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A silence so loud

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Fiona Taylor Reflective Essay

You Said It, Mr Twain

A middle-aged housewife pushes a trolley through Woolies. Her mind strays as she moves through the cool of the fruit section, and she considers her proposal. She's not sure how she got here; how on earth she found herself planning to write a fictional account of a woman sliding into dementia, and of her husband, who is at a loss at how to deal with the fallout. There's a chance this venture is simply part of the Housewife's mid-life crisis. She holds up a packet of tomatoes to the light and remembers Annie Proulx saying it's irrelevant at what age a person starts to write.

What she can't figure out is how she ended up with this story. She signed up for the course with the idea that she could finesse the first draft of a manuscript she worked on the previous year, only to discover on the first day that participants are required to start an entirely new project.

Last year's story was exciting: death, betrayal, a shooting, international travel; it's difficult to put it aside. And this new idea as laid out in her proposal seems dull. Nothing else is coming through though. She examines an aubergine and reminds herself that Toni Morrison sometimes starts with boring ideas. What intrigues Morrison are the boring ideas that bring about questions she can't find the answer to. The Housewife certainly has a lot of unanswered questions about her own writing plans. There must be a way to harness language to make the story interesting, the way Alice Munro does with certain short stories in *Dear Life*, like "Train", and "In Sight of the Lake". They deal with the loss of words and the fallibility of memory in a way that leaves her breathless. If her own story is boring, it will be because she makes it that way.

She hates it when there's only celery that's already chopped and cling-wrapped. She'll have to head across to Food Lovers. Which means that she'll probably be late to pick up the youngest child from school. Which she has forgotten to do before now. Perhaps a psychologist would say her own mental porosity has something to do with her choice of story.

If nothing else, the proposal got the rusty bits going; she's force-feeding herself on the recommended reading list in a bid to catch up on twenty-six years in the wilderness. Latching on to the notion that her protagonist could have Alzheimer's disease, she draws up a timeline and plots how Betty's mental deterioration coincides with a slide ever deeper into her memories. That appears to be the way Alzheimer's operates. She could work it so that Betty's

chapters are effectively sequential memory episodes, and that as her brain function deteriorates she travels further back in her memories.

Once through the recommended reading on literary criticism, she dives headlong into Julian Barnes' latest offering, and is thrilled to see that Shostakovich experiences flashes of something similar. But wait. Shostakovich did not suffer from dementia. She'd better tread carefully when it comes to making things fit.

As Betty goes back in time, her story will become less and less attached to the reality of the present. The Housewife is pleased with this idea. At first. She recognises the need to familiarise herself with Alzheimer's so that there aren't any slip-ups that might call her bluff. Some contemporaries have family members who suffer from Alzheimer's or dementia. They offer to take her to the establishments where the patients are looked after, so she can gather some information.

The Housewife shrinks from this, but doesn't know why. She reads up on Alzheimer's, and realisation dawns: she's not interested in the disease. For her, it is useful only so far as it falls in line with the story Betty whispers in her ear. In addition, while reading John Bayley she discovers that while some of Iris Murdoch's manifestations of the disease ring true with Bettys, others don't. Like Betty, Iris could sleep at any time, and experienced a loss of words and memory. Unlike Betty, however, Iris could maintain a sort of clandestine communication with her husband, and in fact became increasingly needy of him. Nor does the Housewife want Betty's face to have the typically leonine expression of the Alzheimer's patient that Bayley describes.

Undeterred, the Housewife reads Oliver Sacks. The Spouse raises an eyebrow. She gives him a thumbs-up because it seems that Twain was spot on: truth may just be stranger than fiction. Perhaps the story isn't that boring after all.

The Housewife dons her swimming goggles and shower cap, and sets about chopping onions. Spouse doesn't flinch. He and the Offspring know how she hates the smell of onion in her hair and the sting of it in her eyes. On she chops, ending with something akin to onion soup as she threshes through plans for Betty and Frank. At this rate, nothing will be edible for the duration of her course.

-oOo-

Genre.

She hasn't thought about genre for close to thirty years. There is a character blossoming in her mind's eye: Shiloh. Surely Shiloh means her story is fantasy? The fact that Shiloh is a function of Betty's mental deterioration means it might be realism.

She smells onions on her fingers as she dons her specs and reads up on the topic.

There's a wrestling of sorts among the authorities on genre, and it's giving her a headache. She's inclined to lean in with those who suggest avoiding labelling it. She closes the books and swallows a couple of Panado. She needs to get on with writing the story. What does seem clearer is the notion that pretty much anything goes when you scratch around the possibilities of the human mind.

That reminds her. She tugs old textbooks from her shelf and dusts them off. She makes herself a cup of coffee and drinks the whole cup in a reverie of undergraduate days. It seems clear that Betty has scientific permission to be aphasic while maintaining a reasonably eloquent internal voice. Which means the Housewife won't annoy the reader with gibberish if she allows Betty a voice all the way through the story. Not that she has to justify everything Betty gets up to. This is fiction, she reminds herself.

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Having submitted nothing aside from a proposal, the Housewife considers the matter of individual characters being identifiably unique and intriguing.

Perhaps she could contrast Betty with her earlier self, thereby developing irony and moving the reader. The Housewife already knows Betty's history, so this shouldn't be difficult. Betty is the child of Hollywood parents, with an episode in her teenage years that brought to a head her distrust of them. In an act of rebellion, she ran away from home after school and joined a hippie group. Upon discovering that she was pregnant, Betty returned to her parents who reacted by taking her on a trip to Europe, with the implication that an abortion might be less traceable there. While in Italy, Betty met Frank, and used a night of sex with him as a means of evading her parents' plans.

Betty's name is a useful one. Derived as it is from the name Elizabeth, there is a plethora of other associated names by which Betty is known at various stages of her life. And the Housewife plans to use some of these in Betty's memory episodes. She is Betty while married to Frank. Elyssa in her hippie phase. Libby, Lizzy, Bett, Elizabeth. There's a lot to work with. She wonders whether it's wrong to have a crush on one's protagonist.

Olive oil should not get too hot before the celery and onions go in. She adjusts the flame, nudging Betty (in her blue crimplene dress today) away from possible incineration.

-oOo-

Betty.

In the shower, Betty hands the Housewife the soap. They drive together, cook together (sometimes with Shiloh, sometimes without), garden, escort Spouse to company

functions, and lament over the difficulties of parenthood together. The Housewife's fondness develops into an insistence that Betty's decline be experienced as an adventure. Early into the story, Betty forgoes insight into her condition; she may as well enjoy the ride.

Betty is dying, and her condition is unnamed. Aside from the arrival of Shiloh, one of the signs the Housewife gives the Reader that there's a problem, is Betty's difficulty with speech. It's something evident in Alzheimer's as well as in a myriad of other disorders. Mental illness is a hot topic. Magazines in the aisles at Woolies and Pick 'n Pay feature it. Even movie stars suffer from it, according to one magazine cover. Writers deal with it at every turn. The Housewife pauses when she reads Arundhati Roy describe her character Estha as he slides into silence.

She takes a deep breath and puts the onions in. Betty gives her a nudge and a wink.

The Great Secret in this story is that Chiara is not Frank's child. Betty never tells him, but as a silent gesture, she never confronts Frank about his infidelity. The Housewife means this to be an interesting aspect of Betty's character: her weakness on the one hand, and her strength to see her decision through on the other. She wants it to be a slow revelation through the novel.

A protagonist who does something this heinous must be developed cautiously to ensure the Reader doesn't feel cheated. At the same time, the Housewife also needs to watch that she doesn't lean on it too heavily as a plot device.

Betty needs to be identifiable as herself, a voice separate from Frank's, and a character discernible from the crowd in the story. She needs hand gestures, clothing, little mannerisms and quirks that are peculiarly hers. Not difficult when she shuffles alongside the Housewife all day.

The crimplene dress that appears to vary only in colour from one day to the next, threatens to combust when Betty leans in too close to the Housewife's gas hob. The Housewife chides her for speaking (in the early days of course) in too British an accent. Betty must not forget her LA heritage.

In the early days, before the aphasia, Betty whispers to the Housewife about Shiloh, clearly trusting the Housewife to understand. Which of course she does. How could she follow Pamuk's most recent protagonist and not be a believer?

As Betty's decline accelerates, the Housewife is allowed into her delusions, and they are glorious and sad. In there, the dead and the living float along on a different continuum. The Housewife must keep a cool head; she finds that she's wondering just whose reality is real.

Iris Murdoch loved the Teletubbies, and the Housewife introduces Betty to the wonders of the small screen in her own story. Then she reminds herself that Betty won't be tied down to Iris' form of dementia.

Betty taps the wooden spoon on the side of the pot, and the Housewife takes it from her. There should only be one cook in the kitchen.

So. Betty is clearly suffering from some sort of dementia that is being dictated to the Housewife as time ticks on. Her aphasia rushes into the story in a way that could make the Reader suspicious. Her decline is rapid, and the Housewife ponders whether the loss of lucidity should be more gradual, even sporadic. Betty shrugs off these suggestions and tears along in pursuit of Shiloh.

But only so far. Because racing along with Shiloh means a galloping retreat into the past, and that's fine while Chiara is still present. But when Shiloh's next appearance necessitates the loss of Chiara in Betty's memories, something in Betty blocks that appearance. The Housewife wants to use that mother-daughter bond as a tool to change the pace of Shiloh's visits. Thus Betty, although not recognising the present adult Chiara in the story, still longs for her child (in her reality, a baby at this point) and refuses the move that will tear her from Chiara completely. Any shift further back in her history will be to a place before Chiara was born. Her unrelenting hunt for her baby leaves Betty suspended in time, unable to move back or forward.

Which gets the Housewife thinking about Betty's own childhood, and the possibility of reaching back to catch a glimpse of what helped make Betty who she is. It is important for the story that Betty ran away from home and joined a hippie commune, because that was where she became pregnant. And although she chose not to have an abortion, she did choose to convince another man, a 'respectable' man, that he was the father of her child. She made the decision to get away from her parents once again, and to protect her unborn baby. The respectable man is one she chances upon in Italy while on holiday with her parents.

So many sacrifices for this baby have made Betty a certain kind of woman. One who feels an indebtedness to the respectable man; a woman who will not confront him on dangerous issues, such as his infidelity. And above all, a woman who will not let go of the baby who changed the course of her life.

The onions are soft. It's time to put the tomatoes in the pot, and there is another point of view to consider.

-oOo-

Frank.

The respectable man needs a voice in all of this. He is the one to explain things once Betty gets a little harder to follow. The Housewife makes him a clinical sort of guy, an engineer. But fallible. Not the sort the Reader instantly forms a bond with, but as his voice takes over the narrative, the Reader will at least need to trust that voice. She's still reading *A Strangeness In My Mind,* and feels inspired about rendering two points of view. In her opinion, a story is more interesting if there is something of a Rashomon Effect, where characters are given the opportunity to give different accounts of the same situation, most especially if one of those characters is mentally unwell.

Frank finds Betty's illness something of an irritant to start with. He is slow to recognise the signs, as was the case with John Bayley as his wife began her mental decline. Marriage can be like that. Living with a person constantly can make one blind to small changes.

The Housewife glances at Spouse as she stirs.

Frank comes in for an occasional admonition for speaking with too British an accent, much as Betty does at times. Despite himself, Frank wishes he could fit in with the ex-British colonial thing. He continually finds himself adopting their inflections, and then loathing the other characters (like Deidre) who despise him for it. The Housewife wants him to be complex, not simply the anti-hero to Betty's character. She uses Frank's own voice to make the indictments against him. It's the Reader's sympathetic interest she's after.

Nothing wrong with aiming for the stars, thinks the Housewife, mashing up the tomatoes a little as they soften in the pot.

Frank, prodded by the impatience of his daughter and the increasing difficulty of living with a wife in Betty's condition, must grow more empathetic by increments. When she escapes from the neurologists' rooms in Johannesburg, he is exasperated and worried in equal measure.

To add to his difficulties, his daughter finds fault with his every move. As the story develops, the Housewife allows him a stuttering compassion for Betty, and a slow recovery of his relationship with Chiara, who has never forgiven him for his affair. Frank starts the story not knowing that both Betty and Chiara knew about his affair with Cassie. At first the Housewife wonders whether Frank would actually be unfaithful to Betty. She considers the people she knows and has known who have had affairs, and there are many of them. One thing she is sure of is the fact that the human condition is a complicated one. She realises she does not need to explain Frank's actions too deeply.

Frank and Chiara's relationship was a good one when she was a child. The Housewife allows him to mull this over, to wonder where their bond faltered, and why he seems unable to relate to her any more. Children change as they grow older, and there is a concurrent shift in any family dynamic that writers explore with varying success. Frank and Chiara stumble through their adult story, shifting the upper hand and only occasionally sharing moments in synch. The underlying current that the Housewife means to achieve, is for the Reader to increasingly suspect that Frank is not her biological father.

Back to the matter of Frank's increasing empathy. It shouldn't be an easy thing; there must be a cost. The more compassionate he becomes, the Housewife decides, the less sure of himself he needs to be. After all, he needs to enter Betty's world at least a little to achieve this empathy. In doing so, after many years of taking his wife for granted, he starts to revive his love for her. In this process, her loss of memory starts to affect his own. As the story progresses, Frank enters Betty's world as a part-time actor, in snatches.

But the Housewife does not want a true mental decline in Frank. And he most certainly is not permitted any physical dishevelment as an exposé of his distress. Frank remains, above all else, an engineer and a practical person. The closest he gets to unravelling is to perform an act of aggressive cleaning of the kitchen and pantry while he waits for Betty to emerge from the guest bedroom, where she has taken up camp. The Housewife wants him to imagine a life without Betty, albeit subliminally. She allows him to think about getting a puppy once their two old dogs have died. She doesn't allow him to stop shaving. Frank is so close to Betty that his thinking and emotions are intertwined with hers and her experience. As a result, his motives become increasingly confused, to the point where he's no longer sure what he wants for either of them.

So the Housewife plots a shift in the tragedy: it starts as Betty's and changes to Frank's. The story both narrows down as Betty shuts down, and opens out as Frank opens out. She's aiming for an associated sense of claustrophobia.

Nothing wrong with such ambition! What's wrong with these tomatoes? Why won't they break down?

Frank is not a creature of melodrama or demonstration, but he evolves through the experience of Betty's decline. By the time he is in the ambulance with her on the way to Milpark hospital, how is he feeling? What is he demonstrating bodily?

Grief doesn't have to be tears and gnashing of teeth.

-oOo-

So far, two main characters each with a point of view.

A daughter is a good tool to use with the idea forming in the Housewife's mind about Betty's own flaws. The daughter isn't Frank's, although he won't know that. Secrets, familial misunderstanding and tragedies of various sizes: these have been used to great effect by writers like Arundhati Roy. The daughter is named after the place where Betty first meets Frank, the Basilica di Santa Chiara, in Assisi. Housewife and Spouse lived there for a year, well before the destruction wrought by earthquakes.

Alone during work hours, the Housewife roamed the streets and basilicas of Assisi, and was always more drawn to the story of Chiara Offreduccio and the basilica named after her than she ever was to that of San Francesco and his cathedral. This constitutes research, albeit outdated. Frank and Betty met there many years ago…

She runs an eye across Spouse's red wine collection. He takes exception to his good wine being used in a ragu, but she knows box wine won't do the job.

Chiara.

For some reason the Housewife finds herself labouring over this character. She is essential to the story; after all, she is the reason Betty won't confront Frank over his affair. She is also, inadvertently, a temporary brake on Betty's sojourns with Shiloh. Betty's love for Chiara outstrips her love for anyone else, and her psyche refuses to move to a part of her history where Chiara doesn't exist.

The problem is the Housewife's inability to bond with Chiara. She tries to picture her. A woman with wild hair and a penchant for Lake Malawi. Tries to make her believable and complex: a woman who was married and widowed young. Who fled to Johannesburg to study as a lawyer and never returned to Lilongwe, the place where she grew up with the man who became her husband. A woman who dresses with a hippie flair when not working, and then reverts to business suits when armed with her work persona.

But she comes across as unsympathetic, occasionally nasty. Underdeveloped. The Housewife watches *Complaints of a Dutiful Daughter* on YouTube. The daughter of a dementia sufferer talks about how resentful she was initially, and how for a long time she insisted on the truth and reality as being important when she was with her mother. If the Housewife can temper Chiara's reactions, perhaps she can use the character already manifesting on the pages, and grant her some development of her own.

The Housewife creates a scene where Chiara buys her mother tie-dyed clothes when she is in Johannesburg, just at the time that Betty has regressed to her hippie memories. She finds herself liking Chiara a little more for that. She also plans moments between Frank and

Chiara where they realise their dependence on each other. Chiara proves difficult to polish, but the Housewife keeps trying.

The wine adds a bit of a sheen, but it's not there yet. There are still clumps of grainy tomato, and the taste is too raw. Just a little sprinkle of brown sugar…

-oOo-

Shiloh is different.

The Housewife could write about Shiloh all day. She sees Shiloh in the eyes of strangers. In the glance of a beggar at the intersection of William Nicol and Main; in the crease of a Sandton shopper's smile. This is the one character the Housewife keeps flat. Shiloh is the Housewife's secret weapon: a character without a narrative point of view, who is technically flat yet changes physically through the story. Shiloh is her primary mechanism for taking Betty as far from lucidity as possible, in a way that should inspire rather than depress the Reader.

The Housewife struggles to define Betty's friend, the character no-one else can perceive, who appears in different guises at various places and pulls Betty ever deeper into another world, and ultimately out of this one. So she doesn't define Shiloh. Instead, the Housewife dives into each new Shiloh chapter with increasing abandon. She feels herself going a little Virginia Woolf, with a dash of Iris Murdoch thrown in for good measure.

The Housewife is enamoured, as much in love with the indefinability of Shiloh as any other aspect of the character. It could well be that she's tapping into the Secret Self Pamuk wrote of.

-oOo-

There is a melange of other characters who swirl, gossip and complicate matters in the Housewife's head.

Margaret for example.

Betty and Frank's domestic helper sulked her way onto the page without permission. She started off as a background character, but now Betty informs the Housewife that it was Margaret who told her about Frank's affair. Why would she do such a thing? There is nothing in Chewa culture the Housewife can use to justify this. Infidelity seems, in fact, to be a matter of routine rather than a secret to be divulged to an expatriate employer.

Betty insists.

As a former member, the Housewife has observed how an expatriate community is unlikely to reveal such secrets to the person betrayed, although they will certainly gossip among themselves. Betty is forcing her to develop a reason for Margaret's dislike of Frank,

and her lack of inhibition in demonstrating it. In her five years in Lilongwe the Housewife never encountered anyone like Margaret. Perhaps Margaret's husband suffered at Franks' hand, or was at least perceived to have done so. Something terrible that left her family almost destitute. Maybe…just maybe Margaret's husband was fatally injured in Frank's factory.

Betty nods and watches as the Housewife jabs at tomato pieces with her wooden spoon.

The Housewife asks Spouse about fatal injuries sustained in their Malawi factories. The response is nauseatingly useful.

Now the ragu is too sweet. She flicks a little salt across the simmering red.

-oOo-

Deidre Parrimore raises her nosey head.

The epitome of an expat gossip. Now these the Housewife has known plenty of, and in the fishbowl of the Lilongwe expatriate community they thrive like piranha. In particular, the Housewife knows how British expatriates tend to nurture their unofficial blue-bloodedness as the royalty of this society. It's a generalisation of course, but a useful one. Betty and Frank are from the USA. Giving them a sense of place within this society could give another layer to the story. And a character like Deidre could be a useful foil to the way Betty and Frank occasionally slip in a bit of British inflection. She doesn't need to be an unrelentingly awful character either. She does need to be British.

The Housewife stirs the sauce as one of the Offspring walks in to see what's in the fridge.

-oOo-

Carolyn glances her way.

The English friend who appears when the Housewife realises Betty is too isolated to be a credible expat wife in the Lilongwe context. Betty likes her, but the Housewife pauses at the idea of yet another character to differentiate in the manuscript. Carolyn will be a support role only. A friend Betty has turned to in the past, and therefore a part-player in Betty's memories. Her job description is limited, and there is the threat of retrenchment. The Housewife will start with her, and pull the plug on Carolyn if she turns out to be unnecessary.

She fills another pot with water, then adds salt and olive oil and puts it on the stove to boil.

-oOo-

Doctor Van Wyk trots into view, and Betty frowns.

It seems important that this character be a bit odd. When the Housewife visits a neurologist at the Sandton Clinic to establish what sort of treatment someone with Betty's symptoms would receive, the man she speaks to is tall, elderly, soft-spoken. Not at all the sort of person that Betty, Chiara or Frank would take an aversion to. Someone wiry, quizzical, bird-like, would be preferable. A character who flashes a spark of erratic energy into a room, and who would be interesting for the Housewife to differentiate on paper. A man with an Afrikaans surname, unlike this genteel fellow of English descent who looms with a soft voice across his desk.

The man pecking and hopping in the Housewife's head will not be scavenged from the Real Neurologist. The Housewife tears pictures from magazines, and makes a few sketches of her own. He looks like a mynah bird; Toni Morrison would be proud.

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The Housewife tries out a couple of chapters on the seminar group, and their reception is lukewarm. Betty and Frank seem too much the same.

She ponders this. Tries it again, but knows that both voices sound like the Housewife. Betty raises her eyebrows. The Housewife re-reads up on tactics.

Stream of consciousness narration strikes a chord. In fact, the idea of going a step further and attempting free indirect style for Betty's episodes could be the trick she's looking for. The Housewife picks up *The Sound and the Fury* and is confounded from beginning to end. Yet there is nothing to lose, and she deems it worth a try.

She is no William Faulkner. The result is contrived and Betty's delusion makes a confusing read for the group. Aiming for a sense of fractured thought this way isn't working.

This wretched ragu; she may need to start again.

Frank, on the other hand, starts to find his own attached third person voice when the Housewife tries it out on him. Free indirect style may be a bit overboard, but with a touch of restraint she feels sure stream of consciousness will work for both Frank and Betty. It's a matter of differentiation.

She ditches Faulkner and attempts something lighter. *Elizabeth is Missing* shines a light in Betty's face: an account of dementia as experienced by the protagonist herself. Of course! Betty's voice in the first person present tense; why not?

The Housewife throws out the ragu, turns off the water she put on to boil for the pasta, and ignores the complaints of hunger from her family.

There are other technical issues she needs to address.

-oOo-

Authorial voice has a habit of creeping in, and her American protagonists, set in Malawi, still come across as too British. Frank's voice seems too modern, and Chiara is proving rebellious. Only Shiloh flows naturally onto the laptop screen. The Housewife decides to write out a conversation between Betty and Chiara. Before she knows it, another story is growing, and the Housewife has to save the document for another day. But it does something: Chiara starts to unfold slightly in her complicated, prickly way.

-oOo-

Melodrama and cliché.

Excessive use of rhetorical questions, cluttered wordiness, and lack of restraint. There's too much disorder and it makes for dull reading. The Housewife takes a deep breath and tries to channel her inner Morrison. It's a delicate search for the optimal thrift of language and images.

Death to adjectives, adverbs and verbosity.

The Housewife chops and stirs, but with greater care this time.

What she wants to harness is that that elusive ability to put down words in such a way that what she doesn't write is what's powerful.

-oOo-

Technical issues abound and Panado is proving ineffective.

Her brain starts searching for other things to do. She skirts Betty and takes a look around. The garden is a mess. She hasn't taken the dog for a run in months. When did she last FaceTime her parents?

Where is the bloody gleam? Just how difficult can it be to make a ragu?

Pace is an issue. Pace and dialogue; they seem to be related. The Housewife is too languid; dialogue needs to do more to drive the pace. She tries to think about what each piece of dialogue does.

Spouse laughs and says she likes talking so much it'll be difficult to pare dialogue down to make it a pace driver. She pours more of his wine into her ragu.

He has a point though. Incessant dialogue that doesn't show what the narrator is observing isn't useful; and she knows that people speak sub-textually. They're not typically articulate or consistently lyrical, and yet their dialogue should (at this level at least) be laid out in traditional ways so that the Reader finds it easy to follow. She tries writing dialogue as a script. While she's unlikely to become a playwright, she might be onto something. She applies it to Chiara, hoping to spark more life into her. There's plenty of interiority in her

writing. Some effective verbal exchanges might be less annoying for the Reader, and could even help with characterisation.

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The Housewife is a creature of habit.

She's writing in a pattern of chapters, alternating between Betty and Frank. She realises that this "tick-tocking" is becoming predictable. Such orderliness also works against the disorder of Betty's mind and the increasing panic she's trying to create in Frank. What she needs is to balance it with the need to show Betty's fractured state against the backdrop of reality. Betty needs to die so that Frank can take over the narrative. Determining this could help the plot. So far she has planned it as a time-line that follows the progression of Betty's disease. That should be interesting because of the regression of memories that go with it for both Betty and Frank; plotting her death and beyond it will surely keep it crisp.

Which brings her back to the beginning in a sense. If she has this understanding of the ending and Betty's death, what are the implications for the beginning? Not only does this ending need to be a final monumental struggle, but she wants it to mirror the opening of the novel. As they stand, those first chapters aren't doing the job. Editing has to be done, but the idea of a prologue starts to form. A scene at the beginning that gives a promise that things are going to be interesting. Inevitable, but not predictable. Encouraged by a smile from Betty, the Housewife mulls over what the prologue would contain.

Is that a hint of gleam she sees across the tomato?

-oOo-

The Housewife understands the value of drawing on what she knows.

There are truths from her own experience she is surely able to express better than anyone who hasn't.

Which justifies her using Malawi, where she lived for five years, as the story's primary backdrop. The Spouse showed her around the factory Frank works in. Betty and Frank's house is the one on Lundu Street in Area Ten of Lilongwe, the very house they lived in. Bishop Mackenzie International School is where two of the Offspring were educated. Kamuzu Central Hospital is where a friend's son was treated for a gunshot wound and almost died.

There were snakes everywhere. The Housewife watched boomslangs in the trees through the window of their dining room. She swept red-lipped herald snakes into buckets when she found them in the childrens' bedrooms, and Spouse released them in nearby fields.

There's a special place in the Housewife's heart for snakes, and she gives them an assignment in this story.

The snakes themselves cause a flirtation with anthropomorphism. She hopes to suspend the Reader's disbelief with the technique, harking back to her undergraduate days of psychology lectures and remembering the innate tendency of humans to anthropomorphise. It's another generalisation, but a useful one. Betty's snake experiences become increasingly elaborate, and the Housewife ignores a slight frisson as she writes them.

-oOo-

There are places and experiences in this story that the Housewife knows little to nothing of as well. She needs to emulate Annie Proulx and be thorough with her research. The clinic and neurologist that Betty goes to in Sandton have been visited.

The taxi ride is both frightening and a revelation. Hand signals flash, the hooter is played like a bugle to war, and unusual tactics abound, such as reversal against the flow of traffic in order to collect a potential customer, performed with an aggression that leaves her speechless. Her pen runs out of ink on the journey and she abandons her notepad to look out from her seat next to Betty. They both laugh as the taxi, now filled with customers, flies down Jan Smuts and cuts off a police van.

Downtown Johannesburg is chaotic and colourful. The Housewife buys a pen from a vendor outside the MTN station, and makes notes about Betty's meander through the streets.

Something makes her look back, and there's Frank, sticking his head into various small shops. Chiara is nowhere to be seen, but the Housewife knows she's not far away.

The ragu smells wonderful. Spouse has a taste and nods. Perhaps it's the 2013 Guardian Peak Lapa she splashed in there earlier.

The Gautrain Station seems incongruous, and the train itself sterile. Part of her is relieved not to take a taxi on the return trip, the rest of her loathes the fast dark tunnel that whips her and Betty beneath Johannesburg, past Rosebank and on to Sandton. They ride escalators to fresh air, both a little shaken.

Back home, the Housewife delves into the world of hippie history and culture, festivals and slang, as Betty regresses. This immersion, while enjoyable for her, causes some irritation in the family, and results in heavy-handed slang in her submissions. She does this again with vernier callipers and redriers in the factory scenes, and again with Santa Monica Pier and Venice Beach. Finesse, that's what she needs.

She reignites the flame beneath the pot of water, and leaves the ragu on the stove top, covered with a pot lid. She pours herself a glass of that Guardian Peak and chooses a playlist on her iPod.

-oOo-

Music.

Songs from the hippie era remind her of an article she read about music having the potential to unlock communication with dementia sufferers. Betty raises her own glass and nods. A clear invitation to introduce music to Betty's episodes.

The Housewife uses music appropriate to the period of each memory regression. Betty takes a long drink. Even Shakespeare would approve; didn't King Lear wake from madness to the sound of music?

Full of this notion, the Housewife includes swathes of lyrics from songs she downloads from the internet. Her head swims with the idea and how it ties in to her story. Until she is informed that with copyright laws, this would simply be too expensive for any publisher to consider keeping. Should she leave the lyrics? Consensus has it that the course is not about getting published. It's about completing a manuscript.

The Housewife checks the water for signs it's coming to the boil, replaces the lid and decides she'll cross that bridge should she ever have the good fortune to come across it.

-oOo-

Sex.

This is a story about adults after all. The Housewife glances across at a family photograph on the wall. Innocent Offspring faces smile at her. She removes the picture, places it face down on the table. She conjures up images of Betty and her hippie lover, of Frank and Betty's encounter in Assisi, of Frank with Cassie. There's olive oil all over the kitchen counter, and she wipes at it with kitchen paper as she considers sex scenes in novels. Best not to overwrite it. Let the Reader do that part.

The water is boiling vigorously. She opens the pot, head to one side to dodge the steam, and places one piece of linguine in the water. It froths enthusiastically. She waits for the foam to subside, and carefully places the rest of the pasta in the water.

-oOo-

Bodily functions.

Shit and piss, blood and vomit. Betty excretes and haemorrhages on the back seat of the doctor's car as the Housewife fights against gratuitous description. Pennac managed it in

Diary of a Body. The Housewife's fingertips attempt lightness. Similar in some ways to the approach to sex, but with a smidgeon more generosity.

She chops fresh basil from the pot plant outside the kitchen. To be stirred into the ragu just before serving. Spouse reminds her of her tendency to put too much in. This is ragu, not pesto.

-oOo-

Betty suffers a stroke.

Not because the stroke might be linked to Betty's disorder (which the Housewife still doesn't want labelled), but because it's one of the conditions likely to be fatal in Malawi. Should a person suffer from malaria, Malawi is probably the best place to be; remedies abound and are frequently administered without script or question. Suffer a serious wound, a heart attack or a stroke, and things are more dire.

The Housewife has first-hand experience of this, and knows that Kamuzu Central Hospital and other Malawi government health facilities suffer the consequences of a lack of essential equipment. During her life in Lilongwe, there were numerous incidents where diagnosis machines were not working because of poor maintenance, or a lack of consistent power supply.

Spouse, who travels there at least once a month, brings back newspaper articles that affirm nothing has changed in this regard.

Betty has gone off somewhere, tired of being moved away from the flame.

Suffering a stroke, Betty needs blood tests to determine her cholesterol and blood sugar levels, but there is also the issue of determining the type of stroke she suffers. Ischemic or haemorrhagic? Symptoms alone are not sufficient to distinguish them from each other, and treatment depends heavily on this diagnosis. Incorrect analysis can be fatal. This plays into the Housewife's hands.

A few weeks ago, Spouse and the Housewife attended a party in Lilongwe. On the afternoon before the party, the Housewife headed downtown in a friend's car. Armed with her cell phone and an understanding that no government facilities may be photographed, (never mind by a foreigner), she aimed for Kamuzu Central Hospital. Friday afternoon traffic on roads overpopulated with un-roadworthy cars, bad drivers and nonchalant cyclists, repeatedly ground movement to a halt. When she lived there, she made every effort to avoid this. This time she used it to absorb the minutiae. Billboards, supermarkets (Foodworths has shrunk. New owners apparently) and at least four glossy new buildings erected by "the Chinese".

No-one stopped her at the entrance to KCH, and she eased the vehicle through the blue pillars, topped by a sign so aged and faded that she could barely read the words "WELCOME TO MINISTRY OF HEALTH". To her left, a small building with "Area 33 Police Unit" stencilled in black onto a wall that must have been white years ago. She smiled at the pan-faced policeman at the entrance, knowing that he could be the one to arrest her if she was caught taking photos. He averted his eyes and she trawled forward. To her right there was some sort of construction going on in front of the main body of the building. Perhaps they were finally going ahead with Phase Two of the plans Kamuzu Banda had drawn up for the hospital decades ago. But that's not part of the Betty and Frank's story.

The Housewife held her cell phone in her right hand, camera on, and steered with her left. Hoped that Spouse won't have to fish her out of jail. But no one paid any attention to the middle-aged white woman in a four-wheel drive car, even as her thumb captured scenes from above the steering wheel. She looped slowly left, past the Sight First Eye Hospital, and slowly right again. And there it was: the ER. The place to which Frank, the GP and the GP's son bring Betty as she lies dying on the back seat.

The Housewife realised she was sweating. Not out of fear but rather from a low-grade nausea as she recognised that no-one stood much of a chance in this place. A sense of urgency was completely absent. Even the red sign on the boards below the corrugated roofing that said "STRICTLY AMBULANCE ONLY", was faded and peeling. In the shade beneath was a line of people. Some sat on a small wooden bench, backs against the cinder-block wall behind them, others on the floor. One man sat in a wheelchair, slumped forward, head in his hands. To his right an old man sat cross legged, one hand at his head, the other on the arm of a woman who lay in the dirt with her head on his thigh. She was curled in a foetal position and the Housewife could see the dust and cracks in her heels. A gurney stood in the sun in front of them, one wheel missing. Laundry had been hung on its rails to dry. The scene was still. Not a twitch from anybody, not even when flies alit. It felt to the Housewife like one of the film sets at Universal Studios, but in this place the people were part of the set.

The nature of her quest was terrible in a way she hadn't anticipated. Her hand shook as she took more photographs, even trying to capture the little rusted sign that pointed to an x-ray department ("KOJAMBULA") that she knew had no reliable equipment in it. She put the phone down on the seat beside her and stared at a sign that hung lopsided off a tree trunk beside the car. It informed her she was parked at her own risk.

How dare she sit there and cry? She started the car, and no-one looked up. She turned the vehicle around and a little boy, maybe three years old, stood up and gave her a wave. It

was easy to wave back, not so easy to stop her tears as she drove past the flash of his smile, back along the path she came in on. Out past the building site and the incinerator chimneys, one of which was chuffing out black smoke. The same policeman stopped her at the entrance and swept his gaze through the car. Said nothing and waved her on.

Back in Bryanston, the Housewife is more composed. So, yes, it's a veritable minefield with all this medical jargon and the unpleasant facts of KCH, but this is an advantage, the Housewife decides. She gives Betty a stroke, and uses certain unusual female-specific symptoms such as hiccoughs and mixes in some regular ones for good measure. She has the company doctor and his son come to the rescue and argue over the diagnosis and risks involved in specific treatment without the ability to access a clear diagnosis at the only facility in town with the equipment to so: Kamuzu Central Hospital. The son performs CPR, as Betty is unconscious. The Housewife is familiar with CPR procedure; she attends courses every two years. Once they realise that the hospital is of no use, the son wants to treat Betty with tissue plasminogen activator (tPA), a substance occasionally kept in the company clinic, and required immediately upon the determination of a haemorrhagic stroke; his father argues vehemently against this because if she has suffered an ischemic stroke, tPA will kill her. Such things were discussed with the Company Doctor at the Malawi branch of the company Spouse works for.

As the wife of an expatriate employee of an American-owned company, the Housewife knows that Betty is covered by a medical evacuation insurance company such as BUPA. Such cover means there is no question about Betty being medivacked to Milpark Hospital with the use of SOS International medical evacuation. This isn't something that she is making up. Friends of Spouse and Housewife have been through this.

All the same, certain things need to be understood better. Such as what comes with an SOS evacuation. What sort of planes do they use? What medical equipment is on board and how many doctors are there? What do they wear? Google provides pictures and scenarios of the entire process that involves this part of Betty's medical evacuation. But the Housewife can't find the specifics on where a spouse would be placed in the aeroplane, which airport the plane would land in, how the journey from the airport to the hospital would work, and what would take place at the hospital.

Spouse pours himself a glass of the Guardian Peak and comes alongside Betty and the Housewife to observe the boiling pasta. As they stand with their heads together in the steam, he receives an urgent call from Malawi.

One of their friends has suffered a heart attack in Lilongwe, and the Company Doctor is in the process of arranging an SOS medical evacuation through BUPA. The patient will be flown into Lanseria and transferred by ambulance to Milpark Hospital. The heart attack victim is stable but critical. His wife will be on the SOS plane with him, and will stay with the Housewife and Spouse.

Stupefied, the Housewife writes the piece as the patient-friend recovers. But she remembers not to flood her readers with this overwhelming pile of in-depth information. She deliberately writes the piece as chaotic and incomplete on specifics.

Betty shrugs, and stirs the pasta.

The seminar group is not convinced. More detail is required on the logistics. The Housewife wonders whether she will ever master the fine balance of this research business, and proceeds to write in the information she left out.

Betty's condition plays on the Housewife's mind. She has been assured that Betty doesn't require a diagnosis for the story to ring true, and five decades have taught her that life is littered with diagnoses, some right, some wrong, others vague. The mind is not a simple machine to assess, and certainly intellectual writers such as Sacks underline the mystifying plethora of possibilities that would never have occurred to her. And yet…

The Benign Neurologist says that Betty's condition could be the result of a tumour, but without assessing the patient, he wouldn't be able to say definitively. She asks Google about the symptoms of a brain tumour, and reads that parietal lobe tumours may indeed result in impaired speech and problems with memory.

The Housewife is dismayed. This does not tie in with the difficulty that she has attributed to Dr Van Wyk's attempts to diagnose Betty's condition. She tries a different tactic: what does Google have to offer if she simply types in the symptoms she has given Betty?

Schizophrenia.

Astonishingly, elderly schizophrenia patients often also suffer from Alzheimer's disease, or some other form of dementia. The Housewife has her nose in the internet for two days, lost in the world of schizophrenia and its relationship with both episodic memory and implicit or procedural memory. She stops when Google, imperfect as she knows the source can be, tells her schizophrenia is believed to have roots in childhood abuse or deprivation, or a psychic trauma.

Well then. It seems that Mr Twain is proved right at every turn. Betty is smiling, her face shining in the steam.

Of course, the internet can be used to justify practically anything. She pulls down *Man in Context* from its place, which is now dust free. And it's true. Episodic memory, the one that is affected in schizophrenic patients, is the one holding information about occurrences and the relationship between them. It's about personal experience.

This strikes the Housewife as uncannily Betty-ish. Her relationship with the Jordaans has turned around completely.

She remembers to stir the spaghetti as it simmers. She has been known (particularly after too much wine) to forget to stir it and to then dish up a mangled clump of pasta.

-oOo-

With the death of Betty and the narrative now handed to Frank, the Housewife faces the task of writing the ending. In seminars one thing is made clear: don't try to resolve everything in the story. Which is tricky. The Housewife wants the Reader to know.

Spouse says she's grimacing, and she explains that this is more difficult than she anticipated. She may not muse, explain or philosophise. She must enmesh the reader deeply in the outcome, and afford redemption to her central character, without resorting to gimmicks. But what could be construed as a gimmick? Spouse's advice is simple: Blow your readers away. She shouldn't have asked an agricultural economist. Apparently she's grimacing again. Spouse moves off to watch rugby on television, and she tests the pasta. It's al dente. She throws the chopped basil into the ragu and stirs.

At the following seminar, the analysis is not too bad. A little chopping here and there, and she has the smatterings of a first draft.

She drains the pasta, runs cold water through it, drains it again. Mixes some of the ragu in.

-oOo-

She seems to have the "shitty first draft" someone mentioned at a seminar the year before.

Her back teeth ache from all the grimacing. Eighteen months into this project and it turns out there's a lot more work to do, and the advice on the process to come is the most obscure she has yet encountered. It seems a writer needs what Hemingway referred to as a "built-in shit detector". Proulx talks of writing fifteen to sixteen drafts, with some paragraphs going through as many as sixty drafts. The Housewife takes a tentative read once she has patched her chapters into a single document. Her shit-detector is clanging loudly but she doesn't know why, where, or how. It's a general sort of alarm that blares. Will she die of old age before she ever gets there?

What is revision and what is fussing?

Spouse states that she does a lot of fussing, and that he's hungry. So are the Offspring. She dishes up, reminding herself that this is not a chore.

Of course. This is joy and purpose. Why is she concerned about this taking forever? She loves to write. Perhaps she will hand in a raw product at the end of the course; she suspects that the faculty knows this is all that any of them can do in that time. Perhaps she will die of old age before the edit is over.

She allows herself the corny thought that at least she will die happy, and takes a mouthful of pasta. It's not bad.

The Housewife's Pantry

As she shopped, chopped, stirred and tasted, the Housewife sampled the following:

Writers on Writing

- Booth, Wayne C. 1961. *The Rhetoric of Fiction*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press
- Forster, E. M. 1941. *Aspects of the Novel*. London. Lowe and Brydon
- Lewis, C. S. 1966. *Of Other Worlds, Essays and Stories*. Orlando. Harcourt Brace Jovanovich
- Lodge, D. 1992. *The Art of Fiction*. London. Penguin Books
  with particular appreciation of his description on page 42 of "the philosophical doctrine that nothing is certainly real except one's existence."
- Pamuk, O. 2011. *The Naïve and the Sentimental Novelist, The Charles Eliot Norton Lectures*. London. Faber and Faber Ltd.
- Shields, D. 2011. *The Inevitable: Contemporary Writers Confront Death*. New York. Bradford Morrow
- Wood, J. 2008. *How Fiction Works*. London. Jonathan Cape
- Annie Proulx interview read online:
  https://www.theparisreview.org/interviews/5901/the-art-of-fiction-no-199-annie-proulx 08/12/15
- Toni Morrison interview read online:
  https://www.theparisreview.org/interviews/1888/the-art-of-fiction-no-134-toni-morrison 09/12/15

Free Indirect Style in a Novel

- Faulkner, W. 1995. *The Sound and the Fury*. London. Vintage

The Art of Story Telling

- TED TALKS – A talk by Andrew Stanton gave the Housewife an idea of what makes a story – any story – worth staying with:
  https://www.ted.com/talks/andrew_stanton_the_clues_to_a_great_story?language+en 14/11/15

Point of View within Fictional Text

As the Housewife finessed her idea of using two points of view for the same story, she took encouragement from:

- McEwan, I. 2016. *Nutshell*. London. Jonathan Cape
  and the point of view of a foetus.
- Pamuk, O. 2015. *A Strangeness In My Mind*. London. Faber and Faber Limited
  and the use of multiple points of view.

Alzheimer's, Dementia, and Quirks of the Human Brain

In her quest to establish boundaries for Betty's form of regression, aphasia and general loss of contact with reality, the Housewife compared the information gleaned from:

- Bauby, J. 2008. *The Diving-Bell and the Butterfly*. English translation by Leggatt, J. London. Harper Perennial
  where, in a reversal of Betty's condition, Bauby is paralysed but his mind is in perfect working order. Despite this, he finds a means of escape, saying on page 13, "my mind takes flight like a butterfly. There is so much to do. You can wonder off in space or in time, set out for Tierra del Fuego or for King Midas's court…"
- Bayley, J. 2000. *Elegy for Iris*. USA. Picador
  where he describes Iris Murdoch on page 260, deep in the grip of Alzheimer's, saying to her friend Audi "as they stood together in the shower, 'I see an angel. I think it's you.'"
- Jordaan, W. Jordaan, J. 1984. *Man In Context*. Isando. McGraw-Hill
- Sacks, O. 2015. *The Man Who Mistook His Wife For A Hat*. London. Picador Classic
- Smith, P. B. M. M. Kenan, M. A. Kunik. 2004. *Alzheimer's For Dummies*. Chichester. Wiley Publishing

She also watched the YouTube video *Complaints of a Dutiful Daughter*, narrated by Debbie, the daughter of a dementia sufferer, in an attempt not only to understand how Betty might behave, but also the possible reactions Chiara might develop:

- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tN8Ku3tdS94 18/11/15
  in which the daughter reports: "I have to be out of my mind…I mean…what does it matter?" And she entered the illusion with her mother, saying "It was a liberating moment…it was light, fun…we were two old friends in the moment…the context didn't matter…it was the feeling…"

Anthropomorphism in Fiction

As the Housewife became increasingly invested in the use of snakes with Betty's character, she sampled the effusive use of anthropomorphism by Yann Martell in:

- Martell, Y. 2002. *Life of Pi*. Edinburgh. Canongate Books Ltd
- Martell, Y. 2016. *The High Mountains of Portugal*. Edinburgh. Canongate Books Ltd

Fiction on Bodily Function and Death

- Jong, E. 2015. *Fear of Dying*. Edinburgh. Canongate Books Ltd
  in which the protagonist is watching her mother's decline and questions her own motives on page 10: "I am praying fiercely for her not to die. But aren't I really praying for myself? Aren't I really praying not to be the last one standing on the precipice? Aren't I really praying not to have to dig her grave and fall in?"
- Pennac, D. 2016. *Diary of a Body*. London. MacLehose Press, Quercus Publishing Ltd

Fiction on Dementia and the Fickleness of the Human Mind

- Atwood, M. 1972. *Surfacing*. London. Virago Modern Classics

- Barnes, J. 2012. *The Noise of Time*. London. Jonathan Cape, Vintage Publishing
- Barnes, J. 2012. *The Sense of an Ending*. London. Vintage, Random House
- Faulkes, S. 2015. *Where My Heart Used to Beat*. London. Hutchinson, Penguin Random House
- Healey, E. 2014. *Elizabeth is Missing*. London. Penguin Random House
- Knox, M. 2015. *The Wonder Lover*. London. Allen and Unwin
  which was helpful in appreciating her own licence not to name Betty's affliction. After all, Knox's protagonist suffers a dramatic mental decline, including the loss of speech, and toward the end of the story on page 352:

  > was seen by neurologists, psychiatrists, endocrinologists, oncologists, gerontologists, cardiologists and even a dermatologist. Theories were tossed around regarding temporary forms of amnesia, a psychotic reaction to a traumatic event, an on-going seizure and, finally, what we were all fearing, the A-word, early and sudden onset of Alzheimer's disease. But scans were inconclusive or, to state it factually, unrevealing. They showed a normal brain, free of build-ups or occlusions or warpings or thickenings or thinnings, just a normal brain, perfectly well.

- Munro, A. 2013. *Dear Life*. London. Vintage, Random House
  which contained two short stories of particular relevance: "Train" and "In Sight of the Lake".
- Pamuk, O. 2015. *A Strangeness In My Mind*. London. Faber and Faber Ltd
  where on page 581 Pamuk's character Mevlut experiences the sense that

  > the cryptic things he noticed while walking on the street were figments of his own mind. Back then, he had knowingly dreamed these things up himself. But in later years, he began to feel that there was another power placing these thoughts and dreams in his mind. In the past few years, Mevlut had stopped seeing any difference at all in his fantasies and the things he saw on the street at night: it seemed as if they were cut from the same cloth.

- Piercy, M. 1979. *Woman on the Edge of Time*. London. The Women's Press
- Roy, A. 2009. *The God of Small Things*. London. Fourth Estate, Harper Collins Publishers
  where the character Estha, whose gradual slide into silence is described on pages 11-12 as "inching along the insides of his skull, hoovering the knots and dells of his memory, dislodging old sentences, whisking them off the tip of his tongue. It stripped his thoughts of the words that described them and left them pared and naked. Unspeakable."
- Van Niekerk, M. 2010. *Agaat*. English translation by Haynes, M. Cape Town. Jonathan Ball Publishers and Tafelberg
- Winman, S. 2015. *A Year of Marvellous Ways*. London. Tinder Press, Headline Publishing Group

Music and the Mind

When the Housewife put on her iPod and listened to her favourite playlist while she cooked, she was inspired to consider the idea of music. She consulted the Daily Maverick article

entitled *When the Heart Still Sings: Can Music Unlock Communication with Dementia Patients?* on the site:

- https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2015-05-08-when-the-heart-still-sings-can-music-unlock-communication-with-dementia-patients/#.v7xh8pN97B1 13/05/15

She was further encouraged by Doerr's use of music in his fiction:

- Doerr, A. 2015. *All the Light We Cannot See*. London. Fourth Estate, Harper Collins Publishers
  In particular she was moved in the scene on page 454 where the character Werner has been trying to encourage Volkheimer out of his mental stupor, but it is only when Volkheimer hears music that everything changes:

> Volkheimer's eyes open as wide as they can. Straining in the blackness for every stray photon. A single piano runs up the scales. Then back down. He listens to the notes and the silences between them, and then finds himself leading horses through a forest at dawn, trudging through snow behind his great-grandfather, who walks with a saw draped over his huge shoulders, the snow squeaking beneath boots and hooves, all the trees above them whispering and creaking. They reach the end of a frozen pond, where a pine grows tall as a cathedral. His great-grandfather goes to his knees like a penitent, fits the saw into a groove in the bark, and begins to cut. Volkheimer stands.

The Parent-Child Bond

It is while reading *All the light We Cannot See* that the Housewife is reminded of the love of a parent for a child, and the role that bond has in a story. Doerr's protagonist engenders the same feelings in her father, and he recognises on page 189 that "his love for his daughter will outstrip the limits of his body. The walls could fall away, even the whole city, and the brightness of that feeling would not wane."

In a flip-side view of such a relationship, Strout's protagonist cannot help loving her mother and wanting her at her side at her greatest time of vulnerability in:

- Strout, E. *My Name is Lucy Barton*. 2016. London. Viking, Penguin Random House

Beautiful Writing

In those moments of searching for inspiration, when it came down to the way she put words on the page, the Housewife fortified herself by reading fiction where language was beautifully pitched, and cadence and meter made something exquisite, such as:

- Morrison, T. 1997. *Beloved*. London. Random House
- Diaz, J. 2009. *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*. London. Faber and Faber Ltd