic with fury at the unwanted administrative demands created by his newborn son, stormed back into the registrarôs office.

The same man from two days before was on duty.

óI registered a birth two days ago. I made a mistake,ôKlaus Schwartz said.

óI remember you. What kind of mistake?

óI registered a girl. Sheôs a boy.ô

The registrar snorted and opened the thick tome.

ôYour surname?ô

óSchwartz.ô

The man ran his finger down the margins of preceding pages.

óChild is Frieda? Daughter of Klaus and Flora?ô

ôYes. But the son of, not the daughter. Of.ô

ôWell, we canôt cross out a birth registration,ôthe registrar grizzled unhappily. óOnce itôs in the registry, itôs official. Iôm not allowed to make alterations either. More than me jobôs worth.ô

The two men stared at each other for a brief moment.

ôWell, what exactly is your damned job worth?ôSchwartz asked and ostentatiously took from his coat pocket a malnourished roll of currency.

The registrarôs job was apparently not worth much.

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in this small space before the girlôs name ï right here,ô he bout an inch in length with his little finger. ôItôs not ideal, but at least your son will be able to hide his middle name, sort of, because we have to keep the Frieda. Itôs in the registry, you see.ô

A dog-eared pound note changed hands. A weekôs booze money, gone. An acid bubble burst just below Klaus Schwartzôs Adamôs Apple.

óGood. Now, what about the gender?ô he demanded, nauseated by the burning in his throat.

ôI can change that a bit. Cross out the *fe* in femaleé I can pretend the pen dripped a dot of ink. It can happen.ô

óThis is also good.ô

óSo, what boyôs name do you now want for your child?ô

Klaus Schwartz hadnôt thought that through either.

His fatherôs name had been Louis.

Floraôs father had been Leopold.

óUm,ô said Schwartz.

óMake it snappy, man,ô snapped the registrar peevishly, óbefore my supervisor comes in and sees this catôs breakfast.ô

So Klaus Schwartz made it snappy and blurted out his sonôs new name.

This explains why Kimberleyôs new Rabbi bore, with exceedingly ill grace, the name, Louispold Frieda Schwartz.

From this storyôs perspective,ô said Yitzhak, óSchwartz the *Goniff* had arrived. And the first shoe was about to fall. Iôll tell you about it next time. Bring tissues.ô

CHAPTER ELEVEN

Zoln dayne beyner zikh brekhn azoy oft vi di Aseres-Hadibres – May your bones be broken as often as the Ten Commandments. ï another even more vituperative Yiddish curse.

Yitzhak adored the concept of creating dots, then connecting them to create a comprehensive picture of the landscape ï people and geographic ï of the scene he would lay before me as an

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e these were generally random memories tacked onto one ometimes prove to be more than just a drifting off at inexplicable tangents.

There was always a plan.

He chose to explain the next phase of his story about the life and times of Theodore and Leah in a diamond mining settlement by connecting it to rugby.

Obviously.

It transpired that Yitzhak, who had of his own volition imprisoned himself in a single block of a Johannesburg suburb for over half a century, was a keen follower of provincial rugby. Griqualand ï which had Kimberley at its epicentre ï was one such province. Being Yitzhak, he assumed his audience would accept that he completely understood the game, rules and all, unlike the audience itself.

An *aficionado*, he called himself with ill-disguised pride.

Griqualand was, he began on this day, one of the first places to play competitive rugby in the new country that was to become South Africa.

ôIt was brought to the country by, would you believe, a Priest,ô said Yitzhak. ôReverend George Ogilvie. Obviously a Protestant. Or maybe an Anglican. I donôt know the difference anymore. By even greater coincidence, this Ogilvie was also Headmaster of the Diocesan College, which opened the year after Theodore arrived in Cape Town. Of course, I have a book from the school library. Somewhere up there on the shelf with my fatherôs other books. He must have visited there too.

ôSo this Vicar started his boys with rugby, a new sport back then. Clubs opened up and rugby slowly spread inland. British soldiers carried the sport with them when they marched inland and arrived at Kimberley, and soon the Griquas began playing too. Not the actual Griquas, of course.

ôThe native Griqua people, who were called Basters, had lived in the area for a long time. They were sort of *schvartzers*, so rugby wasnôt a game for them. They watched while the white settlers jumped on top of each other to retrieve a ball. It must have been very confusing to these placid farming people.

ôIt was only later when the *Boers* took to the game that it spread until the sport became the bedrock of South Africa.ô

Yitzhak was quick to add that without the sheer bulk and height of the *Boers*, the countryôs competitiveness as a rugby-playing force would never have happened.

ôIt would have been like throwing a cheese blintz at a windmill,ô he explained. ôRugby, I should tell youô he began, presuming I knew nothing about the game, ôis a

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ge men in shorts. I personally believe rugby was created
cal and dental professions.ô

Encouraged, Yitzhak continued.

óJust look at who plays the game now: men of monstrous dimensions, Goliaths of the highest order é but those are just the forwards, of course. This is a democratic game, so it makes positions available for smaller men. In fishing,ôsaid Yitzhak, óthese players would be known as óbaitôô

While Yitzhak was clearly enamoured of rugby, the concept of a nice Jewish boy (let alone the tiny Khoi-descended Basters of Griqualand) playing this bullyôs game was beyond the pale for him.

óCan you imagine, a *Yiddische* half-a-fly hovering behind theé whatôs the thing where they all jump on top of each other like children fighting for a dropped sixpence?ô

A ruck?

óRuck, yes! So, our *boykele* is behind the ruck! Itôs the last few minutes of the game! He shouts to his partner é the little one who looks like an angry midget? The scumhalf! He shouts, óSolly! Solly*! Gib mir den ball! I can der spiel gewinnen mit ein dropkick'!'*

That notion was, if not impossible, then extraordinarily unlikely in Yitzhakôs mind. The chance of a nice Jewish boy playing rugby was about as likely as Israel giving Palestine to the Muslims as a *Channukah* present.

óAnyway,ôhe continued, ónough with the digressions. I invite you here to tell a wonderful tale of intrigue and a love story about two *shaine mentsche* in a dark and deadly unexplored part of Africa and all you want to do is talk rugby? For shame!ô

Yitzhak flashed his shy, hooded grin.

óLetôs kick off é ô

Theodore booked Rabbi Schwartz into a hotel suite, paying the owners a negotiated rental for six months ï which was how long it was estimated until the new synagogue (with attached accommodation for the Rabbi) was ready.

For the time being, services would be conducted under the stars, in an empty lot behind the *Red Star Line's* offices where the horses were stabled.

Theodore hadnôt worked the cost of Rabbi Schwartzôs accommodation into his synagogue budget, but the Rabbi insisted that his employment conditions and salary assumed free accommodation. Theodore sighed and shelled out the extra money.

The day after his arrival, Rabbi Schwartz was given a quick tour of the proposed home of the new synagogue. Oddly, Theodore noted, Rabbi Schwartz seemed more concerned at the pace of construction than the actual dimensions of the building itself. He

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ocation of the Ark (expecting the Rabbi to talk in cubits re the women and men would sit ï segregated of course, in the Orthodox manner ï and where the front door would be.

óWhy does it take so many months to get to this point?ô Rabbi Schwartz interrogated. He gestured at another construction site a block away. óIt looks like that place is being built very quickly. Why is that?ô

óIt is a hotel and bar,ô Theodore explained, óbut I have no idea why theyôre working faster there than here. It looks like they have more workers than us ï more noses on the grinding stone. Also, itôs taking more time to get building supplies sent here from the Cape. We canôt build without material. Wood, nails, shingles é none are made here.ô

óYet those people have more than enough.ô

óThey moved building materials here in several ox wagons. We have to be more é considered é in how we spend my money.ô

óYour money?ô

óWell, yes. I am funding everything,ô Theodore explained.

óThen you need to spend more,ô Rabbi Schwartz scolded. óNo synagogue means I go home. Understand? This is no time for short arms and deep pockets, Mister Isaacs. The worshipping of *Hashem* demands sacrifice ï giving, then giving some more. It surprises me that you clearly do not consider this synagogue as of prime importance.ô

óOf course, *Rov,*ô Theodore said, burning with humiliation.

Rabbi Schwartz snorted, scratched a line in the sand with the toe of his black boot, considering.

óTomorrow you will give me cash money,ô he said finally. óSay one hundred pounds. I will go to that site and talk them into selling us some of their material so you can build my synagogue.ô

óIôm not sure they will é ô

óIôm a man of God. They will do as I tell them. Tomorrow bring the money. I will do the rest. No arguments.ô

Grumbling into his beard Schwartz clomped back to his hotel suite, locking himself in his room for the rest of the afternoon, presumably in silent prayer ï *davening,* Theodore imagined.

Mind you, Theodore thought, it did seem as if the hotel and bar ï apparently owned by the abnormally short woman he had seen once or twice from a distance ï was moving towards completion at a rapid rate. Clearly the need for a booze haven demanded more urgency than a house of God.

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draw cash.

anded a wad of notes to Rabbi Schwartz who, without thanks, strode off to the hotel and bar building site, flapping his hand dismissively at the following Theodore, who halted in his tracks like a well-trained border collie.

From a distance Theodore watched the stooping Rabbi and the tiny woman become enmeshed in deep conversation, the termination of which was a cursory handshake between the two, followed by money changing hands, followed by Rabbi Schwartz returning, unsmiling, and wiping his right hand on his trouser leg.

ôDone,ô he said. ôI convinced the woman to share. She agreed, of course. I am persuasive. Tomorrow there will be building material on site and workmen to construct. After a week, give me another two hundred é and so forth. The synagogue will be finished satisfactorily.ô

ôWhat a wonderful thing youôve done,ô Theodore said.

ôYou have no idea. Now leave me. I must plan.ô

And so it began: every week, Theodore handed money to Rabbi Schwartz, who went to the hotel building site. The following day a pile of building material would appear at the synagogue, as did a handful of men who set about measuring and hammering. While the hotel and bar seemed to grow at an astonishing rate though, the synagogue oddly seemed to almost grow and recede like the tide.

Thereôs no question (said Yitzhak) that Theodore probably would have noticed and investigated, being a very observant person. But all the rules changed when the first shoe fell three weeks after Rabbi Schwartzôs arrival.

Theodore was balancing the *Red Star Line's* books, discussing a possible new route with Fred Gibson when John Gibson burst into the office.

ôFreddie é ô John said, voice cracking as he dashed his hands across eyes glistening with tears.

ôFreddie ...ô

Fred Gibson and Theodore leapt to their feet.

ôChrist, John! Whatôs wrong?ô Fred rushed towards John, who slumped weeping onto his brotherôs broad chest.

ôFor Godôs sake, what happened?ô Theodore asked, hands clenched on Johnôs shoulder.

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tly pushed himself away from Fred, handed his brother a

õThis arrived on the three oôclock coach. Itôs é James,ôJohn whispered, and squeezed his eyes shut. õHeôs gone, Freddie. James. He died. Our brother died.ô

The letter, sent from the *Red Star Line's* Cape Town office, formally and with no small measure of dignity, stated that James Gibson had passed away suddenly while sitting at his desk filling in requisition forms for fodder. He had stopped writing, put his head in his arms as if to rest, and simply stopped breathing. The letter added that James had been buried in the Anglican cemetery, and that John and Fred should travel to Cape Town at their earliest convenience to acquire a suitable headstone for the grave. And to bid their brother a final farewell.

The following day the remaining Gibsons set off for the coast in one of their own stagecoaches to see to the final act of Jamesôlife, and to write to their aged parents in England to inform them of their sonôs demise.

They left the running of the operation in not-a-brother Theodoreôs hands, returning six weeks later, having executed Jamesônot insignificant estate, appointing a replacement to run the Cape Town office, and shipping personal effects home to England.

Both brothers felt as if, eerily, they had each lost a limb. It was a sensation that never really diminished over the remaining years of their lives.

In their absence, *Red Star Line's* affairs were managed impeccably by Theodore, who worked eighteen-hour days, seven days a week, to cover the slack left by his absent partners. Theodore had also missed six weeks of being father to Jacob and husband to Leah, who offered sympathy to Theodore and commiseration to the Gibsons.

She complained not once.

õThere is a saying in rugby that players should not take their eyes off the ball,ô said Yitzhak, õSo while my father was utterly engrossed in managing by himself a four-man operation, he neglected to watch the growth of his synagogue, trustingly handing over whatever funds Rabbi Schwartz required. Who wouldnôt trust a Rabbi?

õRabbi Schwartz always came to Theodoreôs office to collect the money,ô Yitzhak explained. õHe told my father he would save him the trip to the hotel (which also needed money to extend his stay) to allow my father to concentrate on the important business of running the *Red Star Line,* and by the way I need my salary.ô

Theodore paid. And paid.

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el Perilly to raise capital for the synagogue was also . These were funds from the pockets of tailors and storeowners. The Jewish mining magnates contributed not a penny.

The synagogue walls were almost complete, Rabbi Schwartz reported to Theodore one morning, but their construction had taken way too long. Meanwhile, roofing and windows ï which needed to be ordered soon ï would be next.

Theodore reached into his pockets again.

Then the cost of glass increased, Rabbi Schwartz explained to Theodore, who absently handed over extra funds.

The wood for the flooring was apparently unsuitable to cope with a growing congregation, the Rabbi said. Better quality flooring would have to be acquired.

More money.

Theodore, frustrated and buried in ledgers and accounts and bills payable and due, took Rabbi Schwartzôs advice and dashed off a letter to the bank, authorising the manager to give Rabbi Schwartz funds on demand. The Rabbi looked at the letter and noted facetiously that Theodoreôs commitment to the creation of the synagogue seemed to be less than comprehensive.

ôIf you cannot find the time to go to the bank, then I suppose I *will* find the time,ô he said before stomping from the office, clutching the letter in his veiny hand.

Theodore, numbed with exhaustion, didnôt even hear Rabbi Schwartzôs words. Heard only the clomping as he strode from the office.

The laces were being loosened on the next shoe that was about to fall.

The Friday after the Gibsonsô return, an exhausted Theodore went to the first synagogue service he had attended since 1862, in a *schtetl* a million miles away.

It was now a quarter of a faithless century later.

The synagogue was still far from complete so the service was outdoors. Beggars cannot choose, Theodore surmised, and anyway, the Jews fleeing Egypt would have similarly had their *Shabbats* under the ceiling erected by God (who apparently built his ceiling considerably faster than Theodoreôs construction team.)

The congregation was small ôbut growing,ô Samuel Perilly whispered to Theodore who arrived a few minutes before sunset. A group of a dozen men stood shoulder to shoulder, while the women, including Leah (holding Jacobôs hand) and the Perilly daughters hung back a few yards to the side, away from the male congregants.

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ng they could muster because they were about to send ank you very much. Many had even bathed that very day, anticipating their first services in ages.

Even in the open, Jewish men and women prayed separately to an apparently male God. People who have historically attended any sort of regular religious services will, by sheer dint of repetition, have drummed into their heads the words, the running order, the rhythms, the sense of the services they attend.

Those people who studied at Monastic schools as small children (and then graduated to a life where attending religious services usually becomes the object of massive disinterest) strangely always recall, a lifetime later, word-for-word, the text of the psalms and hymns of their childhoods, be it about what a friend they have in Jesus or an explanation as to why this night is different from all other nights.

Theyõll remember the smells of school halls, the vulpine stares directed at them by thin-lipped teachers possessed of that uncanny ability to sniff out miscreant students, automatically presumed guilty of sins. It applies to all faiths: whether it is the chanted Latin and the click of rosary beads, the odours of fantastic spices as *Eid-ul-Fitr* signals the end of *Ramadan* or the incantations of the Rabbi as the *Torah* is rolled closed.

So it was that Theodore found himself unconsciously recalling from the depths of his memories of childhood RÎ digkās the running order of the Friday *Shabbat* ceremony, which he had attended throughout his entire childhood, so important was the continued connection between God and his people that all Jews pray for.

In his head Theodore remembered that first there was the *Kabbalat Shabbat*, the inauguration of the Sabbath.

The service would then continue with *Barchu*, which is the call to prayer in the synagogue, which in turn introduces the *Shema Yisroel* (the first words in the *Torah*) then the *Amidah* ï the central prayer in all services. After these, his grandfather, Rabbi Ivanchuk, would provide a brief sermon which always related to living the life of a true *mentsch.* He would use parables and anecdotal (sometimes apocryphal) tales to illustrate his viewpoint on the benefits of happiness, prosperity, mutual respect and, please God, a *yence* every second Thursday (which caused the women to titter and the men to look at their shoes in embarrassment.)

Theodore, surrounded by a handful of fellow pioneers under a canopy of nightfall in Africa, finally understood his grandfatherõs weekly joke.

In Kimberley, Rabbi Louispold Frieda Schwartz gruffly and briefly implored congregants to dig deep into their pockets so that the synagogue might be completed.

õIt will be a *mitzvah*. A blessing,ô he stated, glaring at the congregation.

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ces always concluded with the singing of *Magein Avot* emembered the songs, but forgot their meaning. These were followed by the *Kiddush* prayer over the wine, of which little Tadorus was allowed a tiny sip.

Then *Aleinu,* the closing prayer, then *Yigdal,* the final prayer, which perks up hungry little boys and reminds them of the modest *Shabbat* dinners waiting for them at home.

It was a ritual ingrained into every pore of Theodoreôs body.

Dog-tired at that first service in Kimberley, Theodore shut his prayer book at the end of the service, wished those around him *Shabbat Shalom* and found himself eerily sensing that something was not quite right: like a film whose sprockets arenôt in the gears of the projector, resulting in actors saying words which donôt match the movement of their mouths.

Everything was there.

But not there.

Maybe it was the exhaustion.

Theodore shrugged, linked his arm in Leahôs, and, holding Jacobôs hand (absent-mindedly massaging the boyôs teeny knuckles) wandered off to the Scotch Cart to head home for dinner and ï now that the Gibsons were back ï as long and deep a sleep as possible.

Sleep still did not descend easily on Theodore even after the townôs first bank opened its doors and relieved him of his daily nightmare of robbery by gangs of large men with guns. This night, however, sleep would not be denied. As his head sunk into the pillow, he wondered if he should have said *Kaddish* ï which praises God and asks Him to look after the souls of family members who have passed away ï for James Gibson.

Wondered if a Jewish God would be interested in a prayer for a dead gentile who was, after a fashion, family.

Sleep swept appallingly quickly over Theodore, who realised a split moment after he began his descent into sleep exactly what was troubling him, Vowed to address it the next day and plunged into sleep.

He did know the second shoe was about ready to drop.

By the time he awoke at mid-morning the next day, Theodore had already forgotten what it was that had worried him and spent the weekend playing with Jacob, introducing his son to the toys in the kist.

Jacob loved the *dreidls,* wondered what magic they had within them that kept them balanced on their points as they spun like manic little dancers, marvelled at how strong his father must be to keep the tops spinning for as long as they did.

As expected, Rabbi Schwartz bearded Theodore in his office the following Monday morning.

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it, where there are no *siddurs* and no *Torah*?ô he began,
ning protocol of saying ógood morningô.

óI know that, Rabbi, but it made no sense to have *siddurs* and a *Torah* if there is nowhere safe to keep them,ô Theodore answered defensively.

óWell,ô said Rabbi Schwartz, ówe will have to hasten construction so that by the time the *siddurs* and the *Torah* I will order arrive in this hole, there will be a building with doors and cupboards with locks for their safe-keeping.ô

óYes, but é ô

óThere are no obstacles to this. I am not asking a favour of you. I am telling you we need the necessary elements for a complete synagogue. Or you must find another Rabbi.ô

Theodore groaned inwardly.

óFine. I will organise é ô

óYou will organise nothing,ô Rabbi Schwartz interrupted. óIt is my intention to travel today in one of your *fershtunkeneh* stagecoaches to Cape Town, from where I will acquire *siddurs* and a *Torah* to be sent from England.ô

Theodore sighed. óYou have a letter to the bank é ô

óI have no time this morning for banks. It is a banking holiday anyway. I need cash right now so I can depart.ô

óThereôs a stage on Thursday.ô

óI must go right away. I am booked on the noon stage,ô Schwartz snorted. óThis cannot wait for cheap transport schedules to fit in with rabbinical duties.ô

óHow much?ô asked Theodore.

óWork on three hundred pounds. I will have to ask the Cape Town synagogue to arrange the importation papers. England knows from nothing about the Kimberley Synagogue. And a *Torah* isnôt cheap. It would take a narrow man to seek out a cheap *Torah*. I presume you do not want a cheap, small *Torah*?ô

óOf course not. I will organise the funds for you. I have cash in the strongbox.ô

óAlso, thereôs the matter of accommodation in Cape Town to consider,ô Rabbi Schwartz noted. óOr do you want me to sleep on a bench? No? Also I will need funds for food.ô

óA round number of three hundred and fifty pounds?ô

óRound it off to four. Also, the builders want another one hundred and fifty so they can begin work on the roof. Give it to me and I will pay them too.ô

ółôll arrange the money,ô said Theodore.

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nised to Rabbi Schwartzôs satisfaction, the townôs Rabbi suitcase with the other luggage on the roof of the Concord coach, but keeping his valise with the *Torah* funds snugly between his feet.

He did not pop in to say farewell to Theodore.

He just left, whisked away by the fleet steeds of the *Red Star Line.*

Shortly after lunch, one of the synagogue builders knocked on Theodoreôs office door and strode in, clutching a cloth cap in his rough hands.

óWeôre after the one fifty quid for the roof, guvônor,ô he said.

óRabbi Schwartz gave it to you a few hours ago.ô

óNo. Didnôt. Not to me, anyways. Sorry guvônor. He deals with Missus Yudelman, direct-like.ô

óMissus Yudelman?ô

óAuntie Cockeye,ô said the builder. óShort bint what owns the hotel and bar.ô

Theodore had never known her name.

óWell, ask her for the money. Rabbi Schwartz é ô

óé gave óer nuffink. In fact, Missus Yudelman reckons sheôs been, like, carryinô yer building for some months now. Says you owe her a goodly amount. Says óer charitable spirit donôt extend to people what ainôt exactly regular patrons. If you catch me drift, guvônor. Kikes donôt exactly bend the elbow in the pub with us Christians, do yer? No insult intended.ô

óI donôt understand you ï but I should speak to this Auntie é Missus Yudelman.ô

óPôraps you oughter,ô said the builder.

Theodore felt nauseous. He quickly rose, put on his jacket and porkpie hat, and rode with the builder in his cart to the *Rat and Badger* public house which was the alcoholic frontispiece to a two-storey hotel which itself seemed not to have earned a name yet.

Yetta Yudelman was obviously expecting Theodore, who politely and fretfully knocked on her office door, holding his hat and nervously twiddling the brim between his fingers.

There is a bird called a Grackle.

The male looks like an oil slick with yellow eyes. Its song is at best, grating, like a shrill village gossip being fed into a wood chipper and shrieking, ó*Sha-weeng! Sha-weeeng*!ô as her legs are shredded.

That was what Auntie Cockeyeôs invitation to enter sounded like. She was tiny, even compared to Theodore. Not a dwarf, Yetta Yudelman was a midget, a perfectly formed but very small person.

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nice enough set of teats,ô a barfly suggested oafishly

e evening.

Life, in Yetta Yudelmanôs case, was give-and-take. For example, while she was no doubt massively bereft of any altitude, she was blessed with extremely acute hearing é a sense honed by a lifetime of listening for whispered disparaging remarks.

And while she had all the business acumen of the Governor of the Bank of England, she was, in counterbalance, utterly and completely and eternally without a hair on her head, courtesy of a tropical disease contracted years before.

To counter this, she covered her goose egg skull with a handmade bright red strawlike wig, which through the course of the day would slip and slide as if greased with lard, occasionally rotating around the equator of her head, leaving Yetta Yudelman staring at life through the back of her hair as a loon might gape through a set of Turkish drapes.

A loon, that is, with one good eye, the other seemingly free of any restraints within its socket, resulting in its hypnotic wandering with no apparent desire to focus on anything.

The upshot was that, everything considered, while all her assets created for Yetta Yudelman more money than Croesus, her physical liabilities rendered her a foul-tempered scarlet-wigged midget with acute hearing and a vicious straight right ï a favoured blow which shot Yetta Yudelmanôs knotty fist at pace from shoulder height, unneringly targetting the testicles of any man who dared laugh at her height, the red wig, the lunatic eyeball, or the quality of her teats.

Many a fight was settled in the *Rat and Badger* by a ferocious Auntie Cockeye punch to the balls of the biggest and most aggressive scrapper in the room, the victim invariably being carried screaming in agony and in a foetal position through the batwing doors to be dumped alongside the horse trough.

Theodore found Yetta Yudelman sitting behind a broad desk on which were scattered piles of papers. There were no neat Theodore-type in/out piles of to-do tasks.

Yetta Yudelman sat atop several cushions, which gave her a first-glance appearance of normal height, but when Theodore walked in, she hopped off her chair, momentarily disappearing from sight behind the desk, and then emerged with her small hand held out before her like an assegai.

Theodore, trying not to stoop, bent slightly from the waist like a respectful Japanese servant and took her hand gently.

He could feel sparrow bones beneath dry, cold skin.

óPlease sit, Mistuh.ô She indicated a low easy chair, into which Theodore sunk.

Yetta Yudelman climbed into another, higher chair and looked down at her guest

óAnd what is it I can do for you?ô she asked.

óExcuse me, but how do I address you, maôam?ôô

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ve culture, Mister Isaacs. And before you ask, yes, I
ne, sir. As to your question: in my bar I am Auntie Cockeye. This is because I have, in fact, a cockeye, if you hadnôt noticed.ô

She leaned forward at the waist, displaying her oscillating eye for her visitorôs edification.

Embarrassed, Theodore said nothing, had no idea where to aim his own perfectly normal eyes, ultimately settling on a spot on his hat brim.

óIn my office though,ôsaid the woman, laughing like a broken coffee grinder, óI am Yetta Yudelman.ô

óFine, thatôs fine,ôsaid Theodore shyly, looking up.

óAlso,ôsaid Yetta Yudelman genially, óI suggest you look only at my right eye. If you look at the left one you will either panic or laugh or faint. I do not want you to laugh, panic or faint in my office.ô

óThank you,ôsaid Theodore.

óGood. Now, to business é So?ô

óSo ï well, itôs the money Rabbi Schwartz has given you. For the synagogue. Itôs what we Jews call our church.ô

óI know what a synagogue is. Does Yudelman sound like French nobility?ô

óNo. Yes, well ... Rabbi Schwartz has given you several thousand pounds for building material and labour. This includes one hundred and fifty pounds just this very morningé ô

óLet me stop you right there,ôYetta Yudelman held up her small hand. óNate?ô

She signalled towards a dark shadow in the corner of the room out of which stepped the man Theodore would, forever, refer to as óIronskullô.

A gangly man with sloping limbs and boney fingers and an impossibly wedge-shaped head on which resided spiked hair the colour of an old anvil, Nate Yudelman towered above most men, and while not physically hefty, he nevertheless carried an air of unmistakable viciousness, distrust and general hatred for all mankind.

He was Yetta Yudelmanôs husband, bookkeeper, debt enforcer, and the only man Yetta herself feared, even if only briefly long ago when (in a drunken whirl) they had been married by a passing magistrate who was en route to the Dutch territories.

It was a sobered-up Nate Yudelmanôs sharp backhander, lashed out at his bride of just a few hours before, which had struck Yettaôs temple and left her with a lifetime of headaches and the permanently unfocused left eye which rolled around in its socket, seeking compass points unrelated to those on which her other, undamaged eye had settled.

óThatôs to let you know whoôs boss here, you little bitch,ôhe had scoffed, flipping Yetta Yudelman onto her belly, tearing off her bloomers, guffawing.

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orearm Nate Yudelman roughly forced Yettaôs legs apart
new wife, again and again and again, until he finally sunk into an exhausted snoring sleep.

The strong fingers which gripped Yetta Yudelmanôs throat throughout the night to keep her from screaming permanently mashed her vocal chords and created the grackle voice. Nate Yudelmanôs fingers eventually loosened in sleep, allowing Yetta to slide free, stumbling away bowlegged and bleeding and wanting to vomit ï but unable to because her throat was so damned painful.

Yetta Yudelman thus owed her husband her married name, her nickname, Auntie Cockeye, and her skewed view of mankind as a species. She had always had an ability to skillfully plot several diabolical steps ahead.

It was the following mid-morning when Nate Yudelman eventually awoke, dream memories of the exhilaration of the introductory marital assault on his wife waning. He yawned, stretched, and belched.

And felt something coldly uncomfortable under the covers. Fleetingly, he considered a mamba or *rinkhals* might have crawled into his bed and curled up on his belly.

Heôd heard stories about snakes and chilly African nights.

Nate Yudelman detested snakes.

Warily, he peered under the blanket.

Saw his wife, kneeling naked, her damaged left eye bounding around out of kilter in its socket, but focused enough to ensure that Nate Yudelmanôs gangly penis rested snugly between the blades of a set of pinking shears in his wifeôs small hand.

Instinctively, Nate Yudelman froze.

ôYou need to listen to me very carefully Nate,ô Yetta said in a voice rasping with whispered hostility. ôOne wrong move and I will cut this off. I will then feed it to the dogs. Do you understand me? Whimper if you understand me.ô

There was no bravado within Nate Yudelman, who obediently whimpered, desperately trying to not twitch.

ôThere are some new rules you will need to learn,ô Yetta Yudelman croaked hoarsely. ôFirstly, you will not ever strike me again. Whimper for yes if you understand.ô

Quick snivel.

ôGood. Now, rule two: if you in any way attempt vengeance against me or try to catch me by surprise, it is you who will be surprised. Snip snip. Understand?ô

There was a short sob from the pillow end of the bunk.

ôMay I take that as your agreement?ô

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Nateôs high-pitched whisper.

y side now and forever ï or until I decide you can go,ô Yetta grated. óYou will not ever try to flee. Or hurt me in any way. You know I am way too clever for you. If I even sense you trying to disobey my rules, I will damage you very, very badly in a thousand different ways

óDo you understand me, Nate?ô

óYes, yes, I understand you,ô Nate whispered.

óNow, I ask you to imagine what it will feel like as these very sharp scissor blades cut through your flesh? Do you have the ability to imagine such a thing? Again, whimper, cry or even bawl like a baby if you understand.ô

She increased the pressure of the blades minutely. Just enough to underline her seriousness.

Nate Yudelman shrieked a word consisting of one very long syllable.

óI am glad you understand so clearly. Finally: you will not ever lay so much as a finger on my body again, in any way, ever again. Unless I give you permission. If you do é snip. Also, if you consort with other women and I find out, snip. Yes?ô

óYes.ô

óYou will be my palace eunuch in spirit from now on. Or I will make you my palace eunuch in practice. I will use these big scissors. Do we have an understanding?ô

Nate winced and nodded several times.

Of course, Yetta Yudelman couldnôt resist confirming the contract. She squeezed the scissors just hard enough for the jagged, carefully honed pinking shear blades to break the skin of her husbandôs penis.

Just enough to draw a serrated line of crimson droplets before she whipped the scissors away.

Nate Yudelman screeched, jacked his knees up and clutched his shrinking organ in his hands.

At the other end of the bunk, Yetta Yudelman emerged smiling from beneath the covers, pinking shears snapping menacingly at fresh air.

She quietly looked down at her husband, crooning and cradling himself.

Yetta Yudelman casually took the sleeve of Nate Yudelmanôs nightshirt and used it to wipe traces of his blood off the scissors blades.

Nate Yudelman squeaked in terror.

óThat was just so you fully understand how serious I am,ô Yetta Yudelman said.

óAnd it was also to let you know whoôs really the boss here. Now go to the baths and scrub yourself nice and clean. You stink of fear.ô

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s to the chair on which her handmade bright red strawlike r head, moving it until it was positioned just as she desired.

ôTell me, Natie, before you go,ô she said coquettishly, hand resting on her outthrust hip and pirouetting like a French courtesan, ótell me how very, very pretty I am.ô

He did. Then and every time Yetta commanded a compliment from her obedient husband. Because he believed every word she said.

Right now though, in her office, several years and a continent later, Ironskull was commanded to bring forth the ledger.

ôLook here,ô said Yetta in her coffee grinder voice. ôThis is the ledger. Youôre a businessman so you know ledgers. This reflects just one single payment from Rabbi Schwartz é some months ago. Fifty quid, it was. Paid on your behalf, as annotated right there.ô

She pointed with a tiny ring finger at a cash entry on the date which Theodore remembered as the day Rabbi Schwartz had undertaken to deal personally with the synagogue building issues.

ôBut all the other times é ô

Yetta Yudelman leaned sideways towards her husband.

ôBring the loans book, dearest,ô she ordered.

Theodore could have sworn Ironskull all but bowed. Nate Yudelman backed away and swept silently towards Yettaôs desk, opened a drawer and emerged with another ledger.

Yetta Yudelman opened the book and, with her left eye floating independently in its socket, her right eye sought out a series of entries.

ôSee here,ô she said, pointing to the entries.

And there they were: entries relating to the days on which Rabbi Schwartz had demanded money, then visited the bar building site, followed by delivery of materials, followed by the disappearance the following day of some of the materials, followed by é

Theodore looked even closer.

ôThese are all reflected as loans. Not payments,ô he said.

ôYes they are é see? *Loaned to Theodore Isaacs, the sum of*, well, many, many sums. Right now,ô she said, óyou currently owe me fourteen thousand pounds, sir. Not counting interest at banking rates. All signed for by your Rabbi. You did give him signing authority? Is that right? You did give him financial powers on your behalf? Is that not his signature right there?ô

ôYes but é ô

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ëen, shall we say, a trifle more circumspect in whom you

óBut heôs a Rabbi ...ô

óI say again: perhaps you should have been more circumspect in whom you placed your trust. Would you place funds in a barn with an open door? A bank with no vault? Of course not. But you will trust a man with a beard, a tall hat, a bible in his hand and religious gibberish on his lips, yes?ô

Theodore said nothing. Stared blankly at the blurring pages of the ledger.

óI cannot understand your thinking, Mister Isaacs.ô Yetta Yudelman rasped. óTo say I am shocked is... well, perhaps disappointed is more correct.ô

She shook her head sadly. As if Theodore had failed all of mankind.

óBut to the business of the day...ô Yetta Yudelman continued. óWhen no money was forthcoming we had to take back our building material. Also, we had to pay the workmen.ô

óBut they didnôt actually build anything much. Walls went up, then were taken down again. The windows ...ô

óWorkers had to be paid for carting the material back to my site when I wasnôt paid. You must understand that, surely? What is a contract, sir? Is it not offer and acceptance? Did I not meet my end of the contract ï agreed to by your, shall we say, agent?ô

Theodore nodded, dumbfounded.

óAnd on the evidence of no money received, did you and your agent not fail to honour your end of our negotiated deal? No, of course not. And I should quickly mention,ô said Yetta Yudelman, óthat in case youôre wondering, I do not have two sets of books. My accounting is done by one of your community. Stanislaus Peimer?ô

Theodore nodded. He knew Peimer to be as honest as an orthodox *Chazzan.*

óSo ï where is the money I gave Rabbi Schwartz to give to you?ô Theodore asked eventually.

He could sense Yetta Yudelman smirking quietly, her left eye swizzling like a pea on a plate.

There was a very long pause. Then, out of a very high shadow dipped the long, narrow iron-coloured skull of Nate Yudelman. óAh yes,ô he intoned as if giving the last rites. óThat surely is the question, Mister Isaacs. Where is the money you gave the Rabbi?ô

óActually, perhaps more to the point,ô interjected Yetta Yudelman, ówhere is the good Rabbi himself? Did I not see him leave town today on the noon Cape Town stagecoach? Perhaps Saint Cipriano has caused him to disappear.ô

óSaint ...ô

óThe Patron Saint of evil magic. He makes things vanish in a puff of smoke.ô

Nate Yudelman snapped his fingers.

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oe, falling like dreams.

ôYouôre right.ô Theodoreôs head dropped into his hands. ôHeôs gone. With all his suitcases.ô

Theodoreôs head spun dizzily. He could conjure up no immediate solution, could think of no allies or friends who might assist. There was certainly no one in the synagogue community. Not even the aged Samuel Perilly.

ôMy God é the synagogue funds,ô Theodore clapped his hands to his cheeks. ôHe must have taken those too. Jesus Christ é ô

ôI donôt imagine Jesus is inclined to offer his assistance,ô said Yetta Yudelman. She leaned forward, aiming the bad eye at Theodoreôs face. ôBut I do think we may have someone who can help you.ô

A graspable straw.

ôTell you what ï come back here this evening at about eight oôclock,ô suggested Yetta Yudelman genially. ôThatôs when the boys play poker. One of óem, I know, will help you. He hates Jews, so a thieving Rabbi will be right down his alleyway.ô

ôHates Jews?ô

Yetta Yudelman nodded.

ôBut I am Jewish, Missus Yudelman. So are you.ô

ôYes. But this is business, isnôt it? I would rather have the money I am owed than just add another enemy to the collection of people who dislike me. Do you see where my suggestion makes sound business sense?ô

Theodore pinched the bridge of his nose.

ôPerhaps this *antisemit* is exactly what I need,ô he said eventually. He nodded to Yetta Yudelman, grittily thrusting his small chin forward. ôI will be here at eight oôclock,ô he promised.

And he was.

At eight sharp. Pensive, terrified, and oddly thrilled.

CHAPTER TWELVE

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mit a krechts. – Better one friend with a dish of food than a hundred

óOne moment he was a *mentsch* among *mentsches*, a father, a husband, a pillar of the Jewish community and of the townôs community,ô said Yitzhak. óA moment later there was a crack that became a chasm and everything about his life fell into that hole between here and, if there is such a place, hell.

óListen, this was a boom town. No doubt about it. It was as if Galileo was proven wrong again, and the centre of the universe was not the sun, but Kimberley.ô

People, Yitzhak explained (citing his various reference sources like a scholarly, creaking Rabbi reflecting on Talmudic writing) continued to pour into the place, despite a brief depression that gripped Kimberley for all of two years.

óBut the big boys like Cecil John Rhodes and his boyfriend, Jameson, stayed put, weathered the storm.ô

Yitzhak stopped briefly ï perhaps saw scepticism looking back at him across the small room.

óYou doubt?ô he asked rhetorically. óIt is a historical fact that Rhodes preferred gentlemen to ladies. Maybe not his partner, Rudd, who was married three times, I think. But Rhodes? Definitely. This was a man who made millions and even had his own country é but look at the pictures in history book. He was never seen in public with a woman who wasnôt a Queen. Amazing what *faygeles* can achieve, isnôt it?

óAnyway, so De Beers opened in 1880,ô Yitzhak announced, beaming as if heôd been there at the time and made the front door key. óIt was as if God had bestowed a blessing on this *toches* of a place with a hole in the middle. Opening a company like De Beers was not the same as opening a kosher butchery. De Beers was big business. Kimberley was big business. Diamonds were very, very big business.ô

In the middle of big business and boom times ï which Theodore and the Gibsons cashed in on ï the nightmare had begun for Yitzhakôs father.

óIn Yiddish they say ó*nisht alleh tsores kumen fun himmel*ô é which means that not all troubles come from heaven,ô Yitzhak explained. óFor my father, it didnôt matter what the source was. This was a set of *tsoreses* that should not be wished on your worst enemy, let alone a *mentsch* like my father.ô

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f his nose, examined the nail and nodded in satisfaction. *Geography* magazine,ô he said, ócthat when a star dies it makes in space a sudden giant hole. Into this hole, everything around the star is quickly sucked. Like God has a Hoover. Everything disappears in a flash. Poof!ô Yitzhak demonstrated with his hands. ôWhen the light of the star is suddenly snuffed out. Poof! Just like that. Such was what happened to my father.ô

Yitzhak snapped a bent and crackling thumb and middle finger.

óJust like that,ô he said again.

ôPoof.ô

There are moments.

Some become moments that last into perpetuity.

Become dark shadows, which rip you out of sleep at two oôclock in the morning, feverishly punching at shadows; screaming from a point deep within your throat a freakishly sharp shriek, a note several decibels higher than that howl of steel-on-steel when train wheels and tracks battle each other, trying to hold back a storming monster that wants to do nothing other than charge onwards and onwards, uncontested.

It is a screech with neither shape nor dimension, but which has meaning beyond any sane explanation.

This shriek, suggested Yitzhak, is as if God, in an expression of extreme annoyance at people who choose to ignore His existence, lashes out at you, in your sleep, because of your disgraceful betrayal. It leaves you gasping, hopelessly sucking for air, which is not there.

When the moment-memory eventually skulks back into its cavern, when your heart slowly ceases its thundering, you can then drop your head back onto your sodden pillow.

Count blank faces.

You imagine, as you lie there, what might have happened if you wife had not, for just the slenderest sliver of a fraction of an instant, relaxed the grip on your seven-year-old sonôs hand.

Listen.

Leah was walking down the street, marvelling at the blossoming town. It was mid-morning, hot as hell, dry as an old boot. Leah had tiptoed from the house so as to not awaken Theodore, who (she knew) had come home just before dawn. She knew heôd had a meeting of sorts with the people who owned the new hotel and bar, understood it was a meeting about finances. Numbers fuddled her head.

Leah hushed Jacob from the house after breakfast, holding her finger in front of her lips and making giggling óshushô sounds, which the little boy mimicked.

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re mirrored by Jacobôs. Mother and son also shared the
was a miniature version of his fatherôs ï an upright stride
with arms swinging purposefully.

The heat, which so solidly slapped Leah in the face as she stepped onto the sidewalk, did not bother Jacob, who made joyous being-alive sounds regardless of summer heat or cold-to-the-bone winter nights or during those insane flashing thunderstorms that lashed the countryside and had the natives scurrying into their huts in terror.

Leah recalled how this place had first appeared to her as a dry and dusty spread of land dotted with scrawny stunted thorn trees battling to eke life out of soil rich in diamonds but poverty-stricken where any sort of moisture was concerned. Kimberley in those days was not a place for any self-respecting tree to try and sink roots.

People, on the other hand, sprang up everywhere.

Strolling down the boardwalk with Jacob holding her hand and prattling endlessly about toys and the blueness of the sky and how a single cloud drifting above looked like a snow bear, and asking: were the stars in the sky not *Hashem*ôs diamonds? And mamma, look at how many natives there are? And how do birds stay in the air so long?

Leah imagined herself a passenger wafting along on the same clouds which so enthralled her son.

Incongruously, Leah wore in this sweltering heat, an uncorseted tea gown. Jacob was dressed in a childrenôs style, his Buster Brown suit pants ended just below his knees and while not as billowy as those on a Lord Fauntleroy suit, nonetheless allowed the sun to strike just his knees, peeping pinkly from between the pants hems and the tops of his long white socks. In deference to summer in Africa, Theodore insisted his son not wear the foolishly large bows which fashion demanded of the wearers of Buster Browns.

Idly, Leah paused and looked across the road at groups of Pedi men clumped together outside the new diamond company which that nice Mister Rhodes and his friend, Mister Rudd had recently established. The Pedi men had drifted to this place in their tens of thousands, seeking work on the diggings and quickly discovered that the small coins they were paid for their sweat could buy in seconds what would normally take an entire summer to grow.

They were all so dark their eyes seemed to Leah like lanterns glowing out of Hades on a moonless night.

These men were nothing like that wayward idiot, Caatje, in the Cape, God rest his soul, thought Leah without guilt. Or those Basters who lived and farmed well away from the diggings. The Basters were not, nor ever would be, labourers. They were indeed polar opposites of the Pedi men whose bodies were as spare as dried beef strips, sheened with the stench of hard work in midday-Africa.

The Pedi were never shrouded in the stink of cheap wine.

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umbling in conversation as they jostled uncomfortably

ee if the white man with the list of jobs was coming.

ó*O kese ntshutishe! Ke bile mo esale goseng kudu!*ô a man suddenly shouted angrily at a younger, bigger man who had arrogantly shoved his way to the front of the queue.

The younger man gazed dispassionately at the older man.

ó*Tloga, leshilo ting … shuthela mogolo,*ô he drawled dismissively, flapping the back of his hand at the older man as one does when chasing a misbehaving puppy. The older man subsided a half step, briefly humiliated, but unready to retreat to the safety of numbers of the crowd where his manhood would become like that of a woman suckling her baby, good only for the herding of goats.

Leah watched the two men balling their knotty fists as, chest to chest, they attempted to stare each other into backing down.

Teeth bared and flashing like icicles at midnight.

Leah sensed her heart thumping faster, felt her breath shortening.

Lifted her left hand slowly to her throat in anticipation of physical confrontation.

Noticed the strong muscular definition of the young manôs back.

Allowed her right hand to become slack.

For just a moment.

Which was the moment when Jacob saw something as simple as a white cabbage butterfly flit by on the breeze, and just had to catch it and hold its fragility in his own chubby little hand, which now slipped out of Leahôs.

Jacob broke free in that instant, stumbled after the butterfly and fell over.

Fell for no other reason than little boys sometimes fall over when they run.

On his hands and knees in the dust of the street in dry Kimberley, Jacob looked up at his mother, pondering if he should cry out even though his skinned knees only stung a little bit.

Jacob did not cry out.

Not because there was really no pain, but rather because he could not interpret the expression draped itself over his motherôs face like a veil.

Jacob could not understand the meaning of his motherôs gaping mouth and widened eyes.

Or why she was holding her face with both hands.

Jacob did not hear the Scotch Cart driver yelling move, move out the way boy, whoa, hold, whoa, move dammit it boy.

Watch out.

Move.

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ont hoof caress Jacobôs temple. Flicking aside the half-a-
ed the boy but which Leah treasured as she brushed his thick brown hair every morning.

Heard her son say, *oh*.

Quietly, as if he finally understood everything the universe kept trying to tell everyone else.

Just oh.

Saw him tossed sideways against the boardwalk

Bonelessly.

Looked at him with no sense of understanding, lying there slack and crumpled and unmoving as a discarded toy.

Heard screaming from everywhere.

Was aware she was the only person making no sound at all.

Felt strong hands take her arm and lead her away.

Where are we going? she asked blankly.

Where are we going?

Heard someone shout, call a doctor, someone.

Heard someone else say donôt bother. Itôs too late.

Boyôs a goner.

Where are we going? Leah asked.

Where are we going?

It was some hours later when somebody eventually found Theodore who had just walked into his office.

Hurry him home, they told him, you must hurry.

We cannot stop your wifeôs screaming.

A day later.

The desultory congregation buried Jacov *ben* Tadorus *ve* Leah in a small part of the cemetery designated for Jews. It was close to the three graves provided for Kimberleyôs first Muslim dead, and well away from the growing sea of white headstones with their crosses and instructions to deceased Christians to Rest in Peace.

There was no Rabbi at the funeral of course; the new friend Theodore had made the previous day was currently seeking Rabbi Louispold Frieda Schwartz elsewhere in the godforsaken country.

It was Samuel Perilly, punctuating his words with choked weeping, who conducted the service as best he could, struggling to read some of the Hebrew words which leaped off the pages of the old prayer book and baffled his failing eyes.

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Theodore inserted the correct word when Samuel Perilly age.

Prompted, Perilly would continue. He said a few words about the tragedy of lost young lives and the sorrow heaped on parents and of God watching over Jacobôs soul.

Standard words.

Theodore was aware of Leah hanging off his arm like a black-clad limpet, fingertips digging relentlessly into his forearm through his jacket sleeve. She made not a sound. Had not said a word since she had stopped screaming the day before. When she had finally dropped into bitty, ill-connected naps.

Just yesterday.

Jews bury their dead within the day.

There is nothing about this rule that suggests it was one of Godôs ideas. Jews are buried right away for purely hygienic reasons. Dead bodies are not hygienic. Jews have known that for centuries. So too have Muslims. It makes common sense.

No fortunes of money are spent on lavish coffins made of highly polished teak, and festooned with ornately crafted bronze handles. There is no need to demonstrate the extent of their love for the departed by housing them in exquisitely crafted caskets which the dead do not appreciate as they lie nestled in their velvet and satin eternal resting places.

If the dead donôt know how much they were loved in life and how greatly they will maybe be missed after their demise, then lavishly appointed coffins will certainly not change their minds.

It is important for the alive to continue living. That is why, on the death of a family member, Jews do not wish each other sincere condolences or utter repetitive, ritualistic expressions of sorrow on the personôs passing.

Instead they say to mourners, ôI wish you long life.ô

The person you love is gone, but *you* should live on.

Then they will shake the mournersô hands and depart after donating money to the Jewish holy society called the *Chevra Kaddisha*, which sees to the needs of the dead, the families left behind, the destitute and downtrodden, those without skills or prospects or intelligence or family or friends or hope.

Please God it shouldnôt happen to us, the friends of the mourners will think as they move away from the graveside.

But it always does.

Theodore sensed a tugging at his sleeve. He turned to Samuel Perilly, whose wet eyes peered into Theodoreôs face.

ôTheodore,ô he urged. ôItôs time for *Kaddish*.ô

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Theodore. He cleared his throat and read the words in his

ó*Yisgaddal veyiskaddash shmeh robbo* é ôhe began.

The prayer for the dead, delivered by Theodore by rote, exalting and glorifying and blessing and extolling and sanctifying the God who had snatched away his son.

Kaddish is said not just at funerals, but at any time there is a service. Its reading reminds Jews of the family and friends who have left them.

On completion of the *Kaddish* prayer, a group ó*amen*ô drifted through the sultry air.

õWhat must I do now?ôhe heard Samuel Perilly hiss.

ó*Kriah,'* answered Theodore dully. õYou must rend my garment.ô

õRent your garment? To who?ô

õRend. You must tear here é just the lapel.ô

óOh, Christ! Rend é tear. Right é yes.ôSamuel Perilly tried to tear Theodoreôs shirt in accordance with the requirements of the seven days of *Shiva* that demands mourners carry with them a visible signal that they have lost someone.

Samuel Perillyôs yellowed old fingers didnôt have the strength to rip the fabric, so Theodore the well-equipped mourner fished in his trouser pocket and found a small penknife, which served the tobacconistôs task adequately enough, nicking the shirtôs fabric and allowing Samuel to complete a small, symbolic tear.

Then Perilly called for the men to lower the very small coffin into the very deep ground and asked each man to throw three spadesful of soil into the grave.

Do not hand the spade to the next man; another ritual known to Theodore but never understood.

So the males of the congregation, which Theodore was trying to build, stepped forward and helped him bury his boy as did the *goyim*, embarrassed by the strange words and rituals and the even stranger assortment of *yarmulkes* which sat atop their Christian heads like displaced tea cosies.

He heard Leah gasp as the first hollow thud of dirt on the plain pine coffin snapped mother and father out of their numbness.

This is barbaric, Theodore thought.

If we need to remember the living, why must we strike blows at the hearts of those left behind by leaving with them the awful memory of the echoing *thump thump thump* of soil landing on coffins?

No matter how delicately the mourners tried to drizzle soil onto the coffin, the echo boomed louder, and with each spadeful, Leahôs nails dug deeper into Theodoreôs forearm.

He prayed it would all end.

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h rolled around in his head, muffling his own thoughts.

Then reminded him that something was out of true.

b'al'ma di v'ra khir'utei

v'yam'likh mal'khutei b'chayeikhon uv'yomeikhon

The words repeated again in his memory. Then again.

Prodding.

And then Theodore recognised what it was that had momentarily bothered him when Rabbi Schwartz had conducted that first service under the African stars behind the *Red Star Line* offices not too long ago.

The anomaly that had nudged his exhausted mind that day and which sleep then swept away, to be forgotten the following day.

As he had done that day, Theodore went through the running order of the service in his mind as he stood listening to dirt drumming on the coffin of Jacob Isaacs.

It had its own rhythm.

Like when the natives chanted their choruses as they dug ditches for the white people, pickaxes ascending and descending with military precision.

Like a mantra.

Kabbalat Shabbat, the inauguration of the Sabbath.

Then *Barchu*, the call to prayer, followed by *Shema Yisroel.*

Then the *Amidah* and the *Kiddush* prayer.

Aleinu. The closing prayer.

Then *Kaddish.*

Finally, *Yigdal.*

Standing over the grave of his firstborn son, Theodore realised what had been wrong with the service, what it was that had so niggled at him. It was nothing Rabbi Schwartz had done or said during the service, but rather what he had not.

An omission of such massive forehead-slapping importance, that the very realisation of the magnitude of the blunder ï if thatôs what it was ï chilled Theodoreôs blood despite the suffocating heat.

I am such a fool, Theodore thought, to have missed it.

I am so stupid.

Rabbi Schwartz had left *Kaddish* out of his service.

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ôThe wicked flee when none pursueth,ô Yitzhak began. ôProverbs, in the version of the New Testament written by King James.ô

Yitzhak considered his words.

ôThat King,ô he mused. ôHe must have been a hell of an author to rewrite an entire Bible.ô He sighed. ôI guess thatôs what *goyische* kings do best é rewrite perfectly serviceable Bibles.ô

Theodore, Yitzhak explained, had no time for the seven days of *Shiva*. Had no desire to spend important time being morose when he could be better served finding Schwartz the *Goniff* and the money Theodore (and the community) had raised to build a place to worship *Hashem* in the middle of Africa.

ôThis was for my father not a time for religious protocol. And besides, everything, which had been set as the foundation of his project to rebuild the *Yiddischkeit* he had left back in Lithuania, was now crumbling like those small sand castles children build on beaches. The shame he felt when he shook the hands of people at his childôs funeral ï people who trusted in him ï now totally consumed him.

ôHe needed to become é I canôt think of the word é ô Yitzhak knuckled his temples in frustration, seeking a word from deep within the private Thesaurus he had buried way down in the vaults of failing memory.

ôItôs a word like renaissance, but itôs not. It was when *Yoschke* was reborn after he was crucified. Damn it! é Wait! é Resurrection! I knew it was in there somewhere. My father needed to resurrect himself. Why do I have a block on that word, I wonder?ô

He repeated the word three times and continued.

óAnyway, so Theodore set forth to restore his dignity and self-respect and by the way reclaim the synagogueôs money. He used for this task the man Yetta Yudelman introduced to Theodore in a public house just hours before Jacob died.

óStrange, where we find our Messiahs isnôt it?ô Yitzhak asked absently.

ôResurrection,ô he said. ôResurrection, resurrection, resurrection. Just so.ô

On the eve of his sonôs death, Theodore Isaacs presented himself at precisely eight oôclock at the *Rat and Badger*, pushing through the batwing doors and finding himself assailed by clouds of cheap smoke and the bellowed raucous conversation of men comparing their growing wealth, all the while washing down truth and lies with mugs of ale which Auntie Cockeye had carted in from England via Cape Town in massive casks.

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Midlands, or mild and bitter and dark beer from Whitman ...otic, an Indian Pale Ale.

Beer belches smelled as disgusting to Theodore as the ales themselves, regardless of which brewery was responsible.

He stood for a moment at the entrance, aware of the pauses in conversations, heard someone say, ótôs the Hebe from the stagecoach place.ô

Someone else said, óSôpose a Jewboyôs moneyôs sameôs ourôn.ô

He heard a muffled aside from someone else followed by boisterous laughter, after which he was comprehensively ignored.

An instant before he was scragged by the panic that comes with a sense of being caught in a place you do not belong, Theodore felt a presence looming. It was Nate Yudelman, ushering him gently as a tugboat through a set of curtains to a back room totally unlike those at the *Katzes Bording House*.

For starters, there wasnôt a single haggard old whore in sight.

Nestled in this room with its oak sideboards, crystal wine glasses, decanters, elegant candelabras and exquisite portraits of Noble People comfortable within their flamboyant frames, a group of six extravagantly mustachioed men sat around a green baize-topped circular table, piles of pound notes and coins splayed before them.

In their hands they held large playing cards.

The men glanced up briefly, captured a rapid image of a short, well-dressed, nervous man clutching a porkpie hat as if it were the Holy Grail. It was a picture they all immediately consigned to the status of unimportant.

Theodore watched from a distance the men at their game, saw cash dropped into the pile by each man in turn.

Someone said, óGiôme two cards.ô

The next player ordered three cards which were delivered uncomplainingly as if by virtue of some hidden transactional process.

A stooped man wearing an incongruous sailorôs watch cap, tossed his pasteboards onto the table and snapped, ôFook thee ï especially you, ye damned Scots bastard.ô

He arose from his chair.

ôFook thee all.ô He smiled, circled the table and shook each playerôs hand genially.

óSee yiz all day after tamorra,ô he called as he drifted through the curtain.

óBugger off, Wally,ô the dealer shouted, smiling. The others chuckled. Except the man identified as the Scots bastard.

óDeal, damn you,ô he ordered coldly. ôWeôre playinô Bluff here, not bluidy Tigers and Goats.ô

óSorry, Scotty,ô said the dealer deferentially. ôHow many do you want?ôô

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ónothinô. Theseôll dae me fine, thank ye.ô

óAh shite,ô snorted a walrush-moustached player in disgust. ôDone us all again, havenôt you? Yeôre a damned thief, Smith.ô

óAnd a damned good óun too. Donôt ye fergit it,ôthe Scot smiled sourly as he raked in the pile of cash from the middle of the table.

Apparently, Theodore reasoned, this was a game where you won by either insulting or threatening your opposition or failing to acquire more cards.

óSo, whatôd you have in yer hand, ye scourge of the Sassenachs?ô Walrus moustache enquired obliquely.

óPay up and Iôll gladly tell ye,ô said the Scot and took a deep pull at the whisky in a chunky tumbler at a side table.

Nate Yudelman drifted across to the man, whispered in his ear. He nodded towards Theodore. The Scot appraised Theodore briefly and pushed back his chair.

óAye, weel, deal me oot,ô he instructed the dealer. óIôll be back shortish to take the rest a ye cash. And mind, donôt ye steal a cent, ye heathen brigands.ô

He slapped the dealer on the shoulder, drained the remnants of his whisky in a single gulp, and hunched towards Theodore, to whom he extended a hand without smiling.

There was nothing this man did without a reason.

The mere act of leaning forward was not a gesture of greeting. Instead, the action caused his jacket to open ever so slightly ï enough to reveal to Theodore two shoulder holsters. In one snuggled a double-trigger Tranter revolver; in the other squatted an older Beaumont-Adams muzzle-loading pistol which the man kept (Theodore would later learn) for ósentimental purposesô. That is, he had used it to shoot to death an English solider who had snidely suggested in a moment of ill-considered humour that Scotlandôs historic victory over England at the battle of Bannockburn was entirely due to a ófookinô blind haggis-eatinô refereeô.

The Scot also kept tucked into his waistband a .476 Enfield Mk 1 revolver, not to mention large-bladed hunting knives secreted in either boot, plus a pair of Henry Derringer single shot pistols in both jacket pockets.

And one up his sleeve for good measure.

óI am Theodore Isaacs,ô Theodore introduced himself, shaking the manôs extended hand.

óAye, so ye are.ô He did not introduce himself.

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lorious disarray on her head, chose that moment to burst into the room. In her right hand she clasped the business end of a broken bottle which glistened not with alcohol but rather some errant boozerôs blood.

She held the bottle aloft.

óBlessed are the peacemakers,ô she announced.

óAmen tae that, Auntie,ô the Scot answered, patting his two jacket pockets, óas the peacemakers in ma pockets will attest.ô

He stooped, pecked Auntie Cockeye on the cheek opposite her awry eye.

óScotty, you can trust this man,ô Auntie Cockeye said in her gritty voice, nodding at Theodore. óHe owes me money due to a misfortune ï but he has shown himself to be a man of good faith.ô

Theodore felt himself flush.

óGood enough fer me.ô He turned to Theodore. óAye, weel, ahôm Scotty Smith,ô he said, regarding Theodore with some interest. óAny man what owes the love aô maô life some money is aôright in my eyes.ô

The men nodded at each other.

óCome, letôs talk,ô said Smith.

óAye, letôs,ô said Theodore.

The two sat at a small, private corner table well away from the hubbub in the main bar. It wasnôt long before Theodore discovered that while the manôs Scottish accent was genuine, he was neither Scotty nor Smith. Indeed, the real Scotty Smith had died in some forgotten combat during the Gaika War. He had been a soldier serving in the same regiment as one George St Leger Lennox. Lennox was of noble Scottish lineage, but detested everything his family stood for.

As the real Scotty Smith lay dying in the dust, Lennox plucked the identity papers and paybook from his comradeôs pockets and, in the words of those of the criminal element of the day, scarpered without so much as a óby your leaveô.

The legend that the bandit Scotty Smith eventually left the world when he died an old man in 1919 was that of South Africaôs own Robin Hood, although odds are the only poor he gave to were people he knew would ultimately return those ógiftsôto him.

Plus a bit extra on top.

Robin Hood? Regardless of myth and legend, Scotty Smith lived his life by stealing cattle (a breed of beast he tolerated only for their value) and horses (which he adored for their style).

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illegal diamond trade, smuggled anything which needed and was not averse to settling arguments with extreme violence, the bulky heel of the Beaumont Adams generally serving nicely as a makeshift cosh.

And he loved Shakespeare, which made him a person of true substance in Yitzhakôs estimation, although not exactly a true *mentsch.*

Auntie Cockeye placed beers in front of the two men.

óI donôt drink beer é ôTheodore began.

óYou do now,ôAuntie Cockeye grated, resettling her wig and marching back into her public house.

ñI would give all my fame for a pot of ale and safetyô,ôScotty Smith quoted. ó*Henry V* é Shakespeare.ô

óYou are an educated man,ôsaid Theodore, surprised.

óThat I am, but a scholar who prefers breaking heads.ôHe winked. óNow then, what is it I can I do for you?ô

So Theodore told him everything; the money systematically ladled from his own accounts, the collected synagogue funds, the lies and untruths produced by Rabbi Schwartz.

óSeems ye cannae even trust a man of God anymore, can ye?ôScotty Smith offered.

óIt seems not.ô

óWhere is this Rabbi now?ô

óOn his route to Cape Town I think. He left on one of my stagecoaches.ô

óAye, thatôs right. Yeôre with them Gibson boys. Strange. I never ever considered knocking off one yer coaches.ô

óMay I politely request that this remains your policy?ôTheodore suggested.

óI donôt rob ma friends,ôScotty Smith answered. óSo donôt become ma enemy any time soon.ô

óI wonôt.ô

The two talked until the early hours of the morning, after which Scotty Smith, Bandit Supreme and Theodore Isaacs, Financially Cuckolded Nice Jewish Boy, shook hands warmly.

As Theodore rode back home, he heard Scotty Smith thundering down the road to the Cape on his seventeen-hand black horse.

Their agreement was that Scotty Smith would keep fifteen percent of anything he recovered.

óYeôre lucky,ôhe told Theodore. óI normally take seventy five percent. Well, actually I usually take everything.ô

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hought, going home from a tavern at dawn, having struck a deal with someone who might be *mishpocheh* of the devil. He felt remarkably comfortable with this knowledge and resolved to read Shakespeare, to refresh his memory of those wonderful lines.

Inside the house he undressed, considered sneaking into Jacobôs room and kissing his son on the forehead, then rejected the idea in case he woke the little boy. Plenty time for that in the coming day, he thought and crawled into bed, gently placing his hand on Leahôs back, as he did every night.

Leah mumbled something in her sleep and hefted her rump towards her husband.

They slept, as peaceful as two teaspoons.

Everything will be good now, Theodore thought as he drifted into sleep. I have faith in this man.

He imagined the look on Rabbi Schwartzôs face as Scotty Smith cornered him, as he surely would.

ôI have a message from my friend, Theodore Isaacs,ô he pictured Smith telling Schwartz. ôMy friend wishes you to return his funds, failing which I am under instruction to gut you like a carp.ô

Whereupon a terrified Schwartz would gibber behind his beard and hurriedly hand over a valise stuffed to overflowing with cash.

ôHow all occasions do inform against me, and spur my dull revenge!ô é *Hamlet,*ô Smith would say. In Theodoreôs mind, Smithôs words had essence of a Yiddish accent.

He imagined his new friend spitting on the floor where Schwartz cowered.

ôRouse up revenge from ebon den with fell Alectoôs snake, for Doll is in. Pistol speaks nought but truth é *Henry IV',*ô Smith would conclude before spinning on his heel and leaving for Kimberley with Theodoreôs money.

Smith would be ten feet tall and wearing a cape.

As the first of the dayôs roosters sucked dusty Kimberley air into their lungs and produced their first salvos, Theodore slept perchance to dream.

He did not hear Leah and Jacob venture into Kimberleyôs blasting sun.

Did not know that not kissing his son goodnight was the last thing he had failed to do right.

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A tsadik vos vais az er iz a tsadik iz kain tsadik nit. -A righteous man who knows he is righteous is not righteous.

óI was reminded of a book by a man who wrote stories about a butler,ô said Yitzhak, easing into the pink wingback chair. óJeeves. Thatôs the butler, not the author of course. This particular book wasnôt about this Jeeves though. It was about someone called Sally and the adventures she enjoyed. Not a book I liked particularly, but weôre not here to discuss literature about butlers or Sallies.ô

Yitzhak delved for, then held up, a hardcover copy of *The Adventures of Sally* and opened it to a dog-eared page, peering with squinched eyes at the small typeface and following the text with his forefinger.

óSo Woodenhouse the writer says in this book a line which has a connection with the crumbling life of Theodore and Leah. He writes, óA man's subconscious self is not the ideal companion. It lurks for the greater part of his life in some dark den of its own, hidden away, and emerges only to taunt and deride and increase the misery of a miserable hourô.

óHow meaningful is this line? Very.ô Yitzhak dropped the book onto the carpet alongside the chair, where it would remain until Yitzhak decided to pursue his occasional one-room spring clean.

óYou see, into their lives arrived a certain Delphinia Adelheit Witbooi. This was an example of what the *goyim* refer to as ódivine provincesô. Itôs like if youôre on fire and a rainstorm suddenly starts.ô

Yitzhak leaned forward.

óOr maybe it was simply circumstance tossing the needy into the paths of the needier.

óI must first explain who Delphinia Adelheit Witbooi was ï and how she arrived as if sent by a Messenger of God in the darkest hour of my fatherôs life.ô

Delphinia Adelheit Witbooi was a yellow bone Baster who lived just outside Kimberley with her people on their small farm. Like all Basters, she was a result of decades of interbreeding with other races, colours and creeds: the Basters were a mixed race created by adding to the centuries-old Khoi bloodline some Malay blood as well as many, many white parts donated by the itinerants from Europe wandering about this new land.

The spiritual Basters were well liked by the very early colonial settlers living at the foot of Table Mountain, however their status and popularity changed when prejudice became as much a part of the Cape Colony as grapes and mountains.

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ing Basters ï followers of John Calvin whose words, e is no color in this world that is not intended to make us rejoiceô clearly struck a chord ï were numbered as, regardless of Calvinôs teachings, more and more whites poured into the Cape Colony throughout the nineteenth century demanding land and flashing their pale hides as proof of entitlement.

The Basters were not renowned as fighters, preferring rather to procreate, till the soil and milk their cows. So when more and more settlers arrived and began pushing these people out of their way, the Basters recognised it was time to go.

Several followed the path of the *Boers* and trekked towards the Orange River, with a great many deciding to plant a stake in the land near a place that would one day become the location of the biggest diamond strike in history.

For the most part, their family names were Dutch: Kok, Bosman and Van Wyk are to Baster lore what Smuts and Mandela are to modern day South African historians.

Before people discovered gemstones the size of a big manôs fist under the soil, the settlement of the Basters in the territory was of no consequence to the meager white populace é particularly those pale-skinned men who found the inland colonial territories extremely sparsely populated by women.

The wheels of conveniently colour-blind procreation thus kept slowly turning and turning, churning out children whose racial purity lessened exponentially with each new generation.

The church stepped in (as churches do) at some point in the history of the Basters and made a truly meaningful decision in their quest to preserve the souls of these minor children of their God, that being that the Basters (which means exactly what it sounds like) was not a decent name for so pious a group. The London Missionary Society decided to talk the gentle Basters of Middle Orange into renaming themselves óGriquasô.

Take that, Satan! Yitzhak editorialised sourly.

New location and name notwithstanding, the Griquas continued to produce children fathered by the steadily growing streams of white settlers, resulting in many offspring whose natural colour, black, became more and more diluted. As Octoroons ï people who were one-eighth black, seven-eighths white in the lingo of American slavers ï many had skin the colour of weak coffee.

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parse and sallow Delphinia Adelheit Witbooi who, when she came to work for Theodore, was desperate to carve for herself a life outside the strictures and demands of her extended Griqua family.

Her father increasingly argued with her, then plain shunned her whenever she dared express her life ambitions, which excluded becoming either a farmerôs wife or a bed woman for the diggers.

This was not the life God planned for me, she would try and explain to her fatherôs silent back.

Eventually she decided that instead of continually confronting her father (who would doubtless plead to God, asking for His explanation of this act of treachery by his beloved daughter. *'Wat hebben wij gedaan om dit te verdienen?'* she could imagine him imploring the heavens) or listen to her mother caterwauling as she rinsed the clothes in river water, Delphinia Adelheit Witbooi opted to rather sneak out of their house just before dawn one early morning and flee to the town.

She was soon hired to wash cutlery and crockery in the newly-built but as yet unnamed hotel. She was given lodging in a hut on the edge of town. She would not have to trudge back home and beg forgivness. She would go home when it suited her.

It was a notion that alternatively saddened and terriified her.

Delphinia was clearing glasses from the *Rat and Badger's* back room one evening some weeks after her arrival when she overheard a short man with impossibly sad eyes talking aimlessly to a glass filled with what looked like water, but was probably gin. He spoke a gutteral-laden language she didnôt understand at all, but sometimes you donôt need to know words to comprehend their meaning. She assuredly recognised that any man who puts his face in hands so intensely is a man haunted by pictures he does not want to look at.

Delphinia Adelheit Witbooi, on what she would tell Yitzhak many years later was her avowed mission from God, finished her labours and waited for some hours outside the *Rat and Badger* until, at around midnight, Theodore Isaacs emerged, head down as he trudged to his Scotch Cart.

Two weeks had passed since his son had died in the Kimberley dust. Two weeks and one day since he had watched the bandit Scotty Smith ride off towards the Cape to find the man who had robbed him blind.

As he passed Delphinia Witbooi, she stepped out the shadows, touched Theodore gently on his sleeve.

'Excuseer mij, mijnheer. Maar kan ik u helpen?'

ôIôm sorry ï I donôt speak Dutch too well,ôsaid Theodore, shrugging her hand off his arm. The woman did not budge.

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sked snidely. ôEveryone seems to want my money.ô

swered doggedly, then switched to English. ôI seed you in *de kroeg.* The bar. I seed in you great é um é *verdriet?'*

ô*Verdriet?'* Theodore was momentarily intrigued. ôThatôs almost like Yiddish. You mean sadness?ô

ôSadness, *Ja*.ô

ôYes, I am in great sadness, I suppose,ô Theodore said offhandedly. ôNow if you donôt mind é ô

ôI can to help, *mijnheer*.ô

ôSorry, but I have no money with me,ô Theodore said, backing away, irritated.

ôI want none money from you, *mijnheer,*ô said Delphinia, placing her hand back on Theodoreôs arm. ôSometimes *God en Jezus* make peoples to cross paths. I can to help. In your time of sadness.ô

ôWhat do you really want?ô Theodore demanded curtly.

ôI can to help *mijnheer*. To lift from your shoulders the yoke from *de pijn* that bends your body en, er, *de ziel.*

ôNo one can help me,ô Theodore snorted. ôI am not sure what it is you want, but I can confirm this to you é I have no need of your *Jezus* in my life. I have enough *tsores* without the Son of someone elseôs God meddling in my affairs. Now, good night to you.ô

He swung himself unsteadily into the cart, tapped the horseôs flank with the tip of his whip and trotted back to the house where he knew Leah would be sitting, waiting not for Theodore, but for Jacob to come ambling home.

Or someone with a message to say Jacob lived.

Theodore noticed as he drew closer to their beautifully appointed home that, as usual, Leah sat silhouetted in the window. Even from some distance down the road he picked out how her small form managed to fill the window frame, backlit by a roomful of lanterns and candles.

To let Jacob know; this is where we live. Remember?

Theodore sighed, stabled the horse and entered the lounge where Leah sat stolid as a concrete gnome, chin resting in her hand as she gazed out the window and down the street. She did not acknowledge Theodore.

ôLeah?ô he touched her shoulder. She said nothing, shrugged his hand away. Impatiently. Just as he had hitched the Griqua womanôs hand off his forearm outside the *Rat and Badger.*

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eodore said. óThis waiting for Jacob é there is no good ut there looking for a light in a window.ô

Leah turned briefly to Theodore. óHe will come home,ô she said dully. The Siamese cat eyes had become the colour of frozen spit. óSo I will wait.ô

Theodore smelt the pungent reek of urine.

óLeah é Youôve soiled yourself again,ô he said gently. óLeah? Please? This is no good.ô

óUm,ô said Leah, not moving.

Theodore took Leahôs arm gently, tried to lift her.

óLet me take you and bathe youé ô

Leah whirled, her small, neat teeth bared.

óSod off!ô she screamed. óCan you not see Iôm bloody well waiting? Can you not understand I donôt want your help? I do not want to be bathed neither. I will sit here in my own piss until my baby boy comes home to me.ô

óHe isnôt é ô

óHe damned well will. Now bugger off and leave me be.ô

óLeah, you have to stop blaming yourself.ô

They had travelled the road of this conversation before: Theodore knew the route.

óIt wasnôt you who let go his hand and let him die under them horse hooves,ô Leah said. óIt was me whatôs to blame, and only me. So it will be me who bloody waits.ô

Her face was feral.

óAll right,ô Theodore sighed, exhausted. óMaybe I donôt understand how you feel. But he was my son too, Leah, so I understand some of it.ô

Leah returned to her vigil.

óNo. You donôt,ô she mumbled at the open window. óYou bloody well canôt because you never show nothing, ever. You donôt and you canôt understand a damned thing.ô

óMaybe youôre right,ô said Theodore. óMaybe I donôt grasp it the way you do.ô

But he did.

He understood utterly and completely, but was unwilling to involve Leah in any discourse that might force her deeper into the pit into which she had slipped. Defeated, Theodore stumbled wearily to the kitchen, tossed two logs into the dying fire in the stove and set a kettle boiling.

He would make tea for Leah, knowing the cup would still be next to her, untouched and stone cold, when the sun rose hours later. Leah would continue watching and waiting throughout the night, not knowing if sheôd fallen asleep sitting in her chair at the window in her own waste.

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The kettle sang its hysterical song, prompting an automatic reaction in Theodore to whip the kettle off the stove before it woke Jacob.

Theodore shook his head and was stirring two spoons of sugar into Leahôs tea when he heard the tapping on the front door.

ôWho the hell ...ôIrked, Theodore looked at his fob watch. One forty five in the morning. He stomped to the front door and swung it open, ready to angrily demand an explanation from the interloper as to why they had chosen this ungodly hour of the morning to come banging on his front door.

Then realised it might be Scotty Smith, finally, with overdue news.

It was not Scotty Smith standing there with hands folded into coat sleeves.

It was, of course, Delphinia Adelheit Witbooi.

ôYou? How did you find me?ô Theodore asked, annoyed.

ôI runned behind the cart. All the way, but back some way. I cannot run with the haste of horses. I hided in the dust as I runned after *mijnheer*. I seed you from back there, stopping in this *huis.* It was a sign*, Looft den Heer,* that this is a *huis* with a light shining in the night.ô

ôLights? So what?ô

ô*De bijbel* of the Hebrews it say lighting of candles in *de donkerste tijden* brings the ending from the dark.'

ôJesus. Youôre talking about *Chanukah*. What do you know about Jews?ô

ôThe Hebrews are fathers of every person,ô Delphinia answered simply. She peered into Theodoreôs eyes.

ôThis time is the dark for you? *Ja*?ô

ôYes,ô said Theodore sighed, aware that just a few feet away sat his wife, staring blindly down the deserted street. ôThis time is dark for me.ô

Delphinia stepped forward a pace.

ôI can to help *mijnheer,'* she repeated, and nudged her way past Theodore, who stepped aside, resigned, numbed and uncomplaining.

Delphinia moved to Leahôs side, touched the same shoulder on which Theodore had placed his hand earlier. Leah did not shrug away this hand. Its touch was different, she sensed. She turned, looked into the face of Delphinia.

ôDid you bring my boy to me?ô she asked.

Childlike.

ô*Nay, mevrouw.*ô

ôAre you the Angel of Death, then?ô

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óI am not any sort of Angel, *mevrouw*. I am just a person. I can to help you. ó

óI have to wait here for my boy to come home,ô Leah explained.

óYour son has passed?ô

óYes. He passed. Recent like.ô

óThen I will wait alongside you*, mevrouw*. But your boy will not come to you from this window.ô

óWhere will he come from?ô

ó*Mevrouw,* he will come to you in the darkness of sleeping.ô

óHe will?ô

'"De Heer is mijn herder", the bible say,*'* Delphinia explained. óHe is your shepherd too. And your small boy. *De Heer* will take from his flock your son for you to speak. But only in sleep will he do this ... so you can not look upon the face of *De Heer*.ô

óBut I will see Jacob?ô

óOnly in the sleep*, mevrouw*.ôDelphinia took Leah by the elbow, eased her to her feet.

óYou promise?ô Leah begged.

óI promise, *mevrouw.* My God says, ñyou must submit to supreme suffering in order to discover the completion of joyò. The joy will be with you soon. But you must come with me now, *mevrouw*. I must bathe you for to wait for your boy.ô

óYes,ô said Leah. óI must present myself proper like.ô

Docile as cotton wool, Leah allowed Delphinia to lead her to the zinc bath where, with equal measures of warm water and soft touches, Delphinia prepared Leah to finally float into sleep.

Theodore watched Delphinia ease his wife into the bed, drawing the single blanket up to Leahôs chin.

ó*Slaap*, *kleine mevrouwtje*, so your son can to visit you.ô

óYes,ô said Leah, allowing her lids to slowly droop until her buzzing snore confirmed sleep had at last washed over her.

Theodore and Delphinia watched Leahôs narrow chest rise and fall rhythmically for a few minutes before both slowly backed out of the room.

óThat was a miracle,ô said Theodore when they stopped on the landing.

óNot a miracle, *mijnheer*,ô said Delphinia. óThere are no miracles here. Just tiredness.ô

óI suppose so,ô Theodore conceded. óIt was just speaking of a manner.ô

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ôThe *mevrouwtje* will sleep long, long hours. I will be here when she awakens.ô

ôThank you,ô said Theodore. ôI will too. I will need to deal with how she reacts when she wakes. When she realises Jacob did not visit her in her sleep.ô

ôI not understand.ô

ôWhen my wife wakes up she will be angry because you fooled her into bathing and sleeping.ô

ôThere is no fooling, *mijnheer,'* said Delphinia Adelheit Witbooi. ó*Omdat de Heer is mijn Meester* ï because the Lord is my Master – I can to promise you, *mijnheer,* that the soul of your boy will visit your wife. I can *zijn woord geven*.ô

ôYour word? Listen, thank you, but we donôt believe in spirits,ô Theodore said. ôWe do not think the dead are floating around in the air waiting to say hello to someone.ô

ôWho told you that?ô Delphinia asked politely.

Theodore smiled sourly, regarded his fingernails ï just as his son Yitzhak would do many many years later as a means of buying thinking time.

óA certain Rabbi, many years ago,ô Theodore said eventually.

ôWe will see if your Rabbi was right,ô said Delphinia Adelheit Witbooi. ôNow, *mijnheer*,ô where would you like me to put my things?ô

When Leah woke up fourteen hours later, she was fairly lucid. She dressed herself, smiled weakly at her husband.

Leah dipped her eyes shyly when Delphinia entered the room moments later. As if Delphinia was madam and Leah the servant.

Their first conversation was as if two old friends were discussing the weather. Matter-of-fact.

ôDid your Jacob visit you?ô Delphinia asked Leah, gently clasping her hands in her own.

óJacob is dead,ô Leah answered evenly.

ôSo in your sleep he said to you, farewell, mama?ô

ôSôpose he mightôve. I was asleep, so I dunno.ô

'Mevrouwtje will now have peace in her life?ô

ôMaybe,ô shrugged Leah. ôôSôpossible. Anythingôs possible.ô

'Dank de Heer,ô said Delphinia.

ôPerhaps.ô

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ia, who did not enter the conspiracy.

He took Leah in his arms, felt her resistance and released his hold. Kissed her swiftly on her forehead.

ôI must go to my office,ô he said gently to the top of Leahôs head. ôWhen I return we will talk for a while.ô Leah nodded, backed away from her husband.

ôYou go ahead then,ô she said dully.

When Theodore arrived home that evening he found Leah sitting at her window, watching the road. Seeking a sign, her chin nestled in the palm of her tiny hand.

In the kitchen, Delphinia stirred a pot of vegetable soup on the stove. Theodore could smell turnips.

Delphinia saw Theodore standing quizzically in the doorway.

ôShe is still the same,ô he said. ôLeah ... sheôs back where she was.ô

ôThis will not be fixed in one night, *mijnheer*,ô she said. ôThe thoughts and memories of the little missus will go back and forward as waves from the sea. It will take many such nights as last night before the waters stand still for the *mevrouwtje.* She will one day understand it was Godôs will to take her son. The *mijnheer* and me ... we know the boyôs death was not the fault of the *mevrouwtje,* even though this is what she believes in her heart.ô

She ladled soup into a bowl and placed it at the head of the table where Theodore usually sat.

ôThere is nothing you can say which will change her mind. So you must to have the patience of Job of the Hebrew teachings,ô Delphinia said firmly. ôYou must to be patient, *mijnheer.*ô

Theodore looked at the steaming bowl, then Delphinia.

Leaving his coat hanging on its hook in the parlour, he quietly walked out the front door, heading for *The Rat and Badger* for a whisky or two, which he would drink with patience.

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'You've got to know when to hold 'em, know when to fold 'em.' – Country and western song. Not in Yitzhakôs collection.

Theodore sloped wearily into the *Rat and Badger*, feeling guilty about leaving Leah at home to look through the window at a desolate road, waiting for her dead child to come marching home to the imagined sounds of toy army drums.

Rationalising and compromise are twin gifts bestowed upon lone drinkers. Theodore used these gifts to convincing himself that Delphinia Witbooi would watch over Leah, ensure she ate, bathed, went to bed to crash into the endless depths of that sleep which is the gift bestowed on the utterly despondent.

Apparently Old Tom Gin, with its sugary flavour, was the preferred drink of sonless fathers. Theodore quickly downed two (a quick *zoep*, Yitzhak said). The third he slowly coddled. The first two felt were warm going down, as gin does. The third set into neutral gear the angry and frustrated whining whirling cogs in his head as he sought to make sense of what had happened to his family. And why.

Any why him?

And why his child?

For the thousandth time, he considered the concept of a malevolent God who sought to punish him for transgressions of the past.

For some pilfered schoolbooks, *Hashem* takes my child?

God has a plan, the gentiles say.

Apparently, so does Satan é at least, thatôs what the Calvinists believed, Delphinia had mentioned in passing.

What plan could God or Satan possibly have in mind for me, for Leah?

What sort of plan positions a little child as a pawn?

Damn it, Theodore thought. Iôm building a house of worship for you, and this is how you repay me?

Not for the first time did the word, fairness, cross his mind.

Morosely, Theodore swigged down the remnant of his third glass, snapped his fingers at the barman, who nodded and refilled Theodoreôs glass.

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interjected, using his forefinger to demonstrate, ótha
frica, it travels in a clockwise spiral. In England it goes the other way. Anti-clockwise. I checked and can confirm that water does in fact travel in the same direction ï in this house, anyway ï when it disappears into the pipes. I wondered if someone in another hemisphere was checking the same thing at the same time. Idle hands, I suppose.

óThen I began to wonder if, when peopleôs lives start spiralling down the drain, these also travel either clockwise or anti-clockwise, depending on where on Earth their *tsores* occurs.ô

Yitzhak leaned forward and tapped my knee with the same knuckle-swollen finger. óThe things an *alte koker* ponders in declining years. When a luckless fool kills a rooster, it still hops; but when he winds a clock, it stops. Such philosophy the *alte Yidden* had.ô

He leaned back, rubbed the heels of both hands over his tired eyes.

óFor my father, everything was ï whatôs the opposite of exploding? Imploding? Yes. It was all falling down around him, and the resolve that carried him through his life so far was crumbling. Life had become like a stopped clock rather than a headless chicken.

óIf I was a fanciful man ï which Iôm not, as you know ï I would imagine Theodore Isaacs as slowly and agonisingly becoming like the old Greek and Roman ruins that you see in *National Geography* magazine. I would see in my mind a well nourished American tourist family posing next to the strong, upright pillars with piles of broken masonry at their base. The husband, Sherman, is taking pictures of his wife, Bertha, and the kids and not seeing the majesty of what those ruins represent.

óôLook at me on holiday,ô Bertha would be shrieking through her capped teeth at the camera. Her friends would be forced to sit through Shermanôs endless slideshow when they return to Poughkeepsie, New York with their souvenirs, made in China.

óBut fortunately though, I am not a fanciful man. Just the son of a father who was about to go gurgle-gurgle down the plughole. Hereôs what happened next...ô

Theodore sensed a presence behind him. This time it was not Nate Yudelman but rather Auntie Cockeye, appearing not so much at Theodoreôs shoulder, but at his right hip.

óOn the house, Mo,ô she nodded to the barman, who returned to his eternal task of trying to wipe clean a set of glasses and tankards with a filthy cloth.

Theodore nodded his thanks.

ó*L'chaim*,ô he said in Hebrew, lifting the glass briefly.

'*Sláinte*,ô Auntie Cockeye replied in Irish, and without a glass.

óYour good lady is still *désolé?*ô she asked.

óShe is. She is.ô

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f course, and how sorrowful a figure your young wife

óYes it is.ô

óMister Isaacs,ô Auntie Cockeye edged a step closer to Theodore, ówhile I am not averse to your money coming to me over the bar, I sense that you are here to avoid being alone in your own home. Yes?ô

óYou are very perspective,ô said Theodore.

ó..and I can see that you are more in need of company? Other than Mo, of course.ô

Old history is never forgotten in a hurry. Horrified, Theodore raised his hands, palms towards Auntie Cockeye.

óNo, definitely not. I have no need for, erm, loose women.ô

Auntie Cockeye giggling girlishly was not a pleasant sound. Nor was the friendly knob-knuckled punch to Theodoreôs thigh just a chummy tap.

óOh my heavens,ô Auntie Cockeye grackled. ôDear sweet Lord no! Not with a young and beautiful wife at home. Youôre not the usual rabble we have in this bar, Mister Isaacs. I wouldnôt dream of suggesting anything so lowly.ô

Theodore was mortified.

óIôm sorry. I assumed ... well, I spent much of my youth living next door to a house of ill repute. I made an incorrect assumption.ô

Next door? Thereôs another understatement for Godôs punishment slate, thought Theodore.

óDonôt concern yourself, Mister Isaacs,ô Auntie Cockeye rasped placidly. óI was about to suggest you come into the private saloon. Maybe play a hand or two of bluff.ô

óBluff?ô

óThe Americans call it poker. It started in, I think, New Orleans, then worked its way around the world. Or so Iôve been told. Itôs a game of chance, of numbers. Much skill is required, they tell me.ô

óIs that the game those men were playing the first time I was here, when I met Scotty? Those pasteboards with the small artworks of royalty?ô

óThatôs extremely percep é *perspective* of you.ô

óI notice things,ô said Theodore.

óSo I see ï well, a bright businessman like you...ô

Taking Theodore firmly by the point of his elbow, Auntie Cockeye ushered him into the back room ï the private saloon where some of the same men sat around the same table with, apparently, the same money changing hands amid jovial threats and chorused insults.

The game stopped as Auntie Cockeye brought Theodore, shuffling red-faced at her side, to the table.

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ood and nodded politely to Aunty Cockeye. The man with e had noted the last time he had been in this room, snatched the cap from his head.

óGentlemen,ô announced Auntie Cockeye, ómay I introduce you to Mister Theodore Isaacs? He and his colleagues run the stagecoach service.ô

óAh yes. The Gibsons. Know them both,ô said one of the card players. He leaned forward, gravely shook Theodoreôs hand.

ó Tom Rhodes.ô

óThis miscreant on my left,ô continued Rhodes, óis my old University chum, Charlie Rudd. Wonderful companion. Awful card player.ô Rudd blushed, mumbled words, offered a limp dead halibut hand to Theodore.

óThe man with the filthy watch cap is the esteemed Town Treasurer. Or something to do with this town anyway. Youôre not the Mayor yet, Thomas? No?ô

Handshake.

óCall me Tom,ô the man said.

óFinally,ô said Rhodes, ówe have Taberer. Very involved in moving niggers here in droves to help with the diggings. Also a fine cricketer in his day, I understand, but of course thereôs not a soul to play against here, needless to say.ô

óOne day é ô Taberer smiled.

óWhich brings us to our regular but currently absent fifth member; the redoubtable Scotty Smith, with whom I believe youôre acquainted?ô

óYes, he is servicing me.ô Theodore looked towards Auntie Cockeye.

óAnd weôre expecting word from him shortly, I assure you,ô she answered the unasked question.

óSo?ô asked Tom. óDo you play bluff?ô

óI have no idea how it works.ô

The men seated themselves as Aunty Cockeye swept out of the room to break up a fight.

óBluff?ô said Rhodes. óWe can teach you. Itôs simple. Itôs about odds and watching the other fellowsô faces to see if theyôre telling pork pies.ô

óI understand,ô said Theodore. Rhodes rolled onwards.

óSimply, you have to have a better hand than the other chaps. If you believe they have better hands than you, well then you can try and bluff them into believing your hand is best. Easy game if you have decent number skills,ô Rhodes explained.

ó.. and a black soul utterly bereft of any sense of common decency,ô added Taberer.

That, thought Theodore sourly, is exactly me: understand money and have darkness in my heart.

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yed,ô said Rhodes, briefly riffling the cards in his genteel
oards in front of Theodore.

óSo,ô said Rhodes authoritatively. óThere are four suits of thirteen cards each ï from the ace, which is worth one or eleven, right through to the royalty. King, Queen, Knave, ten, nine and so forth.ô

óSuits?ô

óHearts, clubs and ï I suppose entirely appropriately considering where we are ï spades and diamonds,ô said Rudd, who was rewarded with a twinkling Rhodes smile.

óRight. So, each player is dealt five cards ...ô

Half an hour and a few practice hands later, Theodore pronounced himself ready to play. His aptitude with numbers and organisational ability, he believed, made him a perfectly capable competitor in this game.

He imagined he didnôt even need to use any form of deception to win hands, deception in anything being, well, not ethical.

óUnfortunately I have insufficient funds on me right now,ô Theodore began.

Nate Yudelman wraithed up at his shoulder.

õWe will accept your marker, Mister Isaacs,ô Nate Yudelman said suavely.

õIndeed. We have infinite faith in you, sir,ô said Tom the possible Town Treasurer. õYou are among friends here.ô

óAny friend of Scottyôs...ô Taberer began.

õYes, well...ô interrupted Rhodes. óLet us leave the good Mister Smith in abeyance for the moment. Mister Isaacs ï Theodore, if I may ï your IOU is as good as gold at this table. The only people who have anything to fear from us as a group are the dishonest, the unworthy, the patsies.ô

óPasties?ô Theodore asked.

óPatsies. Pigeons ï ripe for the plucking,ô answered Rhodes.

óSo é like sinners?ô asked Theodore.

õI suppose so, old chap,ô smiled Rhodes patiently. õWhy not? Sinners it is.ô He clapped his hands together.

óLetôs play!ô

Rudd shuffled the cards vigorously, and shoved the pack towards Taberer.

õMy deal. Cut, you miscreant slave trader,ô he demanded. óAll right fellows ï ante up.ô

Coins and notes were strewn in the centre of the baize-topped table, uncounted, Theodore noted, pondering briefly the irony of implied trust among players of a card game where the ability to lie convincingly was deemed an important skill.

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s, hooding them from prying eyes, as Rhodes had three threes ï *treys*, poker players call them in Kansas or wherever the hell American cowboys play, Theodore recalled Rudd calling them. He also had two other nondescript cards.

One was heart, the other a black heart with a stem like a cherry.

A spade.

When it was his turn to call, Theodore announced his intention to play, and acquired two cards, discarding the unwanted orphan cards into a communal heap among the coins and notes on the table.

Rhodes took one card, and Rudd tossed his pasteboards in disgust onto the table and announced that the poker gods clearly detested him so he wouldnôt play this hand.

Taberer took three cards.

Tom the Town Treasurer, mumbling something about discretion being the better part of valour, tossed his cards away.

óI will wager ten shillings,ôTheodore announced when it was his turn to call. óIs that too much? Too little?ô

óAha! We have a player,ôRhodes chuckled. óYour bet is fine. And I will pay just to have a look, having not too much of consequence in my own hand.ô

óMiserable pair of deuces isnôt even vaguely competitive,ôgrumbled Taberer and discarded his hand.

óI have a fowl house,ôsaid Theodore proudly. óThree threes and two knaves.ô

He spread his hand on the table.

óExcellent,ôcrowed Rhodes. óWay too good for me, old son. Take the pot, why donôt you?ô

Several hours later, with fifty pounds in his trouser pocket, Theodore rose, shook hands with the others when Rhodes announced that Bluff time was over for the day and it was now time for the sandman to take over.

Theodore imagined that Sandman must be the hotelôs day manager. Rhodes clapped his hand on Theodoreôs shoulder.

óMister Isaacs, we would be delighted if you would give us the opportunity to win back some of our funds. We play every second night.ô

óBugger all else to do in this place,ôgrunted Taberer, who was the eveningôs biggest loser.

óI would be delighted,ôTheodore said. óAt least, until Mister Smith returns.ô

óAs he shall, no doubt.ôRhodes smoothed his moustache, smiled and linked arms with Rudd.

óTake me home, old boy,ôhe demanded of his companion.

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e tossed and turned fitfully, excitedly recalling some on a precipice anxiously waiting to see if the other fellow had a better hand than you. Peering at the other manôs face to try and spot a lie lurking in the tilt of a head, the tweaked corner of a mouth, the nervous stroking of a moustache.

Theodore eventually dozed briefly, waking fully when the sun rose and Delphinia Adelheit Witbooi brought through to his room a cup of tea and jam bedecked bread which she placed like criticism on the small side table next to his bed.

óHow is the Missus?ô Theodore asked Delphinia.

óShe sits by the window again,ô Delphina said coldly.

óDid she...ô

óShe slept for many hours. She awoke crying and screaming once. You were not here, so you did not hear it.ô

óI was at...ô

óThe bar. I am aware.ô

óI was with new friends.ô

ó*Mijnheer* has no need to explain to me.ô

óI suppose I donôt.ô

óThe *mevrouwtje* returned to sleep quite quickly. You do not have to worry.ô

óDid she say ... anything?ô

óShe keeps calling sometimes in her sleep for, I think, the lost child. She calls ñbaby, babyò. Her voice when she calls sounds like that of a young child. ñBaby, babyò. Always *daai woorden*.ô

Theodore was perplexed. Jacob wasnôt a baby when he died; he was not even a toddler. Perhaps, he surmised, Leah still saw in her mind an image of Jacob at the beginning of his life, rather than at its end.

He did not know the answer, so he washed and dressed, kissed the top of Leahôs head and headed to work where trustworthy routines awaited his attention.

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Tsores vil men nit tsunemen; mitsves ken met nit tsunemen. ï Nobody is willing to take away your troubles; nobody can take away your good deeds.

Bluff at the *Rat and Badger* backroom became an obsession for Theodore, who would, every other evening, leave Leah sitting at her window, with Delphinia hovering like a moth behind her weak flame, and head for the green baize table.

After a few weeks, Theodore sometimes didnôt even bother going home from work, choosing rather to head the few blocks down the road from his office to play cards with his new friends. He worked out he had won more than he had lost ï despite his inexperience ï and wrote it off to a natural ability with numbers.

It never occurred to Theodore to ask either of the Gibsons to join him. He sensed their relationship was purely business. And anyway, they both had new families and no dead children to bury.

Six weeks passed. There was still no sign of Scotty Smith with news of Schwartz the *Goniff*. After three weeks, Theodore didnôt even bother questioning Yetta Yudelman, whose stock answer had been, óItôs a big country and Scottyôs just one man. I will let you know as soon as I hear anything.ô

And besides, Theodore rationalised, if Scotty returned with his money, then he would have no excuse for visiting the bluff table and the sensation of notes and coins and cards churning in his hands.

Responsibility for the building of the synagogue had been taken over by someone whose name Theodore didnôt even know or care. Theodore had no interest in visiting any house of any God any longer. Jacobôs burial had left the last scratchings of faith under the same soil as his sonôs body.

Into the kist went his *siddur*, his *yarmulke* and his childhood.

Friday night at the *Rat and Badger* was infinitely more fun than sitting in synagogue repeating the same prayers over and over again. And there was no one he actually wanted to pray for. Leah? Sheôd be safer in the care of Delphinia than all the Rabbis in Jerusalem.

And anyway, on Friday nights Auntie Cockeye spotted the players two bottles of whisky imported from a distillery in Ballindaloch. Glenlivet, it was called. Went down the throat like Ambrosia, Rhodes would always comment.

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to turn from a solid *mentsch* into a cynic?ô Yitzhak posed rhetorically. óIf I told you that despite all his *tsores,* my father never once became a cynical man, you wouldnôt believe me. This is because you are your fatherôs son. That is to say, you too are a cynic, a sceptic. Just like your late father. You and your father are cynics like Diogenes ... that insane Greek wandering around forever in search of a real person with his lamp?

óDiogenes,ô he explained, ówas known as Diogenes the Cynic. Were you aware? He called men ófeatherless bipedsô. Why was he a cynic? Because he was subjected to all sorts of terrible things, including being kidnapped and enslaved and impoverished. Also, he *shtupped* Socratesô wife although I must say I canôt understand why *shtupping* anyone is a terrible thing. I should quickly add that this was of course Socrates the philosopher, not the captain of Brazilôs football team.

óMy father was, like Diogenes, also subjected to all manner of *tsores,* yet even though his spirit must surely have teetered on the edge of breaking, he never once actually talked of revenge. Where is each manôs breaking point? Mine is low. Listen, just last week the delivery boy from Sadowskyôs Butchery dropped on the floor of my shop a pound of kosher fillet, and I wanted to murder him with my bare hands.

óBut my father? He would have quietly patted the *putz* on the shoulder and said, ñNever mind. A cow has two buttocks for steak. Go fetch another one for me, and send Sadowsky my best regardsò. And let the idiot ride away on his bicycle with my fatherôs cheque for destroyed kosher beef fillet in his pocket.ô

óIt took me a lifetime before I learned how far my father could be pushed.ô

Yitzhak considered his position for an instant.

óMaybe it was just the sheer weight of numbers pitched against him that reminded the pragmatist in my father that you cannot put fingers everywhere in a dykeôs holes, and that you sometimes have to stage a tactical withdrawal. Fight another day? Or maybe he was just too damned tired to confront these demons facing him. Or he might quite simply have been too scared.ô

At close to midnight that Friday, after almost two months of playing at the *Rat and Badger,* Theodore was dealt the hand poker players dream of.

He picked up the cards dealt by Tom and opened his hand slowly, each face card its own exciting revelation.

He had ten to the king of hearts.

Plus the four of clubs, squatting in the middle like a bullfrog at a cotillion.

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nnounced he would play, and casually bet five pounds.

away the four of clubs.

Again, he slowly squeezed open the hand.

One card at a time.

He had bought the ace of hearts.

Theodore wanted to howl with delight, but had the sense to show no emotion. This was a time for cool-headed men. Casually, he took a nip of the Glenlivet in the chunky tumbler at his elbow and did not choke on it.

Rhodes glanced askew at Theodore, raised an eyebrow and threw in his hand. He knew something. Tom the Possible Mayor met Theodoreôs fiver and bought one card, smiled quickly, then tossed a ten-pound note into the mix.

óI will meet your five and add five of my own, old chap,ôhe announced

Taberer bought no cards, and briefly plucked at his walrus moustache.

ñI will play these,ò he announced smoothly, and added twenty pounds onto the pile, óand what say we double that bet?ô

ôWonderful,ôsaid Rudd sourly, discarding his hand in disgust. óI have a hand like a foot.ô

óMy turn to talk?ôasked Theodore innocently. óYes? Then I wish to redouble. That makes another forty pounds to me?ô

óLetôs make it eighty,ôsaid Tom quickly.

óEighty?ôsmirked Taberer, out of turn. ôWhy just eighty? I say one hundred and sixty pounds.ô

ôThis is a good game to be out of,ôRudd suggested to Rhodes, who nodded.

ôWhat is the limit of bets in this game?ôTheodore asked innocently. óAt which point must we stop betting?ô

óLimit?ôasked Rhodes, acting as umpire. óMust say, I never ever thought of a limit. I suppose whatever you want it to be. No limit at all ï if that is as you wish.ô

óI suggest if you want to play then it will cost you three hundred pounds to see me,ô said Theodore firmly.

The room was silent.

Taberer, Tom and Theodore looked at each other, assessing reactions. What did Tomôs smirk mean? What did Taberer have that did not require buying any cards and which caused him to pluck at his moustache ... which he did whenever he had a decent hand?

Theodore smiled inwardly. It made no difference: his Royal Flush was unbeatable.

Taberer spoke first.

óI think, Theodore old chap, that youôre trying the worldôs gutsiest bluff, and I salute you.ô

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ôThank you,ô said Theodore, blushing.

ôRegardless of your guts though, Iôll wager another three thousand because I think youôre bluffing é but thatôs the name of the game, is it not? Makes it six thousand in the pot.ô

Tom the Possible Mayor spoke next.

ôYouôre both lying dogs,ô he snorted. ôIôve got you both beat, so Iôll make it another six thousand to the pair of you.ô

ôI donôt have that sort of money on me é ô Theodore began, touching his pockets. Of course, Nate Yudelman was quickly at his side, with a marker to sign.

ôThank you, Nate.ô Theodore quickly took the proffered pen ï and paused. ôTell you what though,ô he said to Nate and the table, ôlet me rather sign a market for é ô he did some sums in his head é ôtwenty thousand pounds. Is that agreeable, Nate? Gentlemen? Is an extra twenty thousand pounds acceptable to you?ô

Nate Yudelman, unblinking, changed the amount on the marker, which Theodore quickly signed. There was a collective intake of whisky-flavoured breath around the table

ôRegardless, Iôm in,ô said Taberer without hesitation. ôHaving said that, gentlemen, I also donôt have the ready cash on me. However, this will cover the bet.ô

He dropped a thumb-sized diamond into the pot. ôHereôs the assayerôs certificate é Cecil, wonôt you be a good fellow and hold onto it for me?ô Rhodes took the stone and certificate and popped them indifferently into his coat pocket.

ôSuch is the life of a poor civil servant,ô sighed Tom the Possible Mayor, rising and ostentatiously unbuckling his belt, which he dropped on the table.

ôWithin this money belt resides exactly eighteen thousand pounds. You may count it, if you so wish. Plus this extra two thousand in cash from my kitty.ô He pushed all his money into the pot.

ôThatôs my twenty thousand. I am seeing you, Theodore, and trust my pants will not fall down.ô

ôMe too,ô said Taberer. ôThat means you can raise no further, Theodore.ô

ôThank the Good Lord Iôm not in this,ô muttered Rhodes, who had more money than the local bank and could thus have played, lost, and felt not a damned ounce of pain.

ôI have a mere four aces,ô said Taberer laying down his hand, face cards up. ôYou will recall I acquired no cards.ô

ôOh I say!ô said Tom the Possible Mayor facetiously. ôExcellent hand é and what dreadful luck, old son. But it seems I have a straight flush, nine to king in clubs. Sucks to your pathetic four of a kind, Taberer.ô

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He splayed his hand on the table and leaned forward to scoop the pot.

óAw Jayzuz,ô Taberer cursed, rocking back in his seat. óFour bloody aces, beat by a straight bloody flush. Jayzuz, son of bloody Joseph and bloody Mary. Damn you, Thomas.ô

ôWait a second,ô said Theodore, holding up his palm. óI believe I have you both beaten.ô

He slowly spread the cards before the others.

Ten, Knave, Queen, King and Ace of hearts.

óI have a Royal Family Flush.ô

Four heads craned forward simultaneously to examine the hand.

Some people play poker their entire lives and never see a Royal Flush. In their hand or anyone elseôs for that matter. It is a rare and beautiful thing, they will tell you.

ôWell, Iôll be damned,ô breathed Taberer.

óIôll be double-damned,ô added Tom the Possible Big Loser.

Rudd simply shook his head.

The card players gazed in awe at the Royal Flush, then at Theodore, who (beaming massively) scooped the pot towards himself using both hand as a makeshift dealerôs rake.

ôBut I say, old chap,ô said Rhodes suddenly, placing his hand on Theodoreôs forearm, óthis cannot possibly be.ô

ôWhat do you mean?ô Theodore asked.

óI mean, this cannot be the winning hand. It is simply not possible,ô said Rhodes.

óIt is a Royal Family Flush,ô Theodore insisted. ôYou told me it was an unbeatable hand. Straight Flush is second strongest, with the Royal Family Flush the best possible hand. Tabererôs four of a kind came in third place.ô

óA Royal Flush is most certainly unbeatable, Theodore,ô said Rhodes, óunless the Ace of Hearts in your Royal Flush is the same as the Ace of Hearts in Tabererôs four of a kind.ô

óAh, jeez man,ô said Taberer rising to his feet, fists clenched.

Rudd whistled ominously under his breath and pushed himself away from the table.

ôôBut é I donôt understand how this is possible?ô Theodore stammered.

óItôs bloody nonsense is what it is, ôTom steamed angrily.

óListen, old chap,ô Rhodes hissed at Theodore, óI understand you have had some travails in the past few months ï but cheating at cards? Theodore, thatôs unacceptable. One doesnôt cheat oneôs friends. I am personally shocked that you should do such a low thing.ô

óAfter we welcomed you into our group é ô said Tom the Greek Chorister

óé and accepted your markers without question,ô added Taberer.

óI have never cheated. Not at cards or in life,ô Theodore said hotly. ôNot now or ever.ô

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a court? Never stolen anything? Ever? Not cooked any

ually pallid complexion reddened.

Sudden images of his youth in Cape Town flashed unbidden through Theodoreôs mind. He said nothing, could only gape at the Royal Flush leering at him from the table.

óJust as I thought é nothing to say,ô sniffed Rhodes. óTom, old boy. Potôs yours. Straight Flush is good enough. Your hand is not in doubt.ô

óThis is not fair,ô Theodore rose angrily, but Nate Yudelmanôs gigantic hand landed like concrete on his shoulder, gently shoving him back into his seat.

óWait here until my wife arrives,ô he said calmly to Theodore. To the others, óGents, please enjoy a libation at the bar while we sort out this small problem.ô

He made it sound like a death sentence.

óDamned if Iôll sit at the same table with a Jew thief anyway,ô snapped Taberer, stalking into the bar area.

óTabererôs spot on,ô said Tom the Victor, stuffing notes into his pockets. óWhat did we expect from the people who killed Our Lord? Honesty? Should have known better.ô

He, Rudd and Rhodes stomped to the bar leaving Theodore alone at the baize table upon which lay the discarded poker hands, mocking him. The Knave of Clubs winked snidely at him. The King of Spades simply ignored him.

A lifetime later, Yetta Yudelman entered and sat opposite Theodore at the table.

óWhat are we to do with you, Mister Isaacs?ô she asked sadly.

óI did not cheat, Missus. I swear it on the grave of my child.ô

óWhat sort of man swears anything on his children?ô

óA man who is innocent.ô

Yetta grunted.

óMister Isaacs, I have enjoyed the pleasure of those gentlemen in my bar for years and have never seen anything which might suggest there is a deviant bone in any of their bodies.ô

óNor mine,ô said Theodore, óI swear it.ô

Yetta aimed her good eye at Theodore, searched his face for long seconds.

óNow thatôs not really true, is it, Theodore?ô

She had used his first name. Reduced his status by simply by omitting the honorific.

óWell, Theodore? Nothing to say?ô

óWhat can I say? Must I confess to all the crimes of humanity?ô

óIf thatôs what you wish.ô

óThis is nonsense,ô snapped Theodore. óI have been cheated here.ô

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delman. óBy who? Cecil John Rhodes or Charles Rudd? Both can buy and sell you a thousand times over with the small change in their pockets. Taberer perhaps? Are you not aware that Mister Taberer has several very successful claims and at least one hundred and fifty compound niggers working for him? He has millions in the bank. I know this because, Mister Isaacs, I am a trustee of that very institution. And what of Tom? Civil Servant you think? His family is English nobility. He is a Belted Earl or perhaps a Viscount. Something like that. The gold ring he wears on his pinkie bears his family crest. Important people have such symbols of their status, Theodore. You obviously have no such signs of your forebears, yes? Regardless, Sir Thomasô title is not of consequence here, however all the funds and properties that accrue to his title are of considerable consequence. I can promise you, Thomas does not need to cheat at cards for money or status.

óYou, however, are a different matter. I must ask this: who are you really? A Jewish merchant who handed money to a man who easily tricked you into believing he was a man of the cloth? You didnôt check his credentials? This alone shows a level of fiscal naiveté hardly typical of the important businessman you pretend to be.

óYou then hired a known villain ï a notorious robber, killer and cattle thief ï to hunt down and kill this irreverent gentleman.ô

Theodore was staggered. óScotty? But it was you who introduced him to me. You said he was the solution to my problemô

óProve it,ô Yetta Yudelman said definitively. óNate? Explain, as you would to a police constable, what you saw when Mister Isaacs met with the notorious Scotty Smith recently?ô

óI saw the bandit Smith and this man in deep conversation,ôrecited Nate Yudelman, blandly gazing over Theodoreôs head at a shelf of whisky tumblers. óAfter which they shook hands. As if they had reached an agreement on some matter. The brigand Smith, then left for the Cape in pursuit of the man who is, if we are to believe *Mister* Isaacs, a man of God who stole money set aside for a House of Worship.ô

Yetta Yudelman nodded, standing. óThis leaves you, Theodore, owing me ï a simple, handicapped woman struggling to build a business ï thousands and thousands of pounds. All of which is documented, needless to say. At which point I must enquire, what documentation do you have which might contradict my papers?ô

óThe money owed excludes tonightôs markers, dear,ôinterjected Nate Yudelman, laconically dropping Theodoreôs IOUs onto the table where they lay as defeated as his Royal Flush on the green baize tabletop.

óWhich funds, by-the-by, I require by close of business tomorrow,ôconcluded Yetta Yudelman, turning on her small heel and walking away, behind Nate.

She stopped briefly, turned.

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rink on the house before you leave, Mister Isaacs. I

ple to whom Iôve just given a good old-fashioned rogering.ô

Theodore could hear from the bar the raucous laughter of his erstwhile poker friends: it sounded like the baying of maddened hounds in counterpoint to Auntie Cockeyeôs coffee grinder cackle.

He looked briefly at the poker hands on the table, flipped his Royal Flush onto its belly, as Nate Yudelman had once done to his wife. Did the same with the other cards, closing the curtain on his defeat.

Noticed absently that the backs of the cards were red as spilled blood.

Other, that is, than the Ace of Hearts in Tabererôs four-of-a-kind hand.

Its back was blue.

That was when he realised he was what Rhodes had called a pigeon.

Plucked, bluffed and thoroughly reamed, Theodore stood slowly, thought briefly of Delphinia Adelheit Witbooiôs words the last time he had seen her as he left his home two days before.

ôThe torture of a bad conscience,ô she had stated grimly to his departing back, ôis the hell of a living soulô.

Theodore left the bar and walked home, the sounds of derisive laughter and cascading shoes ringing in his head.

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Down went the owners – greedy men whom hope of gain allured: oh, dry the starting tear, for they were heavily insured. – W.S. Gilbert.

Leah was not at her window when Theodore bumbled through the door and into the tomb that was his house. He slumped dumbfounded into the cushions of the settee, slack-jawed and as an ox in an abattoir the instant after the butcherôs bolt strikes it between the eyes.

Theodore did not hear the ticking of the grandfather clock in the parlour corner. Did not, for once, listen for Leahôs disturbed and unhappy breathing, whiffling down the passage from their bedroom. Did not hear the creaking of wooden roof beams or the night insects clicking and chirruping their moonlit concert in the tamed wild outdoors.

Heard only the screaming uproar of a house utterly soaked in the noise of a tomb.

Noise is not always just the sound of passing traffic or the conversations of random passers-by. Noise is sometimes the shattering din in your own head and which obliterates all other sound. It turns your mind to jam, preventing your brain from assimilating what happened just an hour before, when your great triumph crashed so awfully into the dirt. When your dignity and absolute innocence was shredded and tossed into your face like an old rag, not because you were a devious son of a bitch who had it coming, or as an act of revenge for some act perpetrated by you on those people who now so comprehensively dismissed you as a having absolutely no value.

For none of those reasons.

Rather, you were stripped of every iota of your self-respect for being a person who had allowed himself to commit that most fatal of flaws. That is, unquestioningly and unconditionally being a Jew who allowed himself to trust.

ôSo? Who does one trust in business?ô Yitzhak asked. ôWhen your father and I did business, we spoke not so much of the monetary size of a deal or profit margins, but rather the characters we encountered. Iôm sorry to say we categorised people by their roots. As if their forefathers were guilty of creating what their sons became. What can I say? We were judgmental. We put square people into what we believed were square holes. Everyone does it.

ôFor instance, we both believed Armenians were particularly tricky to deal with in business. So too were Hungarians, for some reason. Indians we agreed were clever, but with the meekness of lambs. The Chinese said little. They were stoic, unemotional. I am fearful of people who show no emotion. As for Afrikaans businessmen: over the years they became very smart and tough in life and politics. No subtledty, of course. They would rather bully a good deal than negotiate or share a bagel and lox with you.

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what to expect from our own people, so there should be your own tribe jumps up and bites you in the *toches*. These betrayals do hurt a great deal. It could be because we have such a small community. The man you are planning to crook tomorrow could be sitting next to you at synagogue tonight. He may have had a father on the same boat as yours, fleeing Poland or Lithuania or Russia. Or, I suppose, Germany, not that long after.

óListen, there are always exceptions. I had one customer, a nasty little runt by name of Giesenow. He had the cunning of a rat, always looking to snatch money out of the cash register when you werenôt looking. *Oy*, that Giesenow ï he was one of those people who enter a revolving door behind you and comes out the other side in front of you.

óAuntie Cockeye was of the same ilk, as Theodore had discovered, and he was soon to get more of the same treachery. It was just hours after Theodore had been exposed as a card cheat, Yetta and Nate Yudelman presented themselves at his front door.

ólt is at this point that my father recognised within himself a side he did not know he possessed. It was, shall we say, his David. Let me explain ...ô

Dulled, Theodore invited them in, asked Delphinia to ensure Leah stayed in her room for a short while. Shut the door behind you, please. Thank you.

Theodore sat opposite the midget and her husband, saying nothing. Waiting.

ólt is clear,ô Yetta Yudelman began, óthat you are in great debt to me in my capacity as the owner of a business which loaned you funds to build a synagogue, and as the proprietor of an entertainment emporium which provided you with funds for your personal leisure activities. Yes?ô

Theodore nodded, recognising that sometimes there is no sense in arguing or trying to defend yourself. The odds are simply too precipitous.

ól have here an accounting of your debt,ô Yetta continued, smoothing out the pleats of her frock. óPlease look at it and let me know if you concur with its contents.ô

Ironskull Yudelman coolly placed several ledger sheets before Theodore, who snatched at the pages, sorted them out and lined them up neatly in date order, as was his habit. He glanced at the pages blindly, not even bothering to try and spot anomalies.

ól suppose theyôre accurate,ô he shrugged. óYou made it very clear that you have what you call écevidenceôand that anything I say will be my word against yours and your cahoots.ô

ólt's *cohorts*, you asinine immigrant moron,ô snapped Yetta, carefully enunciating each word. óNot cahoots. Damn it, if you want to deal with us English, at least learn to speak our language properly.ô

Theodore sat back stupefied.

ól ask again, do you agree with these numbers?ô Yetta grated.

óYes,ô said Theodore. ól am forced to, I suppose.ô

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ing this amount?ô

gernails.

óWhen Scotty returns with é ô

Yetta burst into gritty peals of her uniquely ugly laughter.

Nate Yudelman, who had heard that laughter many times before, stood impassively to one side.

óYou really are such a simpleton, Theodore,ô Yetta Yudelman gasped eventually, wiping at her streaming eyes with a dainty ókerchief. óScotty Smith isnôt coming back with your money, for pityôs sake.ô

óHow do you...ô

ó é know?ô

óYes. How can you know for sure that he isnôt on the road back to Kimberley with my funds right this minute?ô

Yetta Yudelman gazed at Theodore and shook her head, almost pityingly.

óHow in Godôs name have you managed to survive this long?ô she asked rhetorically. óShow him the letter, Nate.ô

Nate Yudelman took from his valise a letter addressed to Theodore.

óThis will clarify matters for you,ô said Yetta Yudelman. She rose. óWhen youôre done reading it, we will discuss your problem further. Make some plan to pay me the large amounts of money you owe me.ô

Theodore read, while Yetta and Nate Yudelman watched him as dispassionately as two pythons sizing up a terrified rock rabbit.

óI have read that very letter,ô said Yitzhak, óand found other communications relating to what happened. I have pieced together how a trap of opportunity was set and how my father fell into its pit and was picked clean, like a chop bone. I have read correspondence from the kist and added my fatherôs own recollections to me many years later when he recognised that some secrets are not worth keeping in death.

óThis is what happened.ô

Theodoreôs letter to the London Rabbinical College had been received and promptly responded to by the Chief Rabbi, who dictated a letter to his clerk ï a sour, heavily bearded man who once had aspirations to become a Rabbi himself but was found to be to lacking in empathy and the skills necessary to tend to flocks in Europe or anywhere on the worldôs frontiers.

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In his tiny pocket of a windowless room at the Rabbinical College, the clerk had meticulously transcribed the Chief Rabbiôs response to the letter from Africa and sealed it with red wax.

The Chief Rabbiôs letter informed the writer, a certain Mister Theodore Isaacs of Kimberley, that as soon as a graduate Rabbi could be identified, he would be sent forthwith to the new town. The letter confirmed to the writer that, as promised by Mister Isaacs, there would more than adequate funds to provide sustenance for a Rabbi as well as for the building of a synagogue, the construction of which he understood had already commenced.

Such were the guarantees that Theodore had included in his original letter. He did not want the Chief of Rabbis to think for one second that Theodore Isaacs belonged to a deprived community.

The Chief Rabbiôs letter was not sent immediately though. The clerk had some small issues to deal with before despatching the Chief Rabbiôs reply.

First, the clerk sent his own letter to a cousin (on his motherôs side) who he knew had lived in what was now called Kimberley for a few years. The clerk and his cousin corresponded regularly. She had travelled to Africa on a Union Line ship to seek a new life and fortune away from the harsh European winters which chilled her blood.

In Cape Town, she had listened carefully to the talk of locals in the tavern where she had found work as a dishwasher and was (as usual) the butt of derisive comments from the local drunkards, whose pockets she would deftly pick later by way of revenge to supplement her meagre income.

The talk in the Cape at the time was, of course, the fortunes being made at the diamond diggings in New Rush, and that is where she saw opportunity not just knocking, but rather bashing the door off its hinges.

She travelled inland by ox wagon with the tall, angular man she had met and married on a drunken whim in the pretty city at the bottom of the flat-topped mountain.

They were a freakish looking couple. He stood well over six feet tall, she was tiny. Nobody knew or questioned the cause of her bizarre eye problem or the illness responsible for obliterating every hair on her body.

To some observers, it appeared as if, despite the huge disparity in physical dimensions, the man was either terrified of his wife ï or was simply happy to be subservient.

In Kimberley, the strange couple exercised extreme patience, waiting for the right opportunity to strike ï and to make their fortunes.

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kôs letter, penned as the prelude to a plan trundling Cousin Yetta, an opportunity has now presented itself. It will most certainly be mutually profitableô.

After the clerkôs idea had been outlined, he concluded, ófondly, as ever, Louô.

The clerk strolled to the shipping office and despatched the letter to his cousin. He then returned to the Rabbinical College to deal with the daily aggravation of his mundane job.

The response to the clerkôs letter to his cousin arrived back in London four months later, such was the pace of the postal service.

She had enthusiastically replied that she absolutely loved the skeleton of the idea her cousin had presented, bade him hurry to Africa at his earliest opportunity, and that she and her husband would set about the groundwork, sizing up the locals and preparing for their bonanza.

Raising a stake to fund the plan was simple enough. She understood alcohol and its effect on diamond diggers celebrating a good strike; that is, a booze-sodden man believing he was being led to a bed containing a warm and willing woman is unguarded and generous.

On the other hand, the womanôs lanky husband understood how a good old billyclub would achieve the same result, but in a much shorter time. Another difference between the two methods was that while some of the womanôs victims awoke satisfied (despite having had their pockets emptied as they snored happily) the manôs victims seldom had the chance to wake up again.

New Rush was not a place where the constabulary actively investigated men with their heads caved in.

It was only later, when the stagecoaches began bringing in more and more people, when it became Kimberley, that formalised law and order was established.

Meanwhile, back in London, the Chief Rabbi finally appointed a young graduate Rabbi to travel to the nascent community and told his sour clerk to write a letter of introduction for the young cleric who, with the letter tucked safely in his coat pocket, excitedly boarded the ship a month or two later.

The young Rabbi was thrilled at the prospect of an adventure in Africa, of building a new community under the stars and in a climate where the rain didnôt, for heavenôs sake, pelt down in torrents every three minutes.

On deck a week out of Southampton, the young man was surprised to see a familiar figure approaching him, waving.

ó*Shalom, Rov,*ô the man called out cheerily.

The Rabbi peered at the man through the gloom, recognising him, then realising he must surely be mistaken because the context did not make any sense.

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hed Rabbi, when he attached a name to the face coming

lerk!ô he said.

Beaming (because he was an affable soul) the Young Rabbi uncertainly extended his hand, which Schwartz warmly trapped in his own.

ôWhat on Earth are you doing here?ô the young Rabbi asked.

ôBecoming a Rabbi,ô said Schwartz offhandedly.

The young Rabbi was confused.

ôI donôt understand. Did the Chief Rabbi send you along as my assistant? He said nothing to me.ô

ôThe answer is in the waves, *Rov*,ô said Schwartz, gesturing grandly at the blackening Atlantic. The Rabbiôs eyes automatically followed Schwartzôs hand.

ôI promise to say *Kaddish* for you, *Rov*,ô said Schwartz calmly.

ôI still donôt under é ô

Schwartz roughly grasped the Rabbiôs thin right forearm in his own strong hands and jerked the young man off balance, pulling him, stumbling, towards the railing. The Rabbi snatched feebly at Schwartzôs coat with his fingertips, grabbing the jacket lapel with his free hand, desperately seeking some purchase with shoes that slipped and skidded on the damp decking.

ôPlease please pleaseé ô the Rabbi whimpered as he slapped pitifully at Schwartz, who simply grunted and clasped his left hand over the manôs pleading mouth, causing the Rabbiôs *yarmulke* to fly off and be whisked away by the sea wind.

Irrationally and automatically, the Rabbi promptly let go of Schwartzôs lapel and snatched at his head, conditioned by years of study to cover his headôs bareness in the eyes of God.

The momentary distraction allowed Schwartz to shove the Rabbi backwards, hoisting him half over the railing, the flailing manôs feet lifting off the deck, kicking impotently at Schwartz who felt little or no impact.

The Rabbi battled desperately to find any sort of leverage, impotently trying to strike at Schwartz, who simply chortled darkly at each insipid blow.

The two men were about the same height and build but Schwartz was, compared to the young Rabbi, brutally strong.

There is no real opportunity for physical activity or bodybuilding in the life of a youth absolutely consumed by Talmudic study. And contrarily, natural strength was just about the only gift Klaus Schwartzman had ever given his son, even if it hadnôt exactly been presented with love and tenderness.

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of strength flagged, the sparse muscles in his thin body when Schwartz decided heôd had enough of toying with the desperate man, the struggle was done.

As nonchalantly as sealing a letter, Schwartz hoisted the floundering Rabbi off his feet and tossed him overboard.

He didnôt even bother to watch the man plunge into the roiling sea.

Satisfied, Schwartz strolled down to the cabin occupied by the late and as yet unlamented Rabbi.

The door was locked.

óSuspicious bastard,ô thought Schwartz, irritated, and strolled down the corridor, tapping on the door of the stewardôs room. A young, fresh-faced man in white jacket and black trousers opened the door.

óLocked myself out of my cabin,ô said Schwartz tersely. óI canôt find the key anywhere.ô

óAh, yes Rabbiô said the steward, not seeing beyond the heavy black beard and orthodox black clothing. ó15C? Iôll get me master key.ô

In the cabin, after going through the dead Rabbiôs worldly goods and tossing out of the porthole anything not of any obvious use, Schwartz lay back on the bunk, fingers laced behind his head, revelling in self-satisfied smugness.

He had found the Rabbinical Collegeôs letter of introduction, still sealed shut with wax, in the young Rabbiôs *siddur*

Arrogantly, he had kissed the letter and tossed it and the *siddur* into his valise.

óNow you will see whoôs a useless piece of dog *sheisse*, papa,ô he said to thin air, then rolled over and went to sleep.

With the only possible obstacle to the plot currently on the floor of the Atlantic, the cousinsô plans flowed perfectly from there. Like a smaller version of Wellingtonôs decisive victory at Waterloo, but without a shot fired.

õThat was the beauty of being Wellington,ô Yitzhak commented. õWaterloo was a victory for a coalition of countries against Napoleon. History, though, has recorded it as being Wellingtonôs victory alone. Schwartz was just one part of a coalition, and even though he was a main plotter, the people in Africa, led by Yetta Yudelman, were essential to his small coup.ô

Schwartz met up with Nate Yudelman in Cape Town a day or two after the ship docked. Nate had travelled by stagecoach to meet Schwartz, to confirm that not only were all their forces firmly in place, and that the victim was blissfully unaware he was currently funding his own downfall.

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eton immigrant who is a minor businessman,ô Nate Yudelman explained. óHe is essentially uneducated. I suspect his wife wrote the letter to the Chief Rabbi. She is English and apparently a former chambermaid or something equally menial. In other words, there is no great intellect in either of them. Isaacs has some basic bookkeeping skills. Christ alone knows how he made his money, but he has lots of it.

óYetta, by the way, is now a trustee of the bank, so she has access to evidence of this manôs earnings. He is affluent without being absurdly rich. Isaacs is involved in a thriving stagecoach business, so our plan will be worth the very minimal risks we will be taking. In fact, there are no risks. Yetta has everything covered. In short, this man is exactly what weôve been waiting for.ô

óWhat of the other people in the stagecoach company?ô

óOf no consequence,ô Nate Yudelman said. óThe Gibson brothers work with Isaacs, but have very little to do with him outside of business hours. The brothers hunt and drink in their leisure time. Isaacs sits meekly with his wife and child drinking tea and reading books. He believes himself to be a scholar of sorts.

óIn short, all you have to do, my dear Schwartz, is behave like a Rabbi, and weôll be home free.ô

óEasy as plucking a chicken,ô Schwartz nodded.

Or a pigeon.

And so the choreographed liberation of Theodore Isaacsô funds was unrolled and flawlessly manipulated until some months later, when Schwartz the *Goniff* left for the Cape on the Thursday stagecoach, his valises stuffed with Theodoreôs and the congregationôs cash.

The departing Schwartz resisted the urge to look out the stagecoach window at poor forlorn Theodore Isaacs, standing on a dusty road, dimly waving goodbye to his Rabbi and his money.

He resisted looking back because, frankly, craning his neck was not worth the effort ï and besides, Schwartz was very comfortable in his leather stagecoach seat.

Systematically sucking Theodore Isaacs dry was simpler than anyone had dared to believe, Schwartz thought. Mind you, the death of the one Gibson brother was extremely fortuitous in that it so comprehensively exhausted Theodore he could barely think straight.

So too was Isaacsô boyôs unhappy ending extremely providential.

Unplanned for sure, but one adapts when opportunity presents itself. Bad luck for the brat, good luck for us, Schwartz would later tell Auntie Cockeye as they clinked celebratory glasses.

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intention of getting even halfway to Cape Town.

h at the first rest stop when the horses were swapped, and strolled off to meet the man in the overcoat, standing alongside a two-horse cart, as planned.

óSchwartz, old son,ô said the overcoated man. óGood tae see ye again.ô

óAnd you,ô said Schwartz, tossing his bags into the back of Scotty Smithôs cart.

óI gather everything went going accordinô tae plan?ô

óOf course,ô said Schwartz tersely. óThe fool handed over every bean he had. And some beans he didnôt have. It is now up to Yetta to lure young Theodore Isaacs into the next phase.ô

óSheôll do it. Trust me,ô said Smith. óJump up, Schwartz. Iôll take ye to the house in Free Town, then Iôll hasten back tae Kimberley. Just in case the Jewboy takes the bait sooner ratherôn later.ô

Smith peered narrow-eyed at Schwartzôs impassive features. óNo offence? I ken yeôre also a Jew.ô

óNo offence taken,ô said Schwartz gruffly. óI hate every one of the bastards.ô

Grunting, he clambered onto the cart.

óGet me to Free Town. I need to dump these undertaker clothes and buy something more in keeping with being an affluent man in Africa.ô

It was a dayôs ride to Free Town, where Schwartz was settled in at a small farmhouse on the outskirts of the town. Smith stored the cart in the barn, saddled his big stallion and rode through the night to Kimberley.

Two nights later, sitting around the poker table in the *Rat and Badger*, Scotty Smith spotted Nate Yudelman ushering in a short man who was nervously obliterating the brim of his porkpie hat.

óChrist, that was easy enough,ô he thought, spotting Nate Yudelman touching his forefinger to his nose in the time-honoured signal that says: *Pigeon enters stage left*.

The next phase was underway.

óSo, whatôd you have in yer hand, ye scourge of the Sassenachs?ô the player with the tossel cap and walrus moustache demanded of Smith, breaking his reverie.

óPay up and Iôll gladly tell ye,ô said Scotty Smith, sucking at the whisky and instinctively sensing his weapons, loving their heft against his body.

Nate Yudelman drifted across to Smith.

õThe mug has arrived,ô Ironskull Yudelman whispered.

Scotty Smith looked at Theodore and pushed back his chair.

óAye, weel, deal me oot,ô he instructed the dealer genially. óIôll be back shortish to take the rest a ye cash. And mind, donôt ye steal a cent, ye heathen brigands.ô

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ı the shoulder and stalked towards Theodore, hand

õTake careful note of the hardware Iôm carrying, ye damned kike,ô he thought, shifting his body position marginally, allowing the coat to fall open, displaying his arsenal.

From that point, Smith, Schwartz and the Yudelmans would gloat several weeks later as they divided the piles of cash on the table before them in a suite in the now completed hotel, it was all as simple as shelling peas.

All it took was a deft card sharp ï such as Tom the Decidedly not-belted Earl ï to deal the hand of a lifetime to Theodore.

Easy-Peasy.

In his sitting room Theodore dropped on the table the letter from the Rabbinical College introducing a Rabbi surprisingly not named Schwartz. He glared at Yetta and Nate Yudelman.

õYou have robbed me.ô He said. õPlain and simple. You have robbed me.ô

õRobbed?ô Yetta Yudelman pondered, sinking into the easy chair. õWell, call it what you will if it makes you feel any better.ô

õWhat else would you call it?ô

õWe think of it as opportunity presented. We are simple business people looking to scrape a meagre living from the soil of this accursedly bountiful land.ô

õWhy me?ô Theodore implored. õWhat did I ever do to you?ô

Yetta Yudelman burst into her grating grackle laugh.

õMy dear boy,ô she scoffed. õThis isnôt personal. This is about fortuitous circumstances. An opportunity presented itself and we have simply capitalised. It could have been you or Perilly or some other gullible fool. All they need is money and ignorance and the rest is easy. My cousin Lou and I needed to simply wait for opportunity to raise its hand.

õWe agreed that Kimberley was the best place to be ï the diamond rush saw to that. We could have fleeced diamond diggers or talked people into, shall we say, handing to us a share of their businesses in exchange for our é discretion. But we chose to wait for the best opportunity ï the appropriate time for Lou to leave London for Africa. Patience, Mister Isaacs. It is clearly a greater virtue than, for instance, praying to God every Friday night. Yes?ô

õThere is nothing spontaneous about how we work,ô Nate added. õDo you know that those awful ticks which infest animals in this Godforsaken country can actually wait for years and years on a bush for cattle or goats ï or people ï to pass by. These ticks attach themselves to the passing beasts, sink their little teeth into their hostôs hides and gorge themselves to bursting point with the animalôs blood, then drop off, happily replete. Think of yourself as a passing ox.ô

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óOf course,ô added Yetta Yudelman, ówe have no issue if you are currently thinking of us as ticks, Theodore. We have thick skins, do we not, Nate? We attached ourselves to you, Theodore. So terribly sorry, but it was that opportunity thing. You understand, surely?ô

óBut there are so many other ways of earning money in this place,ô Theodore said bleakly.

óAh, but this way is so much more fun.ô

Theodore sat hunched in frustration, arms encircling his knees.

óNow that youôve got every penny I have, will you leave me and my family alone to get on with our lives?ô

Nate Yudelman shifted ominously in his seat.

óYou really have missed the point, Mister Isaacs,ô he said. ôWe do not believe a chicken should be simply plucked and left on the kitchen counter. We believe it should be stuffed, roasted and consumed, right down to the parsonôs nose. Remember, you owe us for your poker losses, not just the money for your synagogue supplies. We cannot simply write off that money as if it was just a minor bad debt. That would be poor business. What would people make of us? No, no, sir. We wish to have our pound and a half of flesh, paid in full.ô

ôI have nothing left to give you.'

óReally?ô asked Yetta, óYou have this house, yes?ô

ôIt is my home.ô

óAnd you have your health too, yes?ô

ôMy health?ô

óYour apparently very good health, Theodore. And a thriving stagecoach company too.ô

ó*Red Star Line* is not my company. I cannot take funds from the company to pay gambling debts.ô

óAh, but hereôs the thing,ô Yetta rasped, ówhile we have no desire to touch *Red Star Line* funds, the company is in a way an asset for us é a means to an excellent end.ô

ôI do not understand.ô

óOf course you donôt, Theodore, so let me explain it to you. I will use simple words so as to not confuse you. Are you listening very carefully?ô

ôDo I have a choice?ô

óSee, Nate?ô Yetta Yudelman turned to her husband. ôI told you he would eventually come around to our way of thinking.ô

She turned back to Theodore.

óHereôs how this will work.ò

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For an hour, in precise detail, Yetta Yudelman explained how the diamond companies had realised that the value of diamonds depended on their very rarity. This rarity would be threatened if diamond companies instituted a fixed price, forcing people to hold on to their stones until the price improved. It was something Rhodes himself understood all too well, recognising the potential damage an uncontrolled diamond-flooded market might wreak.

Indeed, De Beers was gobbling up control of all the diamond mines in the Crown Colonies, but (to their chagrin) had no control of the German-controlled South West Africa or the *Boer* Republic diamond mines.

The last independent Kimberley diggers who ferociously clung to their claims found themselves being squeezed out by price control and taxation, recognising that they were receiving less than real value for their stones.

Happily for them and their fellow-diggers in the *Boer* Republic just down Boschoff Road, there would always be a demand for diamonds é and everybody knew their value would inevitably increase sooner or later.

ôIt is simple mathematics,ô Yetta Yudelman explained patronisingly to Theodore. ôDoes one take a chance on earning ï off the books ï twice as much for a stone for which De Beers is prepared to pay a pittance? Or does one merely accept that hard work will be rewarded in due course according to the decrees of a board of old men? Let us not even think about punitive taxation. Of course, if there are willing sellers, it assumes there are willing buyers. Yes?ô

Business norms had not changed a jot since the first entrepreneur bartered a handful of seashells for a warm bison hide back when bankers wore pelts and painted their faces with henna.

ôIt is simple supply and demand,ô Yetta Yudelman added. ôCertain people want diamonds and are prepared to pay top price. They in turn have their own customers who wish to turn diamonds into money.ô

ôBut é why?ô

Yetta Yudelman peered searchingly into Theodoreôs face and shook her head.

ôLand,ô she sighed. ôMoney buys land. Territory. This is why nations colonise and seek global empires. Money buys the men and weapons to take land that its occupants do not wish to simply hand over. The bigger the piece of land, the more men and guns are required.

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easury is already stretched to breaking point due to decades of colonial expenses. The British government continuously need funds. You must understand that sometimes colonising a country does not always result in the immediate rich rewards promised by whatever mineral wealth lies under that conquered landôs soil. Sometimes, the colonists experience losses. Do you understand this, Theodore?

óThe *Boer* Republic leaders, on the other hand, wish to see the backs of the British, who wish to take the land the *Boers* regard as rightfully theirs.ô

Yetta Yudelman snorted.

óRightfully theirs? We shall see é but believe me, Theodore, war is looming.ô

óWar?ô Theodore asked.

óRhodes has, shall we say, a special friend who is an important army man. Jameson,ô Yetta Yudelman rasped conspiratorially. óInteresting man, Jameson. A medical doctor, donôt you know? Came to Africa for health reasons ... like Rhodes. Jameson had acquired a great reputation as a doctor ... and was a confidante of the *Boer*, Kruger, and the nigger chief, Lobengula. Both were his patients. Talk about strange bedfellows.

óAnyway, Jamesonôs doctoring skills were noticed by Rhodes and in a trice, well, they were best of chums. Such is life.

óBut I digress. Right now, I have it on good authority that the days of the *Boer* are extremely numbered ï if Jameson and Rhodes have any say, which I hasten to add, they do.

óIn addition to this old *Boer*-Britain dance, we should also not forget certain tribal figures with their short stabbing spears. They would be overjoyed if all we settlers went away. These niggers of course do not want to buy or sell diamonds. They just want to be left alone é on land they claim is theirs. Ignorant savages that they are.

óSo, all white parties, seeing the massive potential in Southern Africa, particularly now that gold also seems to be in abundance in the *Boer* territories I am led to believe, require guns and money. And here is the conundrum, Theodore: the colonial powers cannot be seen to be illegally buying and selling diamonds to raise funds to finance their troops. Nor, obviously, can the diggers themselves openly flout the law and sell their stones on the illicit diamond buying market.

óIt is thus in everyoneôs interests that the secret sale of diamonds to willing buyers is in no way impeded. It is to everyoneôs benefit. They are just not allowed to do it openly.ô

óI am not sure what role I am qualified to play,ô Theodore said.

Yetta Yudelman sighed impatiently.

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al diamond buying is, well, illegal, and people who are deed. I am sure you have read the newspaper stories? The penalty for those apprehended includes lashes, which render a manôs back fleshless. There are huge fines and imprisonment too.ô

óI still do not é ô

óYou are testing my patience,ô Yetta Yudelman snapped peevishly. óI am personally not going to deliver diamonds for sale and bring back cash for Queen and country to use in their quest to acquire more land. Nor is Nate. Nor is Mister Rhodes or Mister Rudd or any of their friends and employees.ô

She looked pointedly at Theodore.

óIt is thus left to people such as yourself, who owe substantial debts to people such as me, who are entrusted with this task.ô

óMe?ô

óYou.ô

Theodore sighed.

óIn an act of pure charity on my behalf,ô Yetta said smugly óI will ask you to do this task once a week for only one month, starting next week. In six daysô time, that is. Yes? In other words, five trips. You will find a means of carrying illicit stones to Free Town where you will sell them to buyers we have identified and who will be waiting for your arrival. You will bring back the cash. In sterling, of course. None of that silly *Boer* Republic rubbish. Not worth the paper itôs printed on.

óYou will of course check to ensure the right amounts have been paid. If you argue with the buyers in Free Town, your throat will be cut and your body tossed into the nearest latrine. If you do not bring back to us the correct amount, your wifeôs throat will be cut. Simple?

óA few days after your first successful delivery, at a date we will provide, you will repeat the process. And so on and so forth.ô

óI cannot just leave my office and disappear for days at a time,ô Theodore protested.

óThis is not my problem I suggest you tell your partners youôre seeking new stagecoach routes. Theyôll believe anything.ô

óWhat if they donôt believe me?ô

óWhy should they not believe you?ô Yetta Yudelman threw up her arms, exasperated. óAnyway, itôs moot,ô she snapped grittily. óIf you donôt do this thing, Nate will visit your lovely young wife to explain your predicament. He will use his own presentation style, needless to say.ô

óWhen I have done this task, my debt to you will be scrapped?ô

óI will tear up the IOUs before your very eyes.ô

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word. There will be nothing in writing. Take the offer é or say farewell to your wife right now. Nate, if you will?ô

Nate Yudelman rose, hitched up his pants and headed towards Leahôs bedroom door, swinging his billyclub by its leather thong.

ôWait.ô

Nate stopped.

ôI do so love pushing confrontation to its very limits,ôYetta smiled.

ôI suppose I have no choice.ô

ôYes, once again, that is so.ô

ôThen of course I must do as you ask.ô

ôExcellent,ôenthused Yetta, extending a hand to Nate, who strode across the room and helped her to her feet.

ôI will not insult you by offering you my hand to shake, Theodore, but I will offer you a piece of advice which, I believe, relates to your religious beliefs.ô

ôYes?ô

ôWhen you are out in the dark, bearing packets containing hundreds of carats of illicit but flawless diamonds, with the policemen and militia of two separate governments sniffing around for suspicious-looking smugglers, with you knowing that your wife is alone and will be visited by Nate should you fail in your mission, when you consider all the nasty possible outcomes if you do not succeed, thatôs when you should remember the Eleventh Commandment.ô

ôThe Eleventh é ô

ôThou shalt not get caught, my dear Theodore.ô

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CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

A klap fargait, a vort bashtait. ï A blow is forgotten; a spoken word lingers on

The month that followed should have felt for Theodore like a dress rehearsal for purgatory, but it did not. Simplistically, he imagined that when he had completed his tasks for Yetta Yudelman, the nightmare would be over and he would be allowed to return to a semblance of the life he had sincerely believed ï until two months before ï would be eternally his.

She had, after all, given her word.

Trust is a witch armed with a bagful of evil, and Theodore realistically understood at another level that a manipulative harridanôs word was without any value. He realised that his future had become a coin-toss: the right call could mean everything would all be over in a month. The wrong call would serve to shuffle Theodore deeper into the web in which he had been so comprehensively snared.

Equally realistically for Theodore, there was no one he could reasonably turn to for advice. No real friends, no mentors, no white-bearded and worldly-wise *Rabbonim* to offer guidance out of this horrendous morass.

Certainly not the Gibsons.

There could be no counsel from Leah, of course. Theodore recognised that Jacobôs death had not just led Leah to the edge of an abyss deeper than his own, it had gleefully shoved her in. There seemed no possible way she could be whole and happy ever again.

There was for Theodore a sensation that despite living in a sizeable and airy house, he might as well have been in his rusty nook on the ship from Europe, or the windowless gloom of the *Katzes Bording House* closet with its nail for a cupboard.

The only differences, thought Theodore, were the smells: gutted fish on the ship, cheap scent wafting through from the whoresô rooms in Cape Town, and now, in Kimberley, the worst of all ï the stench of humiliation.

Theodore sat, invisible again, waiting for his first assignment. Similarly unseen and unheard, the schoolmarmish Delphinia Witbooi cleaned the house, cooked and generally performed the duties of a servant, although most of her time though was spent sitting with Leah at the window, holding her hand and crooning softly into her ear.

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r his office in the mornings, Delphinia would nod curtly to him and return to her ministrations.

Theodore, exhausted more by the anticipation of his first diamond run than his returned routine lack of sleep, would diligently complete his office work then return home to watch his wife fading before his eyes while he waited for the knock on the door. Sometimes he would nap for minutes on the parlour settee.

The grandfather clockôs basso chime at midnight would send him trudging to his bed where he would be met by Leahôs back, rising irregularly in her struggle for deep sleep.

The angry bumblebee snore was gone forever, replaced by mumbling as, in her sleep, Leah helplessly watched Jacob on his knees in the dirt, the óohô etched on his face.

In one of the very few cogent moments Leah had in the years left of her life, she told Theodore that her dream did not move.

It was as if the dream were a still photograph etched into her memory.

Jacobôs death was a portrait frozen in time.

Leah had no other dreams. None that she could remember, that is. When the frozen picture wasted away, just as a normal photograph will fade if left in the sunshine for too long, Leah would not move onto another dream. Instead, she would wake up briefly, murmur the boyôs name, then drift back into sleep, waiting fitfully for a happier picture to slip into view.

It never did.

ówhen will Leah recover from this torment?ô Theodore asked Delphinia a few mornings later.

Delphiniaôs answer was simple. ó*Je vrouw is bezetend door de Duivel.'*.

Your wife is possessed by the Devil.

ówy people do not believe in Devils and Angels,ô Theodore said.

óAnd yet, here is proof,ô Delphinia answered, óthat there is an evil thing which has trapped the *mevrouwtje.*ô She stared icily at Theodore. ól do not care what name you can to put on this evil. For me it can to be *de Duivel.* You can pick your own word.ô

ól cannot argue with you,ô Theodore said, adding sarcastically, óMaybe we should seek a Catholic to drive out the beast.ô

Delphinia huffed, mumbled under her breath, then returned to her cooing and crooning.

Addressing Leah ï but for Theodoreôs benefit ï Delphinia continued; ñAnd Enoch said, ñthe spirit of the giants shall be like clouds.ôò

She stroked Leahôs forehead, óGiants which shall oppress, corrupt, fall, content and bruise upon the earthô, *mevrouwtje.* Such is the evil in this place. Soon, you will be free of its grip, *mevrouwtje.* Very soon.ô

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is Enoch?ô

itings of Noahôs great-grandfather. It is not part of the *Bijbel* of the *Joode,* but it contains many wisdoms, *mevrouwtje.*ó

óDo we need to build an ark? Will it flood?ô

ó*Mevrouw* has made a joke. This is good.ô

Leah flashed a brief and extremely weak smile. óWill Jacob be coming home today? ó

óMaybe, *klein mevrouwtje.* Maybe.ô

óI cannot lose anymore babies,ô Leah said, clutching Delphiniaôs hand. óI cannot keep throwing babies away.ô

óBe at peace, *klein mevrouwtje.* Maybe Jacob will come home soon.

Jacob did not come home that day. Instead, at six in the evening, Nate Yudelman arrived like doomsdayôs messenger.

In the parlour he handed Theodore a worn leather satchel filled with papers.

óIf you are searched,ô Yudelman said, óthe British and the *Boers* will check the satchel and find papers. These papers are of no consequence to anyone on either our side of the fence or the *Boers'.*ô

óWhy am I taking a bag of papers to Free Town?ô

óYou are not. You are taking these.ô

Irosnkull Yudelman took from an inside pocket a tube made of rolled paper, which he shook gently. It made a sound like cockroaches trying to escape from a matchbox.

óThese are ten uncut diamonds,ô Nate Yudelman droned and handed the tube to Theodore. óYou will count them in my presence. Do it now.ô

Theodore spilled the stones on the table, counted them twice, placed them back in the simple paper tube.

óYou will deliver these stones on Friday.ô Yudelman continued. óThis gives you five days to plan. If you wish to simply put these diamonds in your pocket and take a chance you will not be apprehended, then so be it ï we can take the loss of a few stones. They may not search your person ... on which the diamonds will be hidden as you see fit. Cunningly, if you have any degree of guile.

óThat however, might be something of a gamble, and we know your rather poor history with gambling, do we not? Will you be able to stand the physical and financial punishment which will follow your being caught? Or live with the knowledge of what will happen to your wife in your absence? No? I thought not.

óIn brief then, how you complete your task is up to you.ó

Nate Yudelmanôs iron grey skull cracked into what might have loosely been defined as a smile. His teeth were the colour of toffee.

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He placed before Theodore a sheet of paper. It contained the venue and the names of the people he was to contact in Free Town.

óSo ï you will leave the satchel with our friends and return with another satchel in which there will be a substantial sum of money. Pounds, remember? Stirling, not *Boer* paper. I would suggest you count the money in the presence of your hosts in Free Town They are devious bastards. You will sign for the receipt of the money and they will securely lock the satchel. In your presence of course.

óMake sure there is no sleight-of-hand. I would truly be disappointed if you returned with a satchel full of old newspapers.

óOnce home, return to your house. Assuming you evade the authorities or your hosts who may choose to follow you into the bushes and hit your head with a *kerrie* and take back their money. I may remain in this house. Keep an eye on things, in your absence. To ensure your wife is safe. So to speak. Perhaps pleasure her in a variety of ways, yes?

Theodore bunched his fists and started to rise, but Nate Yudelman held up a placatory palm.

óFinally, please do not utter any veiled warnings about harming a hair on your wifeôs pretty little head. If I wish to, I will harm everything on her entire body. Do we understand each other?ô

Theodore nodded. He had heard most of what Nate Yudelman had said.

He knew exactly what he had to do ï and how he would do it.

óI shall return on Friday.ô Yudelman rose. óUntil then, Theodore, sleep soundly. If you can.ô

óIf there was one thing my father knew,ô said Yitzhak, óit was how to be unseen. He had been an invisible child and teenager, using the shadows and those hours when very few people were around to go about his business ... the schoolbooks, the clothes, the toys.

óEven as a partner in the *Red Star Line* he was anonymous. Working in a backroom while the Gibsons sought the spotlight, dealing with British colonial government people, mining magnates, town councillors to chivvy through route planning approval. The sheer force of the Gibsonsô personalities created a sort of unstoppable force. My father was never going to be like them. Instead, he stuck to what he did best ... working with numbers and logistics.

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construct profits, not to design bridges over uncrossable streams. The Gibsons were different ï they could see roads spewing throughout the empire, through valleys, over and around mountains. Theodore saw to the money being available to realise their visions.

ôIt was a partnership that worked well enough.ô

When Nate Yudelman left the house, Theodore sat back and planned in his mind a ledger of sorts: two imagined debit and credit columns into which he detailed his liabilities and assets.

Which tools he had, and which he did not.

What skills were available and which obstacles stood in his way.

Who could provide him with the wherewithal to scale any logistical mountain.

And if no one was available, devise a means of bypassing the problem.

Working out who he could use, and how..

He established very quickly that his very quiet demeanour and small physique did not position him as your archetypal diamond smuggler, whom he pictured as fitting the rangy, bestubbled and masked Scotty Smith mould, rather than the meek bookkeeper image which was Theodoreôs disguise.

And on recent evidence, he decided, he would forever look at people differently from now on. Rather than hopefully seeking out the good in people, he chose to work on the assumption that everybody wants something for nothing.

That people generally took, rather than gave.

Just like God, he thought sourly.

Who, he pondered, were the people who might stop and search him? Clearly not the affluent who would be sitting in their homes eating pheasant and sipping cabernet sent from the Cape vineyards. There would be civil servants ï policemen and soldiers who lived in modest barracks and prayed their government would give them some sort of pension to live on when they could no longer bear arms for Queen, country, town or militia kommando.

People, as Leah might have called them, with sod-all but the clothes on their backs.

The next morning Theodore paid a visit to Samuel Perilly and acquired two dozen tins of rolled cigarettes. Perilly exchanged the cigarettes for money without saying a word, unable to look Theodore in the eye. Like most of the community, he believed Theodore to be at fault for losing the synagogueôs collection fund. He was unaware of Theodoreôs own massive financial loss.

No one asked, so Theodore told no one the truth.

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ulously tweezed enough tobacco out of ten cigarettes to accomodate a single diamond in each, the repacked the cigarettes in their tins, assuring himself they looked absolutely normal.

Then he carefully laid another ten cigarettes on top of the diamond-bearing cigarettes. Much like a blanket over a really valuable mattress.

He placed this tin to one side. It would travel in his inside pocket.

In his valise, among the papers, he packed the normal cigarette tins.

On Friday morning, Theodore Isaacs dressed himself like a carpetbagging salesman ï those men who would weasel their way into the *Red Star Line* offices on a daily basis to try and sell him everything from horse liniment to hair embrocations. Theodore had observed the type and copied it.

A chamelon, he became, Yitzhak said.

Theodore hopped into his Scotch cart with Nate Yudelmanôs valise tucked between his feet and set off for Boschoff Road, hopeful that he would be stopped.

He was counting on it.

That first trip he was stopped twice ï once by two Colonial policemen (one a Sergeant) then on the other side of the border, by rifle-toting *Boer* militiamen commanded by a *Veldkornet*.

On both occasions, Theodore proudly announced that he was a Lithuanian and therefore neutral when it came to supporting either side in the ongoing *faribel* between *Boers* and Brits.

Of course he gladly offered to show his wares ... and presented a dozen cigarettes to both highest ranking officers .

As a gesture of continuing goodwill. To share with his men, of course.

Everyone smoked, particularly if the cigarettes were free.

ó Save yours for later,ô Theodore said, brazenly offering the British Sergeant a cigarette from his own tin, ó and try one of mine.ô

Knowing the policeman would take a cigarette off the top row.

Later, he did the same thing with the *Veldkornet.*

English and *Boer* each politely helped themselves to just a single cigarette off the top layer of the proferred tin. Just as Theodore imagined they would.

Who would think of searching a tin of cigarettes which a potential smuggler had, unsolicited, offered to policemen?

Both times, Theodore replaced the proffered cigarette with a loose Perillyôs cigarette as soon as he was out of sight ... so his tin would always appear full.

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Theodoreôs sole gamble was that neither officer would demand the entire tin. No one, he thought, would kiss a gift horse in the mouth, particularly after Theodore happened to mention offhandedly that he would be back this way every few weeks, and how thankful he was for the protection of these brave men in uniform ... and so on.

The *Boers* he met at a farmhouse outside Free Town a few miles off Boschoff Road were not the shifty-eyed *farbrekhers* he expected. Nor were they beefy farmers with murder in their eyes and blood in their teeth. Indeed, when Theodore looked beyond the bullet-laden bandoliers, the inevitable Mauser or Martini-Henry rifles close at hand, the dirt-impregnated khaki and the filthy bush hats hooded over unwashed faces, he saw the lonely desperation of men denied their families throughout the years of British Colonial rule.

He recognised that these feared *Boers* were just versions of himself.

They all seemed so small. So starved. So immersed in *tsores* worse than his.

There were no names exchanged, no handshakes, and little eye contact.

The *Boers* spoke among themselves in Dutch, which Theodore did not understand beyond a few words he recognised from Delphiniaôs biblical chattering. He recognised the names though; Kruger, for instance, spoken with reverence and pride.

Rhodes and Jameson, spat out of bitter mouths.

The smallest of the *Boers,* a scraggly bearded man of about Theodoreôs height, spilled the diamonds on the kitchen table and examined them carefully, prodding and poking and turning the milky stones until he eventually grunted with satisfaction. He signalled to one of his men, who brought across a valise identical to Theodoreôs.

The *Boer* opened it and laid sheaves of British Pounds in front of Theodore.

*ôTellen het geld,*ô he said, tersely. Then, when Theodore looked at him, bemused, he said, óCount the money, please.ô

Theodore played his first card.

ôI do not need to count it,ô he said, smiling. ôI trust you.ô

He gathered the money together and inserted the notes into the valise.

The *Boers* looked at each other, then at Theodore.

ôIf you gentlemen will excuse me, ô he said politely, ôI have a wife waiting for me at home.ô

The *Boers* respectfully stood back and let Theodore walk from the kitchen, followed by the smallest *Boer*. The man had left his bandolier and rifle in the farm kitchen.

ôI must ask you a question,ô the *Boer* said in perfect English as Theodore prepared to climb into the cart.

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óBy all means,ô Theodore answered.

óYou are a Jew?ô

Oy, here we go again, thought Theodore, but nodded anyway.

óSo was my father,ô said the *Boer*. óHis name was Hyman Kirschbaum. He travelled inland with the Trekkers more than sixty years ago. On the trek he married. My family name is now Kirsch.ô

Abstractly, Theodore wondered what *Pesach seders* were like in the Kirsch household.

óA man in Cape Town told me about the *Boerjode* when I landed in Africa,ô Theodore recalled. ól never imagined I would actually meet one.ô

Kirsch nodded. óWe ï my family that is ï have been completely absorbed into a new tribe. My wife and children are Christians of course, but I retain enough of my fatherôs teachings to hold on to some strands of Judaism. And he taught me English. The Dutch is from my mother of course.ô

Theodore shrugged. ól am afraid events have caused me to turn my back on a God who does not seem too fond of me.ô

óNot so, ósaid Kirsch.óYou walked out of here alive, didnôt you?ô

He slapped the horseôs rump.

ó*Gey gezunt*,ô Kirsch called as he watched Theodore ride back down the dirt road until he reached Boschoff Road and disappeared into the distance.

Theodoreôs trip back to Kimberley was without incident. The *Boer* militia waved him through, as did the the British. The British Sergeant pointedly asked if he had sold his cigarettes, and suggested Theodore ñvisit himò on his next trip.

Theodore naturally enquired of the Sergeant when he would next be on patrol, noted the date, and winked at the officer.

In Kimberely, he handed the cash to Yudelman, who counted it carefully.

óThe next trip,ô Theodore told him, ówill be a date and time I pick.ô

óFair enough,ô said Ironskull after considering the demand. óLong as you get the job done by end of this month.ô

The following week, Theodore took cigarettes as well as five cases of an excellent Stellenbosch *Merlot* in his cart. He presented one case of wine to the same British sergeant and then rode on until he inevitably met up with a new *Boer* militia patrol.

One of the *Boers* ordered Theodore to offload all the bottles for *ónderzoek'*.

All of them.

Which Theodore did, with a smile.

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each bottle up to the light.

Looking for diamonds or perhaps grape sediment?

He found neither and, after searching Theodoreôs pockets and the cart, and the harmless valise, he ordered Theodore (in Dutch) to take his colonial wine and go.

Theodore had the *Boer* militia man help him reload the cases of wine. The *Boer* officer refused Theodoreôs offer of a case and watched him wend his way down Boschoff Road, towards the farmhouse, where Kirsch and his men offloaded the wine.

ôOpen the bottles which have a very very small red spot on theirs corks,ô Theodore explained. ôThen break open those corks. In each you will find a stone. The wine, of course, you can drink when it suits you. It is a very good wine I have been told.ô

Kirsch and his men examined Theodore appreciately. One rattled off a comment to Kirsch, who smiled.

ôHe wants to know if you want to join us,ô Kirsch translated.

ôHe knows you speak English?ô

ôHe should do. Heôs my wifeôs brother. Jacobus.ô

On his third trip Theodore boldly had one of the *Red Star Line*s coach drivers harness eight horses to a stagecoach and take him on what Theodore told the Gibsons was a ôproposed new route into the *Boer* territoriesô.

On this trip only the *Boer* militia stopped him.

The journey was as easily explained to the Militia as it was to the Gibsons; it made sense to plan a new route which would be implemented when the friction between *Boer* and Brit was over.

When the stagecoach arrived at the farmhouse, Theodore told the driver it was a ôpossible stage stopô. The driver (who couldnôt care less) nodded, slid his hat over his eyes and took a nap inside the stagecoach, out of the broiling sunshine.

Theodore entered the farmhouse, greeted the group and handed over to Kirsch a copy of Nicholas Pikeôs *Abridged System of Arithmetik*. The arithmetical value of the book was of no use to Kirsch, but the book itself ï hollowed out just enough to conceal a dozen diamonds ï was almost priceless.

Theodore took the cash and nonchalantly popped the notes into his valise.

Who was to say, he reasoned, that an executive of Kimberleyôs foremost transport company would not be travelling with substantial amounts of money?

If stopped, Theodore reasoned further, he would ask whoever was in charge how they thought *The Red Star Line* paid for strings of new horses?

A cigarette salesman. A wine merchant. A well known businessman.

Masks all.

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For the fourth trip Theodore raided Jacobôs toy chest and unearthed a set of hollow lead toy soldiers made to scale by Britainôs Toy Company.

Theodore had bought the toys for a birthday Jacob would never celebrate.

Levering open the bottoms of a dozen toy soldiers and popping a stone into each Hussar ï each toy resplendant in red and yellow dress uniform and tall pillbox hat ï was simple enough: a flame and a penknife sufficed.

He would tell the British patrols ï if they asked ï that the toys were a Christmas present for his young son, who couldnôt wait to join the Colonial troops when he grew up.

He would tell inquisitive *Boer* patrols that his young son wanted these damned British soldier dolls for target practice.

You cannot beat jingoism or family ties when it comes to pulling the wool over the eyes of far-from-home troopers.

His last run, in which 30 carats of uncut diamonds were hidden in a smorgasbord of toy soldiers, cigarettes and wine bottle corks, also went without undue incident. By that stage, as planned, Theodore Isaacs was recognised by Boer and Brit as (in any language) as being a real *mentsch.*

The exchanges were completed with, as had become their custom, Kirsch and Theodore trusting each otherôs good faith and not counting Yetta Yudelmanôs last and most substantial shipment of diamonds or the *Boer*'s cash payment.

And so it was that Theodore shook hands with Kirsch for the last time and prepared to ride home.

ôWe will probably not speak again,ôsaid Kirsch. ôBut we will be seeing you.ô

Each *Boer* touched the brim of his veldt hat in brief salute to Theodore, who steered the Scotch cart in a small circle and headed for home.

He rode past the *Boer* Militia patrol without any fuss.

One more small road to cross.

It was in the salmon-coloured dusk an hour later ï and just a few hundred yards within the British side of the so-called Free State Line separating Crown Colony and *Boer* Republic ï that Theodore was stopped by a two-man British patrol and ordered to dismount.

The Sergeant was a man he had seen before. So too the Corporal who stood shiftily to one side scanning the gloomy horizon.

The soldiers were, at a glance, shabby contradictions to the British armyôs traditional spit and polish regimen. Both men were poorly shaved, their uniforms ill-fitting and their boots like filthy clods of dung welded to their feet.

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he had been unerringly correct in his original assessment of how his illicit diamond dealing escapades would finally unfold. He suspected that the two thugs had kept eyes on him, from a distance, right from the very first trip ï perhaps even from their vantage point in a dingy corner of the *Rat and Badger,* hidden behind mugs of ale.

The man in Sergeantôs uniform ordered Theodore to hand over the valise, which he opened and checked as Theodore stood meekly to one side. Satisfied all the money was there, the Sergeant nodded to his companion who stepped forward a pace, barring any possible escape route for Theodore.

óI have a message from Auntie Cockeye,ô said the Sergeant, sliding from its scabbard an army issue bayonet. Theodore noticed the bayonet had a rusted and bent muzzle ring and a jamlike substance in its blood grooves.

óShe says to tell you that your services are no longer required.ô

Theodore shut his eyes.

'Yisgaddal veyiskaddash shmeh robbo,' he recited under his breath.

Just in case.

In hindsight, he would tell Yitzhak, he had for once placed his faith in the right people.

It was Theodoreôs belief that, for *Boers* who traditionally hunted for the pot on a daily basis and who were seemingly all possessed a supernatural ability to shoot dead a pronking Springbok at a thousand paces, the simple act of putting a bullet between the eyes of a bayonet-wielding soldier and his chum (at half the distance) was as easy as opening a bible and saying: óOur father who art in heaven ...ô

A line of prayer and two distant cracks later, Theodore slowly opened his eyes and saw both men dead as kippers in the dirt. Each wore identical surprised looks on their faces. Kirsch and his two most trusted marksmen were already riding back to the farmhouse just outside Free Town.

They had a bottle of excellent Cabernet to finish.

Just a few hours later, Theodore strolled into the *Rat and Badger* and, without asking permission from anyone, pushed his way through to Yetta Yudelmanôs office where, he was sure, she and Ironskull would doubtless be waiting for their two yobs to deliver the last payment.

And, by the way, confirm that the little Yid was now worm food.

óThatôs where I found them,ô Theodore would recall, ócounting their eggs before the broken chickens arrived.ô

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To Auntie Cockeyeôs eternal credit she showed no surprise other than an accelerated oscillation of her loose eyeball when Theodore walked in. Nate Yudelman at least had the good grace to drop a whisky decanter on the floor and let loose a string of oaths and curses.

óAs you can see,ô said Theodore, óI have arrived safe and sound. I confess though é I am empty handed.ô

óWhere is my money?ô Yetta Yudelman grated, shifting uncomfortably on her cushions.

óYou must ask your two messengers,ô Theodore explained. óHowever I do not think they are in this area any longer. They seemed in a great hurry to leave when our transaction was complete.ô

óThere was no transaction. Theyôre my men, and you are lying,ô Yetta Yudelman grizzled.

Theodore was prepared.

óThis should clear any doubts ... you will recognise it, no doubt,ô Theodore said and tugged from his waistband the dirty, rusted bayonet, wrapped in a kerchief typical of those used by British military men when Griqualand evenings turned nippy.

Theodore dropped the bayonet on the expansive oak desk.

óJesus ï thatôs Frenchieôs pig-sticker,ô Nate Yudelman swore, peering at the weapon.

óYou are correct. It in fact his weapon. He asked me to present this é sticker? ... to you, Missus Yudelman. He wanted my assurance I would hand it to you directly. I did not question his reasoning. Also, he requested me to give you a strange but very specific message which I also do not understand.

óI am after all, just an asinine immigrant moron, as you know.

óHe said I must tell you that you should insert this dagger somewhere where, he says, the sun fails to shine. I think he means you must put it in a strongbox somewhere. For safekeeping perhaps?ô

Theodore gazed gormlessly at the Yudelmans.

óI am sure you will work out what it means,ô said Theodore. Quietly, he turned and left for home.

It was time to go.

Again.

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'Good-bye-ee, good-bye-ee, wipe the tears, baby dear, from your eye-ee.
Though it's hard to part I know, I'll be tickled to death to go.
Don't cry-ee, don't sigh-ee, there's a silver lining in the sky-ee.
Bonsiour old thing, cheerio chin-chin, napoo, toodle-oo, good-bye- ee.
ï First World War trench song written by Bert Lee and R. P. Weston

Leaving was easier than Theodore imagined it would be ï other than it had to happen quickly.

At least, before the bodies of the two Yudelman brigands were found.

The following morning, Theodore walked into the house and found Leah and Delphinia waiting patiently for him in the kitchen, Delphinia composed as ever, Leah confused, but uncomplaining.

As decided, two trunks were packed with basic clothing. There was the kist of course, and Jacobôs small toy chest.

Theodore had returned from a pre-sunrise visit to the *Red Star Line* offices that Saturday morning. Knowing it would be empty until Monday. He had carefully placed on Fred Gibsonôs desk a note which stated in spare words that Theodore and Leah ï and their servant, Delphinia ï would be gone by the time the office opened.

Do not follow us, Theodoreôs note requested.

ôI have taken from my loan account in the past few months several hundred pounds for my personal use,ô (Theodore wrote) ôMuch more than I should have, and without your approvals. I apologise. In recompense, I hereby transfer to you the deed to my home and all its contents. The keys and the deed are in the hands of Samuel Perillyôs daughter, Isabella. She is the one with the goitre.

ôThe value of the house will more than cover what I took from the bank account.ô

Theodore signed the note and left it under a small paperweight.

He did not mention that he and Leah would be travelling in a stagecoach belonging to *Red Star Line's* fiercest rival, the Zeederberg Company, which was based in the Transvaal Republic, but regularly travelled through Griqualand, using Kimberley as a way station.

CH Zeederberg had established a route from Kimberley to the Witwatersrand before the *Red Star Line* could jump the queue ï much to the Gibsonsô irritation ï and he now monopolised that route.

At mid-morning, the Zeederberg coach raced out of town carrying Theodore, Leah and, Delphinia Adelheit Witbooi, who sat next to Leah on the plush leather seat opposite Theodore, holding Leahôs hand.

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ves and small hats.

For several hours no one said a word. They alternatively gazed blankly out the window at scenery which remained uniformly flat, dusty and populated by ugly, flat-topped thorn trees, or dozed fitfully, or thumbed through an ancient copy of the *Diamond Field* newspaper, each thinking about what was, what is and what will be.

It was a coach filled with secrets for the three passengers, who bounced and joggled away from the town Delphinia had so definitively decided was Satanôs playground.

Half a day out, when Delphinia was certain Leah had slipped into a deep sleep, she leaned forward and gently tapped a dozing Theodore on the knee.

ôYou must know,ô she said when Theodore surfaced, óthat you saved the *mevrouwtje*.ô

óSaved? Well, whatever you want to believe,ô Theodore answered, yawning, ós all right.ô

ôYou are not understand, ôDelphinia persisted. ôYou have saved the *klein mevrouwtje and* the child.ô

óPlease, Delphinia,ô Theodore pleaded, óNo more Calvinist claptrap. We must stop pretending Jacob will miraculously return from his grave.ô

óNot the small boy, Jacob. The other child.ô

Theodore was exasperated. Heôd had enough.

ôYou arenôt making sense, Delphinia. Which other child?ô

ôYou must to listen,ô she implored, clutching both Theodoreôs hands in her own. óRemember when the *mevrouwtje* kept calling for baby, baby. Every night. We thought she was to calling the dead child.ô

ôYes, but I still donôt ...ô

ôYou must silence, *mijnheer,'* Delphinia said sharply. óI am explaining. In Dutch we say a woman *het rode roosje bloet.* It means the red rose is blooming again.ô

Theodore threw his hands in the air, exasperated.

óDelphinia, damn it é ô

ó*Rode roosje* is the bleeding time for women,ô she hissed impatiently. ôThe *mevrouwtje* told me she did not bleed for six months. I thought it was because the sadness had stopped her from being a woman while she grieved. But then, when I bathed her last week, I noticed her belly was é *zwellen*? Rounding? I placed my hand on her, *mijnheer.* There is a baby in the *mevrouw.*ô

óBaby?ô

ôThe *mevrouwtje* will have a child in maybe five months.ô

Theodore was stunned.

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ôI have delivered many babies for my people, *mijnheer*.ô

ôWhen did é ô

ôThe *mevrouw* was already with this child when your beloved Jacob passed.ô

Theodore stared at Delphinia, then Leah.

ôDoes she know?ô

'Ja. Once I was certain, I understood why the she kept saying she did not want to throw away any more babies. She knows of another child growing inside her and it makes her with the guilt. The unborn baby is why she waits for the boy Jacob to visit her. So she can say sorry for letting go his hand in the street, and to promise Jacob this new child was not created to replace him but was supposed to be a gift which could now never be shared.ô

The coach bounced over a pothole, jolting Leah awake.

She gazed at Theodore, as if recognising him after a long absence in solitary confinement. Theodore suspected she had, at some level in her sleep, perhaps heard his conversation with Delphinia.

ôDelphinia told you?ôshe asked timidly. Theodore nodded.

ôGood. I think everything will be perfect from here, Theo,ôLeah said. ôAbsolutely perfect.ô

But her eyes were still as dead as mucus.

ôPerfect,ôshe repeated, and fell asleep again.

Maybe it will, thought Theodore, and placed his hand firmly on the aged valise on which the Serif Montgomery Collingwood monogram still stood proud.

He patted it as lovingly as he would the head of a treasured Golden Retriever.

Life is not a straight line, he decided. It is a circle.

Inside the valise, snoozing snugly in its depths, rested wads of English Pounds which coincidentally added up to the exact value of the 30 carats of uncut diamonds in Yetta Yudelmanôs last shipment, and which Theodore had so efficiently and cunningly delivered to his friends in Free Town.

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ôThe treeless tract itself seemed a mournful and sad enough ï a despairing, bare, sandy veld, with hardly a sign of life except here and there a poor Boer habitation, and some carrion birds lying around a stinking bullock's trunk festering on the road and fouling the air with its poison half a mile away. The wind, playing with the horrible biting dust, sharp as needles ï sent its irritating particles to clog nose, ears and mouth, and drove the shapeless coppery clouds from one end of the uninviting sky to the other.ôï Louis Cohen (mining magnate Barney Barnatoôs cousin) on seeing what would one day become Johannesburg.

Theodore, Leah and Delphinia arrived in the *Zuid-Afrikaansche Republiek*, also known as the Transvaal Republic, in 1888.

The *Republiek* was filled with *Boers* who had lived in peace and prosperity since 1852. That is, if you discount skirmishes with every single local tribe ï from Baralaong to Ndebele ï the Portuguese (who took exception to their hold on Delagoa Bay being annexed by the *Boers*), and illness which ravaged the early pioneers.

Of course, said Yitzhak, there is no such thing as families without *faribles*. So the *Boers* fought among themselves, just to pass the time. Some left the fold and headed for Natal.

Most importantly, there were the omnipresent British who adhered to a paraphrasing of religious texts, which suggested that as one giveth, so should they taketh away. It all depended, as Auntie Cockeye had suggested to Theodore, on what minerals were available.

For instance, when gold was discovered in Bechuanaland (by a German, of all people) the British quickly annexed it.

Annexe, Yitzhak explained, is stealing on behalf of the Queen and was totally legitimate because the Colonial troops had more guns, pipers and artillery than the Bechuana people, who were happy to live their uncomplicated lives in the arid semi-desert that typified their home. They should only have known how much mineral wealth lurked just below the surface of the parched panorama that swept before them, all the way up to the exotic Okavango swamplands.

For the *Voortrekkers* who simply wanted to farm and keep black people and the British at armôs length, the Sand River Treaty in 1852 was like a gift from *De Heer.* The British happily signed away an area north of the Vaal River, granting independence to some 40 000 *Boers*.

Then, because it felt like Christmas, the British also gave the Orange Free State independent status.

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Boers in both these areas would have believed themselves united,ô Yitzhak suggested. Instead, the two leaders, Potgieter and Pretorius, were so used to having other people to blame for their misfortunes and they now had to depend on each other for familial *tsores*. They accused each other of trying to take over the whole country ï British, *schvarters* and all. Happily for all concerned, particularly their families, both men were already *alte kokers* and so before they died, the *Volksraad* ï the parliament ï ensured both territories were reconciled.

The *Boers* could now get on with the business of fighting the weather and disease and of course, the odd tribe taking exception to their farming methods. Of course, with the suggestion that there was more than just a sniff of gold in the *Transvaal Republiek*, the British decided that the honeymoon was over for the *Boers* and promptly annexed the Transvaal.

óGiveth, taketh away,ô Yitzhak noted.

This quite rightly miffed the farmers who protested. So, in 1881 the British again gave with one hand, and took with the other, and allowed the Transvaal to rule itself.

Except that this rule would be under the strict control of the British.

ôIn other words,ô Yitzhak interpreted, óyou can make your own *gehakte* herring, but your mother-in-law must supply the fish and the recipe and supervise the dismantling of the herring itself.ô

After more negotiations, the British sighed and restored full independence to the *Boers*, under Paul Krugerôs leadership, under the London Convention in 1883.

Conventions seemingly trump treaties.

Needless to say though, the discovery of gold on the Witwatersrand (by an itinerant digger named George Harrison) trumps everything including the word of God, the Queen and the Lord High Commissioner.

Into the territory flooded foreigners ï *uitlanders,* the *Boers* called them derisively ï and the relative tranquillity of the independent republic fell apart.

Spectacularly.

The epicentre was a farm called *Langlaagte.* It was where Harrison had struck gold and inadvertently created what would become Johannesburg.

It was into this broiling, dysfunctional *matzos* pudding that Theodoreôs clan arrived.

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ôThe mathematics,ô said Yitzhak, ówill tell you that when they reached *Langlaagte* it was about nine or ten years after they fled Kimberley. My father was sketchy about those intervening years. It seems he invested some money in farming and had, for some time, a successful sheep farm in the Orange Free State. He would tell me of barns filled with wool, which his workers sheared in the summer. The wool was sold to all comers ï British and *Boer* alike.

ôI can only assume he employed local *schvartzers* to do the herding and *schnipping* and whatever the hell it is that people do with sheep. I cannot imagine him on top of an aggressive sheep, shouting óstand still, damn it ï this is just a haircutô. Knowing my father, he probably presented an excellent argument in which the sheep were convinced to grow zips.ô

Yitzhak took a sip of his Manischewitz (it was a Friday) and continued.

óStock theft and the promise of gold just over the river was a strong lure ï not just for my father, but for the whole country. So he sold up and left for the Reef. A Reef, by the way, is not a place where fish live. It is ï and was ï the ridge in and around Johannesburg bearing the richest seams of gold in history.ô

It was here where he took his family, which now included another child. Delphinia helped Leah deliver the baby conceived in Kimberley ï a son who Theodore named Harold.

This time, the name had no significance. Theodore sought no biblical references, had a local doctor perform a circumcision (old traditions die hard), recited no blessings as he had done with Jacob.

ôIndeed,ô recounted Yitzhak, ónothing to do with his life had any religious significance any longer. My father took his belief and stashed it in the kist, along with his *siddur, yarmulke, tallis* and memories. Of course, there were no more Friday night *shabbats* either. No rituals to follow or even think about. My father had slammed the book shut as firmly as he could.ô

For Leah the intense jostling of the coach along potholed tracks as they rode away from Kimberley, the months of mental anguish after Jacobôs death and her poor health ï added to two days of hellish labour ï resulted in the baby Harold being as beautiful as a violin, but without any strings.

Despite Theodore and Delphiniaôs best efforts over the years, it was clear the boy was simple; he could neither write nor read, and had no grasp of numbers. Conversation was limited to the mundane ï food and security. He did display satisfaction in squishing cockroaches underfoot though. Harold could sit for hours examining the goop under his shoes.

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favourite spot in the kitchen and stare endlessly at Delphinia while sucking his thumb.

It was a habit he retained throughout his life ... perhaps, Yitzhak postulated, because at no stage did Leah ever show any inclination to mother the child at all.

ôMy father said Leah had days where she seemed almost normal. Sometimes she even appeared happy, he said, and thatôs when he was happy himself. They would talk into the night ... and then she would hear something echoing in the back of her head. She would stop talking in mid-sentence walk back through the corridors in her mind, finding some door way back in there; opening it and locking herself away, often for weeks at a time.

ôIt could not have been easy for my father, seeing his wifeôs eyes slamming shut,ô Yitzhak said. ôMaybe his decision to sell his land and leave for the Reef was because heôs had enough of the solitude his life had become ï or because he believed a bustling town might jolt Leah out of the pit in which she dwelt.ô

Or it might have been as banal as the lure of gold.

Regardless of the ówhyô, Langlaagte was where Theodore and his wife and child headed.

Once in the mining camp which was to become Johannesburg, the Isaacs family of three, plus Delphinia Adelheit Witbooi, set about doing what Jews do best: making a living and a comfortable home.

The town boomed as more gold strikes brought more mineral wealth and more people.

A hotel with electricity opened its doors. Hostels sprang up and houses were erected. A small hospital and a new university were built, as was a sturdy prison. Roads were tarred here and there, and specialist stores offering pricey clothes to the gentry sprang up in the bustling town centre.

All the while, Theodore worked 20 hours a day to achieve a start in life for his family.

ôHe did this and that, then some of the other,ô Yitzhak explained. ôWherever there are gamblers and risk-takers, my father reasoned, there is money to be made, and wherever there is money to be made, there is also money to be earned. There is a difference.

ôThere were times when he would slip away for weeks at a time,ô said Yitzhak, óand this made no sense to me until Delphinia told me he worked at times for a company called Wenela.ô

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l to Yitzhak, was an organisation that sent drivers with empty wagons into the furthest reaches of the country, returning weeks later, packed with strong, ignorant young men from the villages that dotted the Southern African landscape. Men who lived in mud huts with thatched roofs and kraals for the cattle and strange customs and religious beliefs that were (Delphinia insisted) óGodlessô.

These young men would be given spades and pickaxes and put to work underground for ten to twelve hours at a stretch, disappearing down shafts as cold as death and as deep as their worst nightmares to seek gold. They were housed in compounds and paid a pittance é but a pittance was sometimes better than nothing. One manôs earnings for the months of scraping in the rock layers for gold provided the wherewithal for an entire village to buy cattle or seeds or the makings of the traditional beer they brewed in giant clay pots.

The beer sometimes helped them forget the sound of men screaming as tunnel walls came tumbling down, as they did with alarming regularity, leaving their comrades mostly dead, but sometimes irretrievably buried alive.

Every now and then, survivors might be pulled out of the tunnels after a rock fall if they could be reached quickly enough and without added loss of life.

Many of those survivors were left hopelessly paralysed.

Thatôs what happens when the planet collapses on the human skeleton: fragile neck bones snap.

Wenela ï and the Native Recruitment Corporation, and later, The Employment Bureau of Africa ï had these tribesmen sign contracts when recruiters such as Theodore arrived at their villages.

The contracts were printed on linen. The content made little difference to the young black men Theodore scooped up. Few could read anyway. Venda, Xhosa, Tswana and Shangaans came to work and often die in the goldfields. If they survived, they would go back home wearing European clothes and veld hats and with cash in their pockets. They had to learn a new language called óFanagoloô, which allowed the white bosses to issue instructions to people who came from areas where English had never been spoken.

Fanagolo was mishmash of English, some Zulu and even a bit of Afrikaans. A mongrel language.

Theodore understood mongrel languages and displaced people. He was fluent in both.

He hated the Wenela job, but enjoyed the simplicity and naïve trust of the men he collected and deposited at the many mines on the Reef. He was fascinated by the distinction the mining companies made between blacks and whites on the mines.

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iners, black people were called mineworkers. This was so management would not be confused as to who was doing the ordering around and who was doing the actual work.

Many mineworkers returned year after year. The risk sometimes seemed worth it. They would never return to the gold fields with their families in tow though ï not because they did not want their families to witness their daily humiliation, but because the mine owners ruled that they most certainly did not want a massive influx of black people pouring into Johannesburg.

Everyone should know their place, the mining magnates decided from their loft at the Rand Club while swizzling gin and tonics.

It was the turn of a new century. Apartheid had arrived many years before the National Party made it law in 1948.

Theodore was not a mining magnate, of course. Rather, he was a simple transporter of human flesh for the mines.

People like Theodore were called ôblackbirdsô.

ôThat means,ô Delphinia stated heatedly when Theodore returned from one of his journeys into the hinterland, óyou are little more than a slave trader.ô

She had stopped calling Theodore *mijnheer* soon after leaving Kimberley.

Theodore agreed with Delphinia. He took all his remaining money, bought a sizeable piece of land on which he built a small house ï with a large chunk of ground set aside for a garden. Just a short distance away, he established a shop which began life as a general dealership selling everything from matches to paraffin to fruits and vegetables.

Over time it became Yitzhakôs second hand book shop.

Yitzhak, like his father before him, liberated the best books from the shop and added them to the private library in the modest house.

Can a man loot treasures from his own book shop, Yitzhak would often ask himself. His answer was yes, of course. Just as Theodore had justified stealing books from Cape Townôs schools all those years before.

The coconut does not fall far from the palm tree, Yitzhak commented.

A neighbour did the building; José Mandim was a Portuguese man who had moved to the Reef from the Portuguese colony of Mozambique. He arrived with his own aged father and set to work using his hands, well away from the dreary beaches, prawns and sunshine of the Portuguese colony.

ôGold or seafood?ô José would ask Theodore rhetorically.

ôGold or sheep?ô Theodore would answer, by rote.

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Years later, when Yitzhak was old enough, he joined Theodore in running the shop. Theodore had managed it single-handed, Harold being incapable of doing anything more than manual work, lugging sacks to and from the storeroom or helping people load stock into their wagons, grumbling as he did so.

When Yitzhak began working in the shop, Theodore cut back his hours to a less demanding fourteen-hour day, six days a week, closed on Saturday.

Saturday was *Shabbat*. For most of the last years of his life, Theodore honoured the Sabbath not for himself or his sons, but out of respect for his neighbours.

Shabbat for Theodore was nothing more than just another damned day.

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So he drove out the man; and he placed at the east of the garden of Eden Cherubims, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to keep the way of the tree of life. ï Genesis

óYou have never seen my fatherôs garden,ô said Yitzhak, ushering me through the small kitchen and onto a patio which overlooked a small jungle, dense with vines and elephant ears and strelitzia, interspersed between roses and begonia which stood shyly protected by a posse of gooseberry bushes, and shaded here and there by avocado and banana and paper trees.

óA bizarre gathering of African traditional and English country garden, not so? A different kind of roots, my father used to tell me,ô Yitzhak remarked.

There was no lawn because there was little room at all for grass. Instead, small cobblestone pathways allowed visitors (thereôd been a few, Yitzhak swore) to meander through this tiny Eden.

óIn my fatherôs garden,ô he said, idly plucking a dead leaf off a branch and allowing it to flutter to the ground, ćevery plant has its own name. Every single one of them.ô

There were no garden gnomes or silly fake flamingos disturbing the natural feel of the place, but there was a comprehensive irrigation system which Yitzhak had installed himself and which kept the plants extremely well nourished.

óThatôs the garden. It is important that you saw it before the story finishes. Now, letôs go inside ï Dora made us some carrot cake. A celebration, maybe...ô

He gazed over the lushness.

ó..because itôs nearly the end,ô he said, and led me indoors.

Yitzhakôs birth enraged Harold, who immediately greeted the babyôs arrival by trying to poke his brotherôs eyes out with a fork. Reprimanded, Harold skulked outside to sit under a tree, ostensibly to watch the passing parade of life trundle down Hunter Street, but actually unconcerned by anything beyond the cracked paving stones on the sidewalk.

The childôs birth was catastrophic for Leah, who took to wandering through the house at night, talking to herself.

Once, she was found by a constable who, at two in the morning, saw what he thought was the ghost of his beloved mother, marching down the street, calling out a name he could not identify. It was Leah in her nightclothes. In so small a community, the constable knew who she was and where she lived but had no clue why she was so comprehensively lost and alone just one block away from her house.

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Leahôs life had been spiralling for years. Like those twirling ballerina flowers which spin gently on the breeze until they pirouette down to fertile ground or the street. Mostly, she sat at her window in the pink wingback chair. She was not always the impassive statue of past years. Now, Leah had begun to tug insistently at her hair, gently sometimes, other times frenetically, depending on her state of mind, until over time the hair roots died, leaving Leahôs tangle of graying hair denuded in patches.

She bit her nails until the cuticles bled.

Then she began to pick and scratch at the soft and pallid flesh under her forearms until they looked like scabbed cross-hatchings.

Leah did not even bother trying to cover the scarring.

And she sat, silent as a mortician, for days at a time.

On occasion, a thought or an idea would arrive in her head from a place in some piece of hell no one knows about, and send her into an incomprehensible rage where her words were acidic and without substance or structure. Her body would shake like an engine running out of oil, and she would grind her teeth and rave at whoever was nearest.

Sometimes she would look at her own vague reflection in the window and seethe at that.

Yitzhak was nine months old when Leah marched into Theodoreôs shop on afternoon.

Flaming, was how Theodore explained that moment to Yitzhak, many years later.

ôItôs all that bloody mongrelôs fault,ô Leah stormed, totally horrifying Sophie Starkowitz, who was buying gripe water for her own baby.

Sophie Starkowitz hurried, wide-eyed and gripe-waterless, from the shop while Leah stood in front of her husband, poking at his chest with her blunt index finger.

ôMongrel?ô Theodore asked. They did not own a dog.

ôYou know,ô hissed Leah, suddenly conspiratorial. ôThat abomination there ï sat under the tree.ô She dragged Theodore to the shop door and pointed down the street to where Harold sat, inspecting the contents of his nose.

ôHarold? I thought you meant the baby.ô

He regretted it the moment the words left his mouth. It was a road their infrequent conversations had followed before.

ôBaby?ô Leah spun around, confused. ôWhere? Is it Jacob? Is he here? Did he come home?ô

ôLeah é ô

ôI must rush to the house and make him breakfast,ô Leah sped down the pavement, screaming for Delphinia to warm the milk.

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It was late afternoon.

In the kitchen, watched helplessly by Delphinia and Theodore, Leah prepared a full breakfast of oats, toast, fried eggs and tea.

She slapped plates on the table, frantically opening every preservative bottle in the cupboard.

Her matted hair hung in hysterical strands across her face, some wisps catching irritatingly at the corners of her mouth where gummy white spit gathered. Angrily, she brushed the hair off her face, only to flop down again like rags over a beggarôs backside.

Theodore and Delphinia could do little more than stand and watch. Theyôd been here before. Knew Leah would hear nothing they had to say.

ôWhenever there was a moment of up,ô Theodore explained years afterwards, óthere would always follow a month or more of down. As if the human mind is affected by gravity.ô

There was for the family a fond hope that the ups would last longer than the downs which nobody could explain. Doctor Lazarson, whose rooms were two blocks from the shop, diagnosed Leah simplistically as óhaving conniptionsô and left it at that.

There was no cure for conniptions, other than laudanum, which apparently helped the sufferers of a variety of ailments ï but only for a brief while.

Leah took laudanum once and detested it. Claimed it clouded her mind.

She would always demand that Theodore and Delphinia stop treating her like a cripple, to let her be.

Iôm all right, she would rave. Let me be. Iôm all right.

On this day though, in the detritus of a kitchen upended by an unsolicited afternoon breakfast, Leahôs frenzy spun and jangled for an hour, until the least informed person in the drama arbitrarily decided to interrupt the chaos by crying for his feed.

Baby Yitzhakôs squeak from the adjacent bedroom burst through the door. Leah froze, her hand holding a butter knife which dripped fig jam.

Disbelieving, Leah cocked her head like a morning sparrow.

Yitzhak sucked in another breath and bawled again.

óJacob!ô Leah screeched and burst past Theodore, who instinctively moved to stop her.

Delphinia shifted herself fractionally into his path though, to stop him.

ôWait,ô she said quietly.

From the doorway they watched Leah stoop over Yitzhak, snug in his soft linen sheet, gently moving swaddling away from the small face as if delicately brushing away important cobwebs.

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in Leahôs posture, the way she tilted her head just so, so she might peer at the face shrouded within the bundle and not scare the child.

And then, when she saw Yitzhak, not Jacob, Leah buckled. Complete and utter defeated, her body folded into itself, Leah dipping her head until it seemed certain her chin would push itself through her own breastbone.

It was as if she had stopped breathing, so minisculous was the rising and falling of her shoulders.

There were long minutes before Leah looked up and away from Yitzhak, turning towards Theodore and Delphinia, standing anxiously in the doorway.

ôWho is this baby?ô she asked distantly. ôWhy is it not Jacob?ô

Leah looked searchingly at Delphinia, who stared blankly at the floor, saying nothing.

ôYou promised me,ô Leah insisted.

ó*Mevrouw*é ô

ôStop. No more of your Gods and Angels ratshit,ô Leah said quietly. ôYouôve always been a lying witch, havenôt you? I should have known better than to listen to you.ô

ó*Mevrouw* ...ô

ôYou are a nigger heathen bitch whore.ô The words sounded like a prayer without an amen.

Theodore moved towards Leah, to hold her, to stop the flow of curses.

This time she did not push him away, as she usually did when Theodore tried to wrap her in his arms as protection against her demons.

Instead, she fiercely pulled Theodoreôs head down to her own upturned face and kissed him with a passion Theodore believed had died on the same dusty street as Jacob a decade before.

When Leah eventually broke away, she left Theodore breathlessly stupefied.

Leah floated to the door where she turned.

ôTheodore,ô she said evenly, óthank you for my life.ô

ólôm not sure what you mean ...ô

ôOur Jacob is dead,ô she said, óand in the ground. I have spent too long hiding behind the truth.ô

óLeah é ô

ôLook? Just like that,ô said Leah, smiling without joy and displaying two empty open hands. óNo more lost babies.ô

Then she said it again.

ôTheodore, thank you for my life.ô

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ôMy father found Leah the next morning, sitting in her chair é this very chair Iôm in right now,ô Yitzhak said. ôShe wasnôt looking out the window as she had done in Kimberley and the Orange Free State and, for a while, at the house in Hunter Street.ô

They had not slept in the same room in years, let alone the same bed.

Hopeful that he would find Leah reconciled (at last) to the loss of Jacob, Theodore edged the door open.

The stench of vomit struck him savagely. It was mostly pooled in Leahôs lap but there were some chunks splattered on the wall, evidence that her body had tried desperately to viciously expel whatever she had swallowed behind her closed bedroom door the previous night.

There were four empty bottles at her feet.

All were readily available in Theodoreôs general dealership.

Batley's Sedative Solution, *Mother Bailey's Quieting Syrup* and *Godfrey's Cordial';* quaint names for three brands of the Wine of Opium, which Thomas de Quincey had so eloquently described in his autobiography of almost a century before.

Confessions of an Opium Eater, it was called.

De Quinceyôs book lay among the three bottles of laudanum on the floor.

The fourth bottle, which Leah had drained to cover the laudanumôs bitter taste, was the last of Theodoreôs unopened *Shabbat* wine bottles.

Thank you for my death, the *Shabbat* wine said.

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CHAPTER TWENTY ONE

It seems like I`ve been here before/ I can`t remember when/But I have this funny feeling/that we`ll all be together again.
No straight lines make up my life/ And all my roads have bends/
There`s no clear-cut beginnings/And so far no dead-ends.
By Harry Chapin: All my life's a circle

Yitzhak's room, the last of days, April 30, 1985

Towards the end of the very last chapter. The smell of Old Man farts. Dora Lipschitz, painfully nurdling down the pavement supported by her aluminium walking frame.

Sheet-Pok-Sheet-Pok-Sheet-Pok.

The track on an ancient long playing record jumped, triggering a memory.

Yitzhak remembered and wept.

Sheet-Pok-Sheet-Pok-Sheet-Pok.

ôI am going to miss that sound,ô Yitzhak sniffed, blew his nose into a handkerchief which, he suggested, may once have been part of the sail on *The Mayflower*.

He tucked the handkerchief into a sleeve and swept his hand grandly at his books and records.

ôThese will be yours when I go,ô Yitzhak said.

I offered no dull platitudes.

ô*Nu*, so now I will tell you the last part of my story, in the fond hope it will make many things clear.ô

He leaned forward and patted my knee.

ôYou are very much like your father.ô He smiled and I noticed for the first time he was missing an incisor tooth. ôBut are you a *mentsch* like Herbie was? We shall see.ô

He examined his fingerprints for a minute.

ôI suppose this entire story really is about fathers and sons. And how we make sense of the lives we live. Or, in my fatherôs case, the hands weôve been dealt.ô

Yitzhak rose and tottered across to the turntable, gently lifting the arm and interrupting Sinatra worshipping *April in Paris*.

ôRight month, different city,ô Yitzhak noted, dropping into the pink wingback chair, which seemed to have as its function in life bearing people towards the ends of their lives.

ôLetôs begin,ô said Yitzhak.

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This is his story.

I was born on the fourth of April, in the first year of the twentieth century, Yitzhak said, in a Catholic hospital called the Marymount. It was named for the Mother of the son of a Christian God.

The Brides of Christ who delivered me no doubt sent horrified and apologetic semaphore messages to their boss expressing their apologies and dismay at my arrival. Spectacles, testicles, wallet and watch, they signalled across their chests.

In my young childhood there was nothing which in any way made my life less than absolutely ordinary. There were the normal deaths and diseases which typified life in those years. And of course a matter of a small war between the *Boers* and the British. Women and children and *alte kokers* were tossed into British concentration camps. It was history preparing to be repeated, I suppose. But these were of no consequence to me when I was a toddler, of course.

Everything changes, does it not?

I rode my bicycle into a riot once. I was twelve years old and had received my first bicycle. It was a birthday present from my father. I wanted a fancy Triumph bicycle with the new Derailleur gears. Instead I was given an Es-Ka Gents Bicycle made in Bohemia.

It had no handbrake. You had to back-pedal to stop. It had an ornate chain guard that made the bicycle look like a two-wheel Buick.

It should have had fins.

I hated the Bohemian bike, but I rode it anyway, pedalling to school with my shoes knotted together at the laces and slung around my neck.

We didnôt wear shoes too much back then. I used to be able to walk on gravel and stones and feel nothing. Then I grew up and became sophisticated (I started wearing shoes). Soon my feet would be as soft and vulnerable as a soul.

It was April 1. A day for fools. I wasnôt wearing shoes when I pedalled my brand spanking new back-pedal-braking detested bicycle towards Twist Street School and almost rode right into a mob of howling, shrieking miners, rampaging towards the Rand Club which was in the middle of town.

I was old enough to understand their bellowing complaints about ófat capitalist mine owners and their lackey mine managersô.

The fury in their voices convinced me they did not appreciate these mine owners or their representatives.

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Politely, because thatôs how we were taught to behave in those days, I pulled my bike to the side of the road and dismounted, standing at attention out of respect to the mob which thundered past.

I was twelve and small for my age and ignorant of minersô demands and so I was ignored by people who had bigger targets in mind. I was insignificant, and that allowed me to marvel at how extremely red and dirt-grimed their faces were, how their anger had its own rhythm.

I may even smiled and waved at someone I thought I recognised in the mob. When they had finally swept past I remounted my brand new Bohemian bike and rode to school to enjoy the traditional daily precursor to study ï that is, kicking around a football, barefoot.

There would be no kick-around this day though: As I wobbled through Twist Street Schoolôs front gate I was snatched off the bicycle by Mister Anderson, the Teacher Who Smelt of Biscuits, and hurried into the school hall to where children quivered and wept soundlessly into their knuckles and panicked teachers fluttered their hands like divaôs fans, trying not to swoon.

The headmaster, Mister Long, pretended to be in Full Control, which he did by clenching and unclenching his fists behind his back.

óThese miners will murder us all!ô squeaked Miss Small, who taught the six-year-olds. Miss Small really was small. She laughed like a cartoon mouse.

Tee hee, was the sound she made when she was amused.

That day though, there was no laughing.

óPull yourself together,ô Mister Long bellowed at her, ócor I shall have to slap some sense into you!ô

It made Miss Small squeak even more pitifully.

There was an ill-controlled climate of fear impregnating that tiny school hall.

I hadnôt been particularly worried by the mob which had swept past me. I imagined that even if they had noticed me ï and if they were the hooligans the Twist School staff believed they were ï then they surely would have snatched away my Bohemian bicycle?

Nonetheless, because I was a child and instinctively trusted the adults responsible for educating me, I was now frighteningly and suddenly made aware of a real world outside my fatherôs house and shop on Hunter Street.

I had lived in a cocoon with my father and brother and the stoic and stolid Delphinia. They protected me from everything óout thereô.

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pt at knowing what those threats were.

When I finally got home everyone was buzzing about the news. Troops had opened fire on those same strikers not too long after theyôd ignored me and my bicycle.

More than a hundred miners died in what the newspapers called óa hail of bulletsô.

There was also a small boy, my age, who was watching the riot.

The troops shot him dead too.

Perhaps he wasnôt standing properly at attention next to his new bicycle. There was a photograph of a policeman pointing at the boyôs blood on the street. Newspapers in those days were far too discreet to show the bodies of children. If anything, the personless blood was more terrifying to my eyes than an actual body.

It was the first time I had ever considered my own mortality.

Children believe they are indestructible, and here I was, for the first time in my life, afraid of dying.

I think it was a foreword for what was to come.

Not too long after the minersôriots, my brother Harold saw to it that fear and pain created the Yitzhak you see before you.

Listen. The neighbourhood had become an impromptu *schtetl* over the years, drawing *yidden* to its heart in that strangely magnetic way that scattered Jews manage to find each other.

Other than the Shepherdsons, who lived at the end of the block (and were considered óstrangeô) and Jose Mandim, the Portuguese handyman/carpenter/seafood lover, the whole street ï the entire neighbourhood, in fact ï was Jewish.

óJewburgô, the gentiles at my school used to call it, mimicking the words of their parents, no doubt. Even then, when weôd done nothing other than handle peopleôs bookkeeping or mended their suits, we were destested.

The neighbourhood contained many Litvaks, but none from RÎ digkãs, which had apparently (as predicted) been crushed underfoot by The Hangman, Mikhail Muravyov, not long after Tadorus Ivanchuk had been spirited away and put to sea.

There were Russians in our Johannesburg *schtetl* too, a few Germans, and of course Poles. There are always Poles.

Scatterlings of Europe once again gathering in a place far from where they were born. Naturally, they all spoke Yiddish and of course my father slipped comfortably back into talking the language, revelling in its unique phrasing, its colour, its sheer manic descriptiveness.

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He drifted back into the fold, in a sense ... now just one of many refugee children, all grown up, and all with their own tales to tell of hurried getaways.

He never really trusted anyone though, so my father became that member of the community who remains forever in social shadows; standing back when others take front stage, nodding politely and laughing quietly at otherôs jokes but never telling his own.

He was a solitary man doomed forever to be described by people who knew him by that most insipid of terms, ónice.ô

Theodore Isaacs was thus all but invisible again.

It suited him well enough. Heôd been sucked dry of any desire to be a leader of communities. That task he left to people like Jewburgôs unofficial mayor, an imposing man named Paul Bachmayer who ógot things doneôsimply by being dignified.

Paul Bachmayer was the sort of man who, when he walked past, you felt compelled to tip your hat to him, such was his presence.

My own friends included Linus, whose father was Starkowitz the King of Toys. Linus was the baby with gripe whose mother had fled from the shop on the eve of Leahôs death.

Dovie Rappoportôs father was the local greengrocer.

Dovie and Linus were the leaders of our small group, which also included me, Morrie Kramer and the cleverest boy in school, Shmuel the *Shmendrick*.

I had no idea what Morrie and Shmuelôs fathers did.

We were the Starkowitz-Rappoport Gang ï twelve-year-olds playing at being just like the infamous Foster Gang, which robbed banks and jewellery shops in Johannesburg. We were enthralled when the Fosters robbed an American Swiss Watch Company, wearing false beards and moustaches as disguises.

They looked like Hassidic Rabbis with guns.

Two *alte yidden,* Hirschsohn and Grusd, ran the shop and were working late when the Fosters blazed in and demanded everything they could put into three sacks. The two merchants complied and emerged from the robbery poorer but alive and with exciting stories to tell.

It was all so very thrilling for us young boys who never had to flee on ships to experience adventure, like our fathers. The Starkowitz-Rappoport Gang, with me, Shmuel and Morrie *nogschlepping,* decided to embark on our own crime spree, which is to say we stole three apples from Dovieôs fatherôs shop when the old man wasnôt looking. Then of course we felt guilty and immediately gave them back.

The crime wave was over.

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My life was about to change radically. Every protective wall my father had so carefully constructed around me was now about to come tumbling to the ground.

I was riding the Bohemian Bicycle towards Dovieôs house in Webb Street one afternoon, aware that just behind me, plodded my brother Harold. I tried to ignore him, of course, but he kept calling my name.

It was a wet dishrag kind of a day: chokingly humid in the aftermath of one of those monstrous thunderstorms which lash down for an hour, then disappears in a flash, leaving streets and people joyously drenched.

I pulled up outside the Shepherdsonôs house at the end of the block and angrily dismounted.

óGo home,ô I shouted at Harold.

óI want to come with you,ô Harold whined.

I saw, peripherally, the curtains in the Shepherdson house parting slightly. We were being watched. Harold was not a liked child in the neighbourhood. People ignored him or crossed the road to avoid him and warned their small children to stay out of his way.

óPlease, Harold,ô I begged him. óGo home. Dovie and Morrie and Linus and Shmuel é theyôre my friends, not yours. Youôre too old and too big for them.ô

Harold stamped his foot. Thrust out his chin and folded his arms.

óNot going home,ô he said stubbornly.

I was suddenly aware that people had soundlessly moved up right behind me.

Before I could turn, they were all over me.

I donôt know how many there were.

Something smacked me on my head ï just there ... a sickening blow just behind my ear.

I fell down in the road, wanting to throw up.

I was blinded, my face pushed into the roadside. I can still taste the motor oil and dirt to this day, whenever I think of that morning.

I think of it often.

When you become so trapped by fear as I am today, and you cannot travel much beyond the boundaries of your own front door, you have lots of thinking time.

There was nobody else on the street that day other than Harold and me and that stupid bicycle. No one watering a lawn or washing their cars with buckets of soapy water.

óWhy donôt you both go home right now,' a man rasped, sounding like he was speaking from the bottom of a pickle barrel full of water.

óGo back now to whichever rat hole Jew village you crawled out of.ô

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ôIôm on my way to friends,ô I wailed, believing this was an explanation which would abruptly stop the beating.

No one cared where I was heading though.

I couldnôt raise my head from the dirt. Someone elseôs hand was holding me down.

ôWe donôt like Yids passing our way.ô Another adultôs voice.

Not a teenager or a small kid.

ôLooking for things to steal when weôre not watching, arenôt you?ô

Then, another voice, another set of heavy footsteps. I heard the sound of a practice strike on the pavement. It was a bullwhip, a long strap of rhino hide which the *Boers* call a *sjambok*.

It cracked like a pistol shot.

I turned to my head a fraction and saw Harold for just a second.

ôHarold,ô I cried, órun home. Call papa ...ô

Thatôs when the *sjambok* lashed across my legs. I heard it before I felt it.

I screamed.

ôDamned Arab,ô the *sjambok* man shouted, slashing at me.

I tried to make myself small. Scrunched up like a baby in the womb, but I was pinned. Exposed.

Why did they call me an Arab?

Terrified, I ripped my head to the side. Glimpsed Harold again, standing there. Not dumbfounded. Rather, he wore that look you see on childrenôs faces when the circus is in town.

ôHit him!ô the first man screamed. ôHit the damned Arab! Flay the Christ-murdering son of a bitch!ô

ôRun for papa,ô I called out to Harold as the *sjambok* descended again and again on my back and my legs. Then a hand muffled my mouth.

But Harold just stood there, mouth open, wearing the same look on his pudding face as when he mashed tick-tock beetles between his fingers.

Heavy boots thudded into my ribs.

Three or four or five times.

I couldnôt breathe.

Heard the crack of *sjambok,* again and again. Thought I heard someone laughing.

Joyful, clapping hands.

I could feel my flesh splitting.

Have you ever heard your own bones break?

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I heard my fingers break when one of the men, tired of kicking, thrust his heel down on my hand and ground it into the dirt, like he was crushing a cigarette.

Somewhere in the distance I heard someone screaming my name.

Papa, save me, I called.

Thatôs when the second or maybe even a third person sat on my back.

Held me down as another man kicked me repeatedly.

Between my legs.

It was the most excruciating pain imaginable.

Each kick was greeted with peals of laughter and insane clapping.

I heard another voice ï a woman ï shriek something about óhalting the curse of your kind, one Jewboy at a timeô before one last kick struck my chin.

Heard another voice. óDo him proper, dad,ô the person howled. óDo the kike good and proper.ô

That was when I passed out, but not before realising that the laughter and clapping came from the same person who had been screaming my name.

Harold.

Thrilled by each new blow.

My mind went blank then, and I drifted into a place filled with pure nothingness.

I did not feel myself being picked up and carried away to the safety of the house, away from the agony and the madness. I had no idea who took me home and called my father to tell him, once again, to hurry home for more bad news about his child.

It wasnôt Harold, of course. It was never Harold.

I was unconscious for three days. I was kept in bed at the house. Years later when I asked my father why I hadnôt been rushed to hospital, he shrugged. Told me Delphinia was more than capable of seeing to my needs ï and anyway, Doctor Lazarson visited twice a day.

It was the same Doctor Lazarson I heard brusquely telling my father the following week that my broken bones would heal in time. I might limp a bit, he said.

From my bed I heard the murmuring of the two men discussing my life.

The welts from the *sjambok* will go down eventually, the doctor said. And theyôre on his back anyway so no one will see the scarring unless he takes off his shirtt.

The hand will be functional. Hands heal well enough. Heôll have hell with arthritis when heôs older though.

Alas, thereôs nothing we can do, the doctor said, about the ladôs testes.

I did not know then what testes were, of course.

They must have been important, I thought.

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So important that, for the first time since his childhood in RÎ digkās a lifetime before, my father, Theodore Isaacs, broke down and wept.

Yitzhak paused.

óI can stop if you want.ô

No, I said. Go on.

Yitzhak shrugged.

óI didnôt even tell your father this story,ô said Theodore.

He would have wept for you, I said.

I knew my father.

óYes, he surely would have,ô Yitzhak agreed, ówhich is why I never told him.ô

He also knew my father.

óMany hours later,ô Yitzhak continued, óafter the doctor had gone, I awoke and heard my father and Delphinia arguing in the kitchen. It was dark outside, and the silence from the street magnified their voices.ô

The walls were thin enough for me to hear their angry words.

óYou have to tell the police,ô Delphinia demanded. óIt had to be those damned Shepherdsons. You know it was them. If not them, then who?ô

óThere is no proof,ô my father said. óNo witnesses.ô

óStill ï get the police to at least question those bastards.ô

óTo what end?ô my father countered. óThe Shepherdsons will swear they never even saw Yitzhak.ô

óBut Harold saw them. He ran into this house, smiling all over his face, with the news that Yitzhak had been crushed. Like a cockroach, he said.ô

óAnd who will take the word of an idiot over a man and his wife and sons? You know everyone sees Harold as a trouble-maker é a simple-minded thug who bullies boys half his size.ô

Ironically, Harold ï the son of two small people ï was a big brute blithely unaware of his own strength.

óYitzhak will tell the police everything,ô Delphinia said.

óYitzhak remembers nothing. He says he did not see his attackers.ô

óHe can tell the police where he was ...ô

óYou want him to live through the memory of that savage beating all over again?ô

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óAsk him. Ask Yitzhak what he wants to do. This is not a time for you to thrust your beliefs on everyone else.ô

I heard some more rumblings. The sound of furniture being roughly pushed around.

Seething, spite-filled words.

óDelphinia, the bible tells us to turn the other cheek,ô I heard my father say.

óSuddenly *de bijbel* has come back into your life?ô

I heard Delphinia laugh. It dripped with sarcasm.

óWhat of an eye for an eye?ô she jeered.

óThatôs not relevant.ô

óThere is no work,ô Delphinia quoted, óhowever vile or sordid that does not glisten before God,ô

óMore damned Calvin? What does that even mean?ô

As everyone knows, it is in times of personal strife that people allow their true natures to emerge.

óI choose to not raise my hand against a fellow human being,ô Theodore said testily. óIs that so wrong?ô

ó*Jislaaik,* man,ô Delphinia snorted bitterly. óYou are such a typical damned Jew, Gutless.ô

And then the door slammed shut.

I did not know who slammed it. Who had left, who had stayed.

Delphinia was gone the next morning, though. With no word, no farewell.

Her room cupboard was emptied and the sepia photograph of the quaintly posing Delphinia and the Isaacs family which resided next to her sparse and functional bed had gone too.

I always believed that photograph was Delphiniaôs most beloved possession. It showed Theodore, chin up and manful, cravat at his throat; Leah unsmiling and haunted; Harold looking at his fingers; Delphinia Adelheit Witbooi, standing to one side, sternly disapproving of the concept of her image being captured in a small box.

Little Yitzhak was not yet in the picture.

I swear I felt Delphiniaôs hand on my forehead the night she left. I will swear too that she kissed my forehead, murmuring something in Dutch.

I was dreaming about my father at the time. He was standing over me, his hands covering his eyes as if he was ashamed of me.

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In my dream I kept begging him to tell me why he didn't go and seek out whoever attacked me. Why he did not seek justice. He kept insisting in my dream what he told me in life; never raise your hands to your fellow man unless you are sure you are right to do so.

His failure to find and have punished the people who assaulted me was for many years a wedge between us, even though that cool distance was not obvious to anyone but us. Sons did not question the actions of their fathers in 1913.

Not like today when everyone questions everyone regardless of their ages.

There is a saying in Yiddish; "*far kinder tseresit men a velt.*" It translates as "for your children's sake you would tear the world apart"

My father wasn't tearing anything apart on my behalf though. Even when he saw how the world beyond our home so comprehensively terrified me.

I would shake like a broken washing machine and sweat and fall to my knees and need to be helped indoors if I even came close to the idea of crossing the road. It was a horror I could not deal with. There was in my mind an incomprehensible evil just over a narrow road. For years and years, people on the other side of the road were ... waiting for me? Silly, but I was just a boy.

It became easier over time. I could walk to the end of the block, shuddering inside, then hurry back home, listing to one side like a crippled ship, petrified. Shut myself in my bedroom and read books and think about people at the end of the block, hitting and kicking.

Sometimes, I would imagine that my father, like Harold, had seen what was happening but did nothing. Of course, that was just me being fanciful.

I tried to make some sense of my father's reluctance to, at least, find out why people had found pleasure in beating a child.

His attitude was something I could not, for many years, understand at any level. So I grew to accept outwardly that there nothing my father was going to do to achieve ï a balance? ï and that there was a horrifying truth I would have to live with forever.

That maybe my father was a craven coward.

I felt humiliated, betrayed. I could see in the eyes of my friends when they looked at him and me that they all believed their own fathers would have acted very differently.

It embarrassed them so much they all eventually stopped visiting me. Just in case my father was there and they had to look upon a man who refused to avenge his own son.

Eventually, as I became more mature, I stopped questioning my father, stopped accusing him, with sharp looks and attitude, of lacking the backbone to march down the street and bop the Shepherdsons on their respective noses.

I accepted that the status quo would never change.

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One afternoon when we were stacking shelves in the shop I confessed, out of the blue, that I had finally achieved peace within myself. I was no longer ashamed.

An epiphany.

He said nothing at first.

Then he swooped on me, took me in his arms and hugged me until I was sure my ribs would crack.

He was much stronger than I ever imagined.

ôThis world works in strange ways,ô my father said to me when he loosened his bear grip.

We sat and talked for hours. That was when he first started telling me about his life. Gave me the chapters which I have passed to you. The Katzes. Jerzy on the ship, the fat English customs man with two surnames. Auntie Cockeye and her crew, and Samuel Perilly and his ugly daughters.

He told me about the son who died, barely knowing his father because Theodore Isaacs was always so very, very busy looking after everyone elseôs business.

Told me of how he had turned the tables on Yetta Yudelman.

Now, my father said, it is God was taking care of Theodore Isaacsô business on his behalf.

ôFind and smack the Shepherdsons? Why should I go to prison for assaulting anyone?ô he asked rhetorically. ôEspecially *schmucks* like those people.ô

Then, as if repeating a mantra, he would say, ôWho would look after you and Harold while I am sitting in a prison cell?ô

If you hear something often enough it becomes true.

I began to look at my father through different eyes as I grew older, seeing just a small man who would not harm the hair on a flyôs back, and began to believe that he was probably right; a real man need not raise his fists against a fellow man.

I decided we should rather beseech God for justice which would come in time, and in the meantime we should go about the business of being good and decent and honourable people.

True *mentsches.*

Delphinia would have approved, I suggested to my father.

The two of us sat quietly for moments. Trying to remember her voice, her face.

I couldnôt remember much more than remnants. I cannot say what my father remembered, but I do know he missed her presence in the house.

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Years had passed since my beating, and Delphiniaôs departure. My father believed she had gone back to her people in Kimberley in a huff ... to visit and calm down after the argument. Delphinia, since my familyôs arrival in Johannesburg had frequently travelled back to the outskirts of Kimberley. First, to bury her father, then a while later, her mother, then more recently to attend the wedding of one of her sisters.

But she always came home after a week or so.

This time, she had not returned.

My father, realising Delphinia was not coming back, searched for her throughout the town, even closing the shop early one afternoon and dashing off to consult the constable whose beat was our neighbourhood. The constable was interested in the case just sufficiently to refer my father to the local station commander who told him that, in his considered opinion, the girl had either skived off to a better-paying job (as a cook or scullery maid in Parktown) or had gone back to her tribal home, or more likely had become a prostitute like so many of these black girls do.

Check your home and see if anything has been stolen, the station commander told my father, and weôll keep an eye open for her.

Grimly dissatisfied, my father realised that there would be no investigation by the police or news from Delphinia Adelheit Witbooi herself. She had quite simply gone from our lives.

Washed her hands of us pitiful Isaacs men and left.

My relationship with Harold was very strained for years. It would have to be, even considering how simple he was. Remembering his laughing and clapping as I was savagely beaten was a memory which could not ever fade away.

It was not a bruise.

The aftermath of the attack did result in Harold becoming a quieter person. Perhaps he understood at some dim depth in his brain, that he had done wrong, even though he had actually done nothing.

He had a very simplistic view of loyalty.

So, quieter, yes, but not a paragon of any sort: Harold still bullied children ï but never physically. Just threatening gestures and bearlike grunts He struggled with the most basic things in life, but had grown out of his bug-crushing phase.

Eventually, he lost interest in trying to scare the local children who chose to ignore his mindless threats anyway.

Poor big, dumpy Harold.

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ôHarryboyõ, my father called him. Harold would smile disarmingly and shrug a sorry as he proffered the shards of a pile of plates which he had accidentally dropped and broken in the kitchen when it was his turn to wash dishes.

In the shop he would give too much change for a pound because he couldnõt subtract five shillings and sixpence without using his fingers. I would have to step out of the shadows and help him. Harold struggled to understand our fatherõs now-preferred Yiddish conversation; it was as if English was an old lover my father had invested in and now wanted to forget.

Harold had no social skills, did not like girls, and was happiest when he was either sitting in his room, moving his lips as his finger followed the text and pictures in a book produced for four-year-olds, or listening to my fatherõs stories about the old days of dirt roads in Johannesburg and the white beaches of Llandudno in Cape Town, or the diamonds (big as your head, Harryboy) or the piles of newly shorn wool in the barn of his Orange Free State farm.

As for me, I became a dynamo, like you find on a bicycle. The thing that makes the lights work. I had an aptitude for numbers, inherited from my father, I suppose. I would run the shop when my father hunkered off to have an afternoon snooze. After Delphinia left, he snoozed a great deal. It was almost like he was hiding between the sheets.

I never went back to school after the attack. I was fourteen when I started working in the shop and back on my feet. More or less physically all right.

My mind was a different story altogether.

As the doctor predicted my broken bones healed. The welts shrank but left scars. And I walked with a limp.

There were cuts that ran much deeper than those left by the *sjambok.*

Have you ever felt hot in a really cold place? Or cold, when itõs actually quite hot? Thatõs how I felt when I approached the edge of the pavement outside the house. Thatõs what I had to deal with. But I never really could.

I could certainly not countenance going anywhere near the Shepherdsonõs home, even though the couple and their sons had left Johannesburg.

No one saw them go.

Skulked away like thieves in the night, my father said.

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I wondered where they had gone and how I would feel if I was ever confronted by the family at the end of the block. You play out scenes in your head. Scenes in which you are the hero of the piece ï dôArtagnan or Quentin Durward maybe. Of course, you know in your depths of your guts that you would probaby *pisch* your pants and run away screaming like a little girl and hide in the darkest corner you can find.

To this day, whenever thereôs a knock on the door, or even the sound of a loud voice from down the street, I go cold in the pit of my stomach. Just in case itôs someone armed with a *sjambok* and hatred, seeking me out.

I feel safe in this house, mostly. But the fear never really leaves. All I can do is bury it as if Iôm covering a ringing in my ears by listening to music thatôs louder than the sound of terror.

Itôs times like that when I think of my father and I ask myself, whoôs the coward now?

Thatôs when I retreat to my books and my music and the teachings of the *siddur* and I find a story so filled with the fantasies and adventures of other people that I can slide between the sheets of paper and hide away from whatever things lurk on the other side of the road or at the end of the block.

I was afraid in life. Now I am not sure if I fear whatever I will face in death.

Thatôs me. Thatôs the person I was made to be.

Now you know.

Yitzhakôs monologue stopped dead. He plucked from the sleeve of the tatty jersey a clean handkerchief and covered his eyes with its crisp whiteness.

ó*Ja, ja, ja*,ô he sighed, and blew his nose.

I rose shakily and walked to the kitchen to pour myself a glass of water.

When eventually I sat down again Yitzhak had composed himself.

óI have of course convinced myself that my life unrolled itself as it did for a reason,ô he said, óLike my fatherôs before me.ô

Yitzhak leaned forward.

óNaturally, you have in your mind the unstated point that what happened to me was undeserved? The ówhat did the nice old man do to deserve this?ô argument. That I am using nonsensical logic to justify my foolish attitude.ô

I nodded.

óAnd you have already formulated a response to what you imagine is a justification for my belief ... that God has a plan for us all, and this imprisonment in my own home is His plan for me. Not so?ô

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Just so, I nodded again.

ôI will put your mind at ease. There are no plans for anyone. Not for you or me. Nobody gets his own plan. Things happen because they happen and we need to find our own reasons why. I often ask myself why God would care to want to waste time on me when the people in my own community couldnôt be bothered.

ôListen, a long time ago, on a rusty boat, two boys discussed how God may be just an idea designed to keep simple people under control. The fear of a power smiting the wicked is a powerful device, Jerzy had said. Fear keeps dimwitted, uneducated peasants in line.

ôGod never gives us an escape route when we cannot work out why it is that the world, and everything in it, makes no sense.

ôWas I sentenced by God to serve life imprisonment in one house and one shop for something I did? I cannot recall any sins I may have committed which demanded such a penalty. Remember, I was at worst a gang member who returned purloined fruit.

ôMaybe the Hindus are right and that in another life I was Genghis Kahn or Alexander the Great, or God forbid one of the *yidden* who crucified *Yoschke.* Imagine that? You could be in the presence of someone responsible for two centuries of anti-Semitism. I do not offer autographs.ô

Yitzhak smiled beatifically.

ôNow you know why God invented atheists.ô

The little general dealer shop continued to support and feed the three of us (Yitzhak continued) for the years left of my fatherôs life.

I read like a savage. Sucked up books until Iôd read everything in the house and begged for more. The classics, good pulp fiction. I devoured the good stuff and the mediocre.

You know I have always been a curious man. I have had to travel the world by peering through the eyes of people who travelled to exotic corners of the world, taken pictures, written beautiful prose. I loved *Life* magazine for its black and white snaps of people and places and adored the colours of the *National Geography.*

I have them all, still. Packed neatly in boxes in my room.

Wonderful magazines, filled with information. I even read the adventures presented in *True Detective,* pretending they were really true, but of course they werenôt.

Those were magazines. Not like the *drek* of today. *Scope* magazine showing girls with stars over their women parts? Are we children, that we donôt know women have nipples? Such strange morality.

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So, typed words became a world I could travel in my mind. I lived my life ï I think the word is óvicariouslyôï through the writings of others.

Imagine this: I have lived through two world wars, the rise and fall of Germany, then the rise of the Soviet Union, and a dozen or more other wars in between. I saw radio arrive, then television. I did not see man land on the moon ï but of course no one in this country did, because those simple farmers of the *Boer* Republic had became brutish rulers in a land where there was no more Imperial hand.

The farmers in government decreed that television was the tool of the devil which meant we were not allowed to see man walking on the moon because that was apparently as Satanic as womenôs nipples.

Delphinia would probably have agreed with the farmers.

So much changed, so quickly.

I experienced it all from within this house, watching lifeôs parades go by, sitting in the same chair in which Leah had chosen to watch no more parades.

And there was religion. I began to investigate Judaism, appreciated what I read. Like my father, I educated myself, although my books werenôt stolen in the quiet of the night from nearby schools.

There are cycles that connect fathers and sons.

How strangely we mirror each other, is it not?

My father never fully recaptured any great degree of his own faith, but he did steadfastly allow me to make my own decisions. He never once suggested I was using religion as a stick to prop me up, although Iôm sure thatôs what he really thought.

óRead this *siddur'*, he said when I was about seventeen, taking the aged and ragged book from his kist.

ôIt is in Hebrew, which I will teach you,ô he told me. óRead it. Ask questions. I will answer everything you ask to the best of my ability. Find other books on religion. All religions. Compare them. I do not care if you read the teachings of Buddha or Mohammed. Understand what it is that makes people happily do things that would lodge in your own throat like a lump of dough.ô

I had asked my father if we could observe *Shabbat*. Like the Starkowitz and Rappoport families. We had never made much of Friday nights. Never went to synagogue. To this day I have never seen the inside of a synagogue. There isnôt one on my block, you see.

Do not deny me Friday nights, I begged my father.

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riday night. Lit candles. Sometimes a neighbour would join us, but usually it was the three of us. Harold eying the food, patiently waiting for the *brochas* over the bread and wine to end, my father as usual silently mouthing the Hebrew words I read aloud from the prayer book. I had become fluent in the language of our people. My father seldom had to correct me.

Harold, of course, could not read a word of English, let alone Hebrew.

ôIs there anything strange about three grown men living in a house for decades, without any sort of feminine touch?ô Yitzhak asked me, pausing his narrative. I suspected he needed another breather. A moment to gather his thought.

ôI ask because I understand that men need that soft touch a woman brings to a home. I do not know if my father had ... relationships ... when he went on his trips into the country to buy stock for the shop, or people for the mines.

ôProbably. Possibly. *Feh.* Who knows? Either way, if you examine the women in his life you will understand that he may have had a somewhat jaundiced view of women.

ôLook what role models my father had ... Gilda Katz, Auntie Cockeye, the women in the whorehouse in Cape Town. All lovely specimens to put before a young man finding his way in a new world.

ôI know that my father always went on his travels alone ... except for once, when he was about sixty-eight or sixty-nine. He was elderly, but very fit. He said out of the blue one day, ôHarryboy, pack a bag. Youôre coming with me this time. To lift some heavy thingsô.

ôLike it was yesterday, I remember it.ô

Yitzhak looked at me without blinking for long seconds, and then nodded to himself.

ôôTo lift some heavy thingsô,ô he repeated.

ôThey returned days later, happy and smiling as if, this late in both their lives, they had found some connection. I was pleased, but jealous, I remember. Fathers and sons ... again.

ôNu, so we continue.ô

When my father was in his late seventies and became ill with pneumonia ï the killer of old men, the doctor explained.

After one particular three-*mentsch Shabbat* my father suddenly could not catch his breath, gasping as we helped him to the bed he had shared with no one for so many years.

Doctors used to make house calls back then. We were between World Wars so perhaps Doctors felt some sort of obligation to the living. He diagnosed pneumonia in both lungs, and suggested my father may have experienced symptoms for some time but had hidden them.

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Maybe his smoking covered the telltale tightness in his chest.

Keep him comfortable, the doctor suggested. It will be over soon.

Sorry.

It took two weeks before my father called Harold and I to his bedside. It was the day I believe he understood would be his last on this Earth.

I knew what to expect, but Harold stood at the foot of the bed, slack-lipped, gibbering and clenching to his chest a sodden handkerchief.

ó*Schern rich, mein kinde*,ô my father wheezed, blending English for Harold with Yiddish for me. Listen to me, my children. When I go, promise youôll run *der gescheft* é the business é *mit erlechkeit*, honesty. Do not forget *Shabbat*, Yitzhakele. And both of you é be *mentsches*.

ôWe will be *mentsches*, papa. But youôll be fine, papa,ô Harold wailed in English.

Theodore patted Haroldôs hand.

ó*Du bruder farschtein*, Harryboy,ô my father said. He turned his wasted face to me. ôYitzhak understands.ô

I could only nod, unable to find the words.

ôBut papa é ô Harold sobbed.

'Genug is genug, mein zuns,' insisted my father. 'Enough is enough.ò

Harold dashed from the room, wailing.

Thatôs when my father beckoned me to come closer.

This is what he told me.

ôYitzhak,ô he said, 'Romans 12:19.ô

I donôt understand, I said.

ôThere is a key around my neck,ô he said. óOn a chain. It opens the kist at the foot of my bed. After I go, open it. Everything will be clear. You will understand the answers to all the questions you wanted to ask me, but never did.ô

He shut his eyes, dropped off to sleep, wheezing and bubbling.

Just a few hours later he suddenly sat bolt upright and wide-eyed, shouted óLeah!ô and fell back into the soft pillow, leaving his two sons weeping softly at his side.

It was the first time we had ever heard our father raise his voice.

So.

Harold and I worked side by side in the shop for a few years to come before Harold became unmanageable.

The bed-wetting tipped me off. We had reached a point in our lives where I had insufficient compassion or strength to deal with late-life *tsores*.

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óWhy didnôt you go to *der kloset lezt nacht?'* I asked, peeved.

Harold smiled his dull-eyed smile and had no answer to my question.

óTalk English, Yitzhak,ôhe said. óI canôt understand what youôre saying.ô

óThe toilet, Harold. Why didnôt you go to the toilet last night? Youôre not a child.ô

óYou mustnôt talk to me like that. Itôs not *fair*!ôHarold shrieked, drumming his fists on his thighs. óI want my daddy back!ô

Harold was sixty years old.

Reluctantly, I put Harold put into a special home for mentally challenged Jewish people in the western suburbs of Johannesburg ï a place where the man with the mind of a boy could be loved and protected by people better qualified than me.

He was taken away in a private car. A big white German Opel, I think. He waved to me from the back window as he was driven off.

Harold and his little suitcase, travelling off to a new world.

I never saw him again in the years before he died on the day he turned sixty-seven, but I would chat to him on the telephone every Friday, just before my one-man *Shabbat*. I would imagine myself sitting in the garden with my brother, holding his hand, looking into dull eyes that stared at everything but saw nothing.

Of course I never shared with Harold what my father confided in me the night he passed away.

Harold would not have understood.

Yitzhak fixed me with his bloodshot-eyed stare.

óAs my father said to me, I am saying to you the same thing. *Genug is genug* for me as well. I have completed a full circle. Ending my life as my father began his ï in a *schtetl.* Such irony, my fatherôs stolen English would have pointed out.ô

Yitzhak took my hand in both of his.

'Nu, so I have now purged my soul. Almost. It will be fully purged in due course. You will know when the time arrives.ô

Yitzhak made his traditional finger-steeple.

óDo you know what my biggest fear is?ôhe asked eventually.

óThat in the end there really is nothing in my Fatherôs Garden other than flowers.ô

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CHAPTER TWENTY TWO

Resurrection, resurrection, resurrection

Epilogue: May 1, 1985

There has never been a telephone call at two oôclock in the morning bearing good news.

My telephone sat next to my bed and was so screechingly intrusive it generated immediate heart attacks regardless of the hour and caused my border collie to scuttle in terror from the room with his tail scraping the floor.

This two oôclock I burst out of a deep sleep and snatched the handpiece out of its cradle, my heart thundering. My wife mumbled something in her sleep and turned her back on me. The night quickly became so still I could hear my sons breathing deeply as they grappled with pre-teen dreams at the other end of the passage.

Dora Lipschitz was on the other end of the line.

ôThe old bastardôs gone,ô she said peremptorily.

Apparently, when Yitzhak decided enough was enough, he did not hang around waiting for approval.

I dressed and drove through to the house in Hunter Street, where Dora Lipschitz waited.

Yitzhakôs small shape lay huddled under a sheet, but I could not bring myself to look into his face one last time.

Dora sensed my unease, and attracted my attention by smacking my shins with her aluminium walking frame.

ôHere,ô she said. ôThis is for you.ô She handed me a note.

It contained a menu of Yitzhakesque instructions and an ancient key.

Dora shuffled to the door and turned.

ôThat lump on the bed may well be the last *mentsch* on earth,ô she said, and plocked away.

I examined the note. This key, it said, opens the kist.

In the kist is an envelope (the note continued). Written on the envelope is the strange message my father left me when he was about to die. Something to do with Romans.

Be a journalist, already. Work it out.

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ast ask of you (the note demanded). I have fed you wine and bagels for a year, so you owe me. I know youôre such an atheist youôre almost a Catholic, but please ... say *Kaddish* for me.

I have no one else.

Being Yitzhak, he signed his note, ôIsaacs the Unforgotten.ô

There was no riddle to work out, of course.

Even a cast-in-stone atheist knows Romans 12:19 refers to something in one of the Testaments.

I called Quentin Roux, a friend who had studied theology before growing disillusioned, preferring to seek God in the record bar where he worked.

ôRomans 12:19?ô he said. ôEasy ï óvengeance is mine, saith the Lordôô

ôThanks,ô I said.

ôWhoôre you planning to kill?ô he asked.

óAll the Christians in Rome,ô I said and hung up.

The Romans 12:19 envelope contained Theodoreôs journal, which I read at the dinner-for-one kitchen table.

On each page there was a name and an attached newspaper story. Some, like the other papers Yitzhak had shown me over the past year, were the colour of saffron rice. Other pages were slightly less dated and contained stories published in the time between the familyôs arrival in Johannesburg and shortly before Theodoreôs passing.

There were also train timetables and ticket stubs and other small clues which explained to me how Theodore finally reconciled with Yitzhak in death how he could not in life.

Attached to the newspaper clippings were notes in either Theodoreôs cramped handwriting or Delphiniaôs formal block letters.

Joining the dots was easy.

They explained lives, made sense of the senseless.

First, in Delphiniaôs hand, was a recollection of some of Leahôs late night anguished ramblings, including her wailing for what Delphinia thought was ôbaby, babyô.

There was no ôbabyô, Delphinia wrote.

Rather, Leah had been calling for Bailey, the butler at the London home where Leah was sent to work as a downstairs maid at the age of ten.

The journal notes explained (with extensive use of euphemisms) that one of Baileyôs functions had been methodically preparing the little girl for, as Delphinia delicately put it, the ópleasuresô required by Montgomery Collingwood.

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His wife would sit in a chair and watch, a Ginger Fizz twirling daintily in her cultured hand.

Leah had travelled to Africa with the Collingwoods just in case Monty grew bored with the scenery. Leah was extra baggage.

The infant girl the builders had discovered buried behind Theodoreôs Cape Town Inn had died in her sleep a few months after Leahôs return to Cape Town from her nightmare in the backwoods of the Cape Province.

The little girl was not Theodoreôs child.

Montgomery Collingwood was the father.

This was not their first baby either, Leah had confessed to Delphinia in a dark moment. All Leahôs other pregnancies had been aborted, in a very genteel manner, by top London doctors.

After Jacobôs death, Leah did not want to throw away any more babies.

She wanted to keep just one.

Delphiniaôs journal notes left me in no doubt who was really responsible for the end of the Collingwoodsô lives at the bottom of some Cape ravine. Similarly, there was no doubt in the minds of Theodore or Delphinia either, according to the journalôs margin notes.

Sorry for you, Snuffelaar.

That was just the start.

I turned the page.

There was a cutting from the *Diamond Field Advertiser* at the turn of the century, reporting the death in a house fire of a Kimberley businesswoman and her husband. The couple had been sleeping, the report said, when a fire broke out on the ground floor of their home. They were overcome by smoke.

Yetta Yudelman, (the newspaper report said), was a board member of the bank, and her husband, Nathaniel, was a local hotelier and racehorse owner.

The date on the newspaper folio was connected (by a red pencil line) to a railway timetable showing that the date of the Yudelmansô death by fire coincided with one of Delphiniaôs journeys home.

In the journal margin, cryptically, were the words, óred wigô.

From the same newspaper, on the same date which reflected the deaths of the midget and her husband, was a short obituary for ówell known former cricketer and personalityô Cedric Taberer, who had accidentally plummeted down the side of the Big Hole while on his way to check one of his diamond diggings.

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Ace of spades, the margin note said.

A year later, in a *Diamond Fields Advertiser* cutting, there appeared a story about the mystery of Sir Thomas Grattanôs murder in a field on a Baster farm. His mutilated corpse was found in a trench. The little finger on one hand had been hacked off, the report stated.

Gold pinkie ring, the margin note said.

A later cutting, dated February 25 1920, and snipped from a Krugersdorp newspaper, contained a photograph and caption story showing a gaunt shop owner named Marcus Schwartzman, who, the caption explained, had been shot between the eyes during an attempted robbery at his outfitting shop.

Schwartzman was a reclusive man who had never married, the cutting said.

The photograph showed a clean-shaven man who ï if the appended note in Theodoreôs handwriting had not suggested otherwise ï might not have obviously been Schwartz the *Goniff*.

The margin note said óblack hatô.

Schwartz the *Goniff*'s murder coincided with one of Theodoreôs business trips to the west of Johannesburg to buy goods for the general store and was just a few months after the passing away in his sleep of the legendary bandit, Scotty Smith.

There was no reason why the two events could be considered even vaguely coincidental. There was certainly no mention in the newspaper obituaries (which lauded Smith as if his crimes were worth a Knighthood) that Smith had been suffocated with his pillow after the soles of his feet were burned with cigarettes, forcing him to reveal the whereabouts of Schwartz the *Goniff*.

The journal notes provided more detail, right down to the brand of cigarettes (Perillyôs) used on Smithôs feet until he spilled Schwartzôs address between muffled screams. The journal notes also revealed the last words spoken to Smith by the elderly man who had snuffed out his life.

Something about ósleeping perchance to dreamô.

The margin entry simply stated ógunsô and in brackets, the letters, HB.

HB for Harryboy.

The red line and circled dates coincided with the buying trip on which the aged Theodore had taken his dim, immensely strong son.

For heavy lifting.

There was one other entry, dated the same day Delphinia left the Isaacs house forever.

On her way back to the Griqua territory, she passed by the house at the end of the block where the Shepherdsons lived.

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The journal entry said nothing more than this: óEvery flower in my fatherôs garden has its own name. Every single flower.ô

I quietly closed the journal.

Yitzhakôs father, Theodore Isaacs, had, with some help, taken care of business on behalf of his family.

Like a true *mentsch*.

The journal entries explained the ugly deaths of people who had, at some stage, threatened Theodore and his family.

It did not explain why, in Theodore Isaacsô garden, there were so many damned flowers.

There will always be postscripts and epilogues and sequels when it comes to *mentsches* like the *farschlepte* old man who chose to share the meaning of his life with me.

It had come to pass that Yitzhak *ben* Tadorus slipped away, alone in his tiny room in the small house crammed with books and music and memories.

He had faithfully kept all his promises to his father and most importantly, himself.

Yitzhak had honoured the Sabbath and kept it holy, and had sanctioned no other God before him. The son of Theodore Isaacs had applied the laws of *kashrut* to his entire life, donned his *tallis* and *tfilin* and prayed every day, observed all the holy days, and meticulously followed the Ten Commandments Moses had brought down from the burning bush on Mount Sinai.

Alone, scarred in body but pure of spirit, pure of thought, pure of life, Yitzhak had passed on.

He was not buried in the Jewish cemetery at West Park.

Despite his piety and an intractable devotion to his religion and his God, Yitzhak would never lie alongside Theodore or Leah or Harold. He would not have on his gravestone an inscription proclaiming this as the last resting place of a beloved son and brother.

He would be denied this, not because he was the son of Theodore Isaacs, but because Yitzhak was also the son of Delphinia Adelheit Witbooi.